Exploring The Relationship Between First Year First Generation College Students And Their Parents

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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST YEAR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

By

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ABSTRACT
Exploring the Relationship Between First Year First Generation College Students and Their Parents

by

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The first year of college is one that is crucial for all students entering higher education due to the major transition issues that must be successfully navigated in order to persist to the sophomore year. Parental support has been shown to have a positive effect during this transition by providing positive coping mechanisms and allowing children to develop higher level of autonomy. The level of parental support is at a high level for members of the Millennial Generation, which is characterized by a close parent-child relationship, as well as a high level of parental involvement in the education process. While this transition is difficult for all first year students, first generation college students struggle more than their non-first generation counterparts due to a lack social and cultural capital that is traditionally passed down from parent to child. The purpose of this study was to explore the attachment between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents or parental surrogates. In-depth and focus group interviews were conducted with six students and family members purposefully selected from the first year, first generation, full time student population at State College.

The findings gave a glimpse into the life of a family with a first generation college student during the first year. The families participating had a strong attachment
relationship between the child and parent which remained unchanged or improved from high school through the first year of college, which was due in part to daily in person communication. The parents have a close attachment relationship with their children, yet do not act as traditional Millennial parents due to their lack of social and cultural capital in the collegiate world. These parents provide emotional support while allowing the child to take control of his or her own education. Child support sources during the first year of college included parents, other family members (some of which who had attended or were currently attending college), friends/classmates, and college faculty and staff. When the child had a question or problem that needed to be solved, regardless of who they contacted first, they all reported discussing the problem or question with their parents before making a final decision. The shared family experience during the first year of college was stressful, and the child participants struggled with the transition from high school to college. Parents were proud of their children for attending college while being painfully aware of the current state of the economy and the positive impact a college degree would make in the lives of their children. Implications of these findings for theory include a need for attachment theory to be further defined and explained through adolescence and adulthood, which includes college. The effects of the relationship on the child have been studied, but the actual relationship itself and what occurs in it can be further defined. Implication for practice include the need for colleges to view parents as partners in the education of students, providing education and support for all parents, especially for those who are first generation. Future research in this area could include replicating this study at other institutions to obtain a deeper understanding of the parent-child relationship.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first year of college is one that is crucial for all students entering higher education due to the major transition issues that must be successfully navigated in order to persist to the sophomore year (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Parental support has shown to have a positive effect during this transition by providing coping mechanisms, which leads to a higher level of autonomy (Fenstra, Banyard, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Since the late 1990’s, there has been a cultural shift in the relationship between parents and college age students, who are classified as members of the Millennial Generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). Parents are highly involved in the lives of their children, staying connected through multiple forms of technology (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). While the transition to the college environment is difficult for all first year students, first generation college students struggle more than their non-first generation counterparts due to a lack of social and cultural capital that is traditionally passed down from parent to child (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrerra, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Gofen, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the attachment relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents. This chapter will present a brief overview of the relevant literature, consisting of three primary research areas, including the Millennial Generation, first year college students, and first generation college students, followed by the study’s
theoretical framework, purpose, research questions, research design, definitions, limitations, and significance of the study.

**Overview of Relevant Literature**

There is a substantial body of literature on the subject of first year and first generation college students in the Millennial Generation, including research on the relationship with parents. In the following section, the literature presented in this study will focus on three primary themes: Millennial Generation, first year college students, and first generation college students.

**Millennial Generation**

The Millennial Generation (birth years 1982-2004) has been defined by seven core traits, which include: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. These traits will be explained in further detail in the literature review. They were born to parents who are classified as Boomers (birth years 1943-1960) and Generation X (birth years 1961-1981). The parent-child relationship of those raised in these two generations was distant, where parents served more as authoritarians than friends. When it was time to have their own children these parents wanted to provide a better childhood than they had experienced, one with less challenge and more support. As a result, these parents put their energies into providing a life where there was safety, security, and joy (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The parents of this generation waited until they were financially secure enough to provide multiple extracurricular activities, including family vacations, team sport participation, summer camps, and music lessons. However, these extras came with the sacrifice of having parents working more hours away from home. In order to best decide
how to allocate family resources, parents of this generation include children in major decisions made with family income which creates a culture of co-purchasing (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). This culture of co-purchasing extends through higher education, as college is a significant financial investment. The cost of higher education has outpaced inflation in the past fifteen years, which makes the emotional and financial investment parents have put into their children to be well spent (Kennedy, 2009).

The first children of the Millennial Generation began attending institutions of higher education the fall of 1999, bringing their parents with them. The parent-child relationship is different from what has been seen in the past by college administration and faculty. The parents are highly involved in the lives of their children, connecting on an average of 1.5 times per day through cell phones, e-mail, and instant messaging (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). Common topics during these conversations include: checking in, academic success, social life, work, money, health, daily classroom life, class complaints, living complaints, and meetings with advisors (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). This generation of parents continues to be involved in their college age children’s educational and personal lives, and due to the hovering type of behavior exhibited, have been nicknamed “helicopter parents” (Cline & Fay, 1990; Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

In order to assist the population of involved parents in higher education, many campuses now provide programs and services including Parent Programs offices, specific orientation sessions, family weekend programming, and newsletters and websites which share information about the college and the possible emotional support needs of students at various points during the academic year (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Ward-Roof, 2005; Wartman & Savage, 2008).
First Year College Students

First year college students are a subset of the Millennial Generation, entering college either directly from high school or after a break to work or raise a family. This population is far more diverse than has been seen in the past, and is more likely to be older, female, racially diverse, and more likely to have a disability of some type in comparison to the stereotypical college student portrayed in the media (Ishler, 2005; Pope, Miklitsch, & Weigand, 2005). Regardless of profile characteristics, the transition to college is difficult for all first year students, and support from multiple sources are helpful in preparing and supporting the student. Parents and family members have been found to be the most effective in this transition as the child adjusts to the new environment while developing autonomy in living away from family (Smith & Zhang, 2009; Feenstra et al., 2001; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009).

Persistence from first to second year in college is the most important in the life of a college student due to major transition issues that need to be successfully navigated in multiple areas, including academics, making friends, and managing emotions (Ishler & Upcraft, 2000). Tinto (1975) extended research in student persistence, and created a theory of student departure that is utilized throughout higher education. In this model, students enter a college with characteristics and a skill set that affect commitment to educational goals and the institution attended. As students continue through their first year, their commitment is increased or decreased based on the quantity and quality of social and academic experiences. Making connections with faculty and staff, as well as with peer groups, help integrate the student into the campus community. If these
experiences are positive, the student is more likely to continue their studies and persist to graduation.

Family plays a large role in the transition from high school to college. The characteristics of the family environment and the individuals’ coping style have been found to play an important role during this time (Feenstra et al., 2001), as well as the ability of the child to develop autonomy from parents (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). This support is key, as college is a different academic world than the child has previously experienced. Due to grade inflation in high schools, many students view their level of academic competence at a higher level than is demonstrated (Howe & Strauss, 2007). As a result, first year students underestimate the amount of time needed to prepare for classes, which can lead to a lower level of academic achievement (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). However, if a student has support during the transition, from family and friends, and college staff and programs, he or she has a higher chance of persisting to graduation (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

First Generation College Students

First generation college students are a secondary subset of the first year college students of the Millennial Generation. First generation students come from households where the parents have no college or post-secondary education experience (Davis, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta (2007); U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Without this level of experience and knowledge in the home, the student is disadvantaged, creating obstacles that will need to be overcome in the college environment due to lack of social and cultural capital that is traditionally passed down from parent to child (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009).
Compared to past generations, the profile of first generation students is older, more likely to be Hispanic, more likely to speak a language other than English at home, low-income, and married before attending college. They are more likely to have attended high school in an urban community, small town, or rural area (Saenz et al., 2007). This population is less prepared academically for college level work, which is evidenced through low test scores and lack of advanced levels of math courses taken before entering college (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The motivation for first generation students to attend college is to be able to take better financial care of themselves (and their families) than they had been provided for as children. As a result, money is a factor in many decisions made, including major choice (many first generation students choose majors in business over the social sciences), and are more likely to work full time and attend college part time than first non-generation classmates (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Saenz et al., 2007; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

First generation students value parental encouragement as an important reason for going to college. While these parents cannot provide the social and cultural capital of parents who did attend college, this information is found through other family or friends who have attended college, as well as high school guidance counselors, and college admission staff. In order to stay close to parents, first generation students are more likely to attend an institution of higher education within 50 miles from home, and live with the family rather than on campus (Saenz et al., 2007). While this provides the student with the family support they desire, commuting from home has a negative effect on student
engagement in campus life and time spent studying for classes, which can lead to a lower level of persistence and graduation rates (Saenz et al., 2007).

Attending higher education is a major cultural shift for many first generation students. There is a period of “leaving off” the values of the past and “taking on” a new social identity in order to fit in with campus friends and social norms. London (1992) describes this as “living in two worlds”, one in which the student strives to find acceptance and the other in which parents and other family members question the changes that are occurring. This provides another set of obstacles that the student must overcome, adding stress for the student. If the student and the family can resolve the dissonance between the two worlds of college and home, as well as manage the academic shock, the student will have a higher chance of succeeding in obtaining a college degree (Rendon, 1992). Given the three areas in the literature, the next section will present the study’s theoretical framework.

**Theoretical Framework**

When exploring the transition from high school to college for first year, first generation college students in the Millennial Generation and the relationship with their parent, attachment theory, which comes from psychology, links to this study’s objectives. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the emotional bonds between parent and child. These bonds (otherwise known as a base) are developed through the type of care provided during childhood. The security of this base forms the child’s personality as well as guides choices, self-esteem, expectations, and interaction with others for the rest of his or her life (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008).
Bowlby’s theory of attachment (1988) includes three basic functions for attachment, which are applied to infants or adolescents. The first function is *proximity maintenance*, where the child seeks to find comfort from the primary caregiver in response to some sort of perceived danger. The second function is *safe haven*, where the child utilizes the primary caregiver as a source of comfort, support, and reassurance. The third function is *secure base*. In this function, children feel comfortable exploring the world around them, feeling confident that they are safe and secure based on proximity to the primary caregiver. The child “uses the mother as a secure base from which to explore” (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978, 22). The type of attachment pattern that a child develops in infancy extends through his or her lifespan.

Many studies have examined the various components of attachment theory with college age students (e.g., Kenny, 1987; Berman & Sperling, 1991; Sorokou & Weissbrod, 2005; Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008). The attachment relationship can be broken down into three areas: affective quality of relationship between parent and child, parents as facilitators of independence, and parents as source of support (Kenney, 1987). As children enter adolescence, one primary developmental task is to develop the ability to interact with the outside world without parents with social, emotional, and cognitive autonomy. Finding such autonomy shows the adolescent becoming less dependent on parents for day to day decisions and protections. The type of attachment pattern and current relationship with parents at the time of transition to college has an effect on how the child views the parents as a source of assistance, the level of emotional distress, and the amount of need-based contact initiated during the first year (Kenney, 1987; Berman & Sperling, 1991; Sorokou & Weissbrod, 2005).
As shown in Figure 1, the main areas of the literature filter through a funnel viewed through the lens of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998). The first major theme is the Millennial Generation, which has a strong relationship between parent and child. These parents are involved in the education of their child, which extends past high school graduation into college years (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). A subset of this population is first year college students. The first year of college is the most important in the life of a college student due to the major transition issues that must be successfully navigated in order to persist to the sophomore year (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). A smaller subset of the population is first generation college students. First generation students come from households where the parents have had no college or post-secondary education experience, and as a result have a lack of social and cultural capital that is traditionally passed down from parent to child (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009). The research study will be conducted on first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation.

Figure 1. Themes in Literature as Viewed Through Theoretical Framework.

Purpose
This study was designed to learn more about the attachment relationship between first year, first generation students in the Millennial Generation and their parents. This study, which is exploratory in nature, examined the base of attachment, as evidenced through frequency of communication, modes of communication, and topics discussed in these forms of communication. Moreover, this study explored first year, first generation students’ problem solving strategies and the shared family experience during the first year of college.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored in this case study:

1. What is the quality of attachment relationship between the first year, first generation student who are members of the Millennial Generation and parent before the child attends college as evidenced through frequency and modes of communication and the topics discussed within those forms of communication?

2. Given the foundation of the attachment base established during childhood, in what areas does the relationship between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents change during the first year of college?

3. What are the major support sources and problem solving strategies of first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation, given the high level of support but lack of social and cultural capital traditionally provided by parents?
4. What is the shared family experience during the first year of college for first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents?

**Research Design**

There are many studies establishing the importance of the parent-child relationship on a successful transition to college (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009; Sanez et al., 2007), but what is missing is a study that qualitatively examines what occurs within the relationship during this time. To explore the relationship between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents, a qualitative research design aligns well. Qualitative research is an organic process, with inductive data collection and analysis process that is exploratory in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007). This study was designed as a multiple case study, which examined the process, context, and discovery in the analysis of a bounded system. A bounded system is one that has boundaries (such as time and place) consisting of interrelated parts (Creswell, 2007). The study was bound by the fact that the participants were all full time, first year, first generation Millennial Generation students who began attending classes in the 2010 fall semester at State College (SC). SC is a new four year college, created in 2002 to meet the educational needs of the southern part of the state in which it is located (SC, 2011).

Data collection was completed by utilizing in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with six children and one of their parents chosen from the population of full time, first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation at SC. This is a typical form of data collection for case study research, which is described as
extensive in nature (Creswell, 2007). The interviews themselves were modeled after the in depth responsive model of qualitative interviewing as outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005). Areas explored were the attachment relationship before and after the first year of college, frequency and modes of communication, topics discussed, how the relationship changes during the first year of college, and problem solving strategies. Interview protocols are presented in chapter three.

The analysis of the data included transcription of the interviews followed by Creswell’s (2007) constant comparative method of analysis to code the data and identify emerging themes, as well to provide a thorough analysis of the data collected. Each interview was analyzed individually, and then a cross case synthesis was conducted to reveal common themes and contrast differences within the six families participating in the study.

**Definitions**

In this study, several key terms are defined as follows:

*College Choice*: “The process through which students decide whether and where to go to college” (Bergerson, 2009, p. 2).

*Cultural Capital*: Forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009).

*First generation college student*: Come from households where the parents have had no college or post-secondary education experience (Davis, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
First year college student: A student in the first year of study at an institution of higher education (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).


Social Capital: resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009).

Limitations

The relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents differ from family to family. While there are similarities based on the fact that the students are attending college for the first time, paired with the lack of college knowledge on the part of the parent, the experiences had by these six families is unique. State College is a state college, but has very few peer institutions. It is a small commuter campus, focused on providing a quality education to the low-income, racially underrepresented, first generation college students in the state of Nevada. As a result, the findings of this research should not be generalized to all first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents or all other public universities.

While most first generation students lack social and cultural capital in higher education (Gofen, 2009), circumstances differ from family to family; there may be another family member or close family friend who assists in providing the support that is missing from parents. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population, but the themes that emerge from the research may be similar to students in similar situations.
Another limitation is the small number of families participating in the research. Out of 144 first generation college students who began taking classes in the fall of 2011, only eight individuals responded to the invitation to participate in the research. This may be due to the time commitment the study demanded; not only did the study require individual interviews with both parent and child in the family, it also included participation in a focus group. This is a large time commitment to ask for from families without any sort of compensation. If there had been a small reward offered, more families may have agreed to participate in the study. This small number of families cannot be generalized to the greater population; more research must be completed in order to learn more about parent-child relationship.

One last limitation is the residential status of the participants in the study. All of the children participating in the research lived at home during their first year of college. While this made for a consistent sample for this study, the findings cannot be generalized widely. The study found that in most cases, the attachment relationship between parent and child does not change from high school to college. This study could have completely different results when completed with families where the child lived away from the family during the first year of college.

While one can find first generation students at any institution in the United States, SC was a campus that was geographically accessible to the researcher. The limitation of a convenience sample may risk the credibility of the study as another geographic area could have provided richer data for the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Significance of the Study
There is a strong body of literature on first year and first generation college students in the Millennial Generation, including research on the relationship with parents (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Smith & Zhang, 2009). What is missing in the research in this parent-child relationship is an examination of the attachment relationship in action: what actually occurs within the relationship: how often and through what mediums parent and children communicate, what topics are discussed, how the parent provides support, and how the child utilizes that support. Therefore, the significance of this study is that an attempt will be made to investigate the shared family experience during the millennial student’s first year of college.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an introduction of the study and research topic. The chapter included a brief review of the literature, overview of the conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, research questions, research design, and definition of key terms, limitations, and significance of the study. The next chapter will provide a more in-depth review of the relevant research on the Millennial Generation, first year college students, and first generation college students as well as the connection of these research areas to attachment theory.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the fall of 1999, the first children of the Millennial Generation began attending college. Born between the years of 1981-1995, these children have a much closer relationship with their parents than in previous generations. The parents of the Millennial Generation have always been highly involved in the lives of their children, and involvement maintained while the children are attending college (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The higher education community has responded to this involvement by creating opportunities to partner with parents to foster student success by providing programs and services focused on making connections with and educating parents on the college environment (Wartman & Savage, 2008). While colleges scramble to meet the demands of this new generation and their parents, there is a gap in the research regarding the relationship between parent and their child born in the Millennial Generation, specifically as first generation students. The purpose of this study is to explore the attachment relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the Millennial Generation, including relationships with parents. This will be followed by a review of the literature regarding first year and first generation students, and identifying specific characteristics of and challenges faced by this student population in higher education. An introduction and examination of attachment theory and how it serves as a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between parents and first year first generation students.
will also be provided, and the chapter will conclude with a chapter summary of the literature and the theories presented.

The Millennial Generation and Their Parents

The first children of the Millennial Generation first began attending institutions of higher education in the fall of 1999, bringing their parents with them (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The parent-child relationship is different from what had been seen in the past by college administrators and faculty. The parents are highly involved in the lives of their children, staying connected an average of 1.5 times per day through in person communication, cell phones, e-mail, and instant messaging (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). This generation of parents continues to be involved in their college age children educational and personal lives, and due to the hovering type of behavior exhibited, have been nicknamed “helicopter parents” (Cline & Fay, 1990; Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The Millennial Generation: Seven Core Traits

Generational research was made popular by Howe and Strauss in the 1990’s. These two men are historians and demographers, completing their research by reviewing “scholarly, journalistic, and pop culture sources” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 375). The review of literature begins by presenting two qualitative generational surveys that serve as the empirical base for this area of research. One survey was administered to 200 elementary, middle, and high school teachers with ten years or more of experience in the public school district of Fairfax, Virginia. This survey asked the teachers to compare the students of that time with the students from ten years ago, focusing on the areas of academics, attitude, behavior, and extracurricular activities. A second survey was distributed to 660 high school seniors in the same school system. This survey asked the
students generational questions about themselves, about their parents, teachers, and siblings; the data were analyzed using trend analysis (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 376).

The books “Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation” (Howe & Strauss, 2000) and “Millennials Go To College” (Howe & Strauss, 2007) report the findings of the two research projects that describe the Millennial Generation using seven core traits. These traits are referred to as special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving.

The first core trait of the Millennial Generation is special. This generation was born in a child-centered world to parents who chose to have smaller families, waiting until careers were established which provided the financial means to provide the best life possible for their children. Through movies, television shows, and news coverage, these children were highlighted for their potential to change the world, and they have internalized that message; they believe that they are the future, and that their actions can help or hinder the world in which they live (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

The second core trait of this generation is sheltered. With the belief that this generation is the future of America, parents became incredibly protective of their children, going to great lengths to keep them from harm. This generation of children was driven around in mini-vans with “Baby on Board” signs hung in the windows, and were raised in homes with childproof doorknobs and unbreakable mirrors (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

The third core trait of this generation is confident. Millennials were raised to believe that they could change the world for the better, and to be happy about their lives. They were taught to believe that the American dream would work for them, and that they
could achieve all of their goals, including balancing a career with marriage and family while making a positive contribution to society (Howe & Strauss, 2007). This continues into the workplace, with graduates seeking out employers which provide a work-life balance (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010.)

The fourth core trait of this generation is team-oriented. Taught from childhood to share and work with others through television shows and team sports, this generation has a strong team instinct and tight peer bonds. Whereas the previous generation (Generation X) valued individualism and shunned peer pressure, this generation values their peer groups, seeing them as a source of help, comfort, and power (Howe & Strauss, 2007). As members of this generation enter the workplace, they continue to value working in teams with “good people”, reporting to supervisors that are personable and supportive (Ng et al., 2010).

The fifth core trait of this generation is conventional. The Millennial Generation is one that is very close with parents, feeling secure and loved. What comes along with this close relationship is a respect and adherence to rules and values as set by the parents. Called neo-traditionalism, the children of this generation are returning to tradition and ritual, with a focus on seeking norms and structure (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

The sixth core trait of this generation is pressured. Along with being loved, sheltered, and protected, there is a large amount of pressure put on children in the Millennial Generation to perform and succeed. Stress is part of their daily reality, due to the demands created by various forms of technology and the peer group. This generation is expected to work with their classmates as teammates, but also need to view them as competitors for grades, college admissions, and future careers (Howe & Strauss, 2007).
The last core trait of this generation is *achieving*. All of the pressures and competition felt by those in the Millennial Generation are balanced with love and support from parents and community. The result of this is a high level of achievement; the children of this generation are “on track to becoming the smartest, best educated young adults in U.S. history” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 60). This is evidenced through higher standardized test scores and high school grade point averages (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

The research completed by Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) has become highly cited and discussed in popular culture, especially in the media, yet the work is based on little empirical research. The major criticisms by other scientists and authors include that the original research was conducted by survey methods with a lack of reliability and validity data collected from middle and upper class white students in one area of the country, which are then applied to an entire generation (Reeves & Oh, 2008). There have been researchers in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, and the field of education that have continued this area of work. However, these studies use Howe and Strauss (2000, 2007) as a foundation, with the results adding additional information to the existing knowledge available, including how the generations interact with each other in and outside of the workplace (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin & Tulgan, 2002; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000), how to best educate the Millennial Generation (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005), and the influence of technology on the millennial (otherwise known as Net) generation (Tapscott, 1998).

The children of the Millennial Generation face different challenges than generations before them; they were born to parents who raised them to be special,
sheltered, and confident. They highly value their peer group, and as a result are team-oriented and hold conventional values that are enforced through peer pressure. As a result, this generation is pressured, but achieves the high standards set upon them by parents and society. The children of this generation succeed in part due to their relationship with parents, who are always there to support them by any means necessary (Cline & Fay, 1990; Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007).

The Relationship Between Parents and Millennial Children

The relationship between parents and children born into the Millennial Generation is different than what has been seen in past generations. These parents often delayed having children, waiting until financially stable enough to provide the childhood extras they were not afforded (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). These parents are also heavily involved in their children’s education from kindergarten through college.

The parents of Millennials were born in one of the two previous generations: Boomers (birth years 1943-1960) and Generation X (birth years 1961-1981) (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). The Boomers were a part of community-spirited progress, seeing large cultural shifts during their college years, including the civil rights, women’s equal rights movements, and the Vietnam War. The members of Generation X had a different childhood, facing increased divorce and crime rates, being left to raise themselves after school (i.e. latchkey kids), and dropping test scores (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). When Boomer and Generation X parents had children, they chose to create a different childhood than they had experienced, putting energies into providing a life where there was safety, security, and joy. The children of this new generation are loved and supported, almost to a fault (Howe & Strauss, 2007).
The children of the Millennial Generation were provided childhoods consisting of family vacations, team sport participation, summer camps, and music lessons. These are expensive ventures, and parents found themselves working more and more hours to pay for these luxuries. This culture shift has changed the workplace as parents look to find a way to spend as much time with their children in spite of working more hours (Kennedy, 2009; Sandfort & Haworth, 2002). Parents now ask for flexible work schedules and when possible, attempt to extend business trips into vacations, where children can join them (Kennedy, 2009). As these children become adults, they intentionally seek out employers that can provide a work-life balance as well (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Parents of the Millennial Generation include their children in the major decisions made with family income, which has created a culture of co-purchasers. Children give feedback on items that the parents purchase, and in return children ask their parents for advice and approval on items that they want to purchase, which includes higher education (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The parents of Millennial Generation children are highly supportive of education. Much time and attention was given to the education of the child, even before kindergarten. Millennial parents are highly involved; they assist with homework, serve on the PTA, and participate in fundraisers and community service projects that benefit the child and his or her school community. This involvement does not end at high school graduation. Parental involvement is sustained at a high level through the college search and application process, continuing the co-purchasing relationship. Parents routinely attend campus visits and assist with college applications (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Wartman & Savage, 2008).
The reasons for this high level of involvement in the college choice process extend beyond a desire to be involved, it is also financial; college is a significant monetary investment. The cost of higher education has outpaced inflation over the past fifteen years: according to the 2007 Almanac in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, tuition at four year public institutions has increased 98.1% from 1995 to 2004. During this time, the Bureau of Labor Statics reported that inflation increased only 24%. Parents want to see the emotional and financial resources they invested in their children be well spent, and want to work with their children to make the right decision in choosing where to attend college (Kennedy, 2009).

The relationship between a child born in the Millennial Generation and his or her parents differs from the generations before it in multiple ways, beginning with the actual choice of the parents to have children, all the way through parental involvement in the education process. This process does not end at high school graduation, it continues into higher education. The expanding technologies available to this generation assist in keeping the communication lines open between parent and child.

*The Influence of Technology in Parent-Child Relationship*

The expansion of technology available in the 1990’s and beyond has allowed for the children of the Millennial Generation to communicate often with parents. These communications occur through various mediums, including e-mail, cell phones, online chat programs, and social networking websites (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

The rise in the use of cell phones has had an effect on college campuses and in the lives of the students who utilize them. In 2002, Aoki and Downes completed an exploratory study analyzing the use of and attitudes toward cell phones in a mixed
methods study at a large university in the Northeast. Focus group interview sessions were completed with 32 students who regularly used cell phones, designed to capture statements regarding cell phone usage. The major reasons given for owning a cell phone were personal safety, financial incentive, information access, social integration, time management/coordination, and parental contact. Other topics discussed in the focus groups were dependency on the cell phone as a part of daily life, the image of having a cell phone, and the use of phones to maintain or manage privacy. These statements were developed into a questionnaire, which was completed by 137 participants. An exploratory factor analysis was completed on the data, which separated the participants into five groups: cost conscious, security/safety conscious, dependent, sophisticated, and practical users. Safety/security conscious users have cell phones for the sake of having a line of communication in case of emergency, while sophisticated users have integrated cell phone use as a part of daily life; they use their phone to keep in touch with friends and family, as well as use the phone as a tool to manage time effectively.

In a quantitative study completed by Hofer (2008), the frequency of communication among college students and parents, focusing on the relationship between frequency of communication and the development of autonomy and self-regulation at a liberal arts college was examined. The study surveyed 407 first and second year students. Of the 407 student participants, 72 of them had parent participation in the study. Student participants completed a survey which asked about parent-student contact, academic self-regulation, procrastination, parental academic regulation, parental behavioral regulation, autonomy, academic satisfaction and engagement, satisfaction with relationships with parents, academic achievement, and demographic variables. Participants in the second
year of college also answered additional questions comparing the first year with the second year. Parent participants completed a survey focusing on parental regulation, demographic variables, and their experiences in leaving home. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the data. The students in the study communicated with parents on an average of two times a day, with both students and parents satisfied with the amount of communication. The frequent communication does allow for parents to continue academic and behavioral regulations with the student, which prevents students from enjoying the college experience as well as inhibits the development of an adult relationship with parents (Hofer, 2008).

In 2007, Junco and Mastrodicasa published the book “Connecting to the Net Generation,” studying the effect of technology in the lives of Millennial students. This national quantitative study surveyed 7,705 students at seven institutions of higher education of varying sizes via an online survey in the fall and spring of 2006. A trend analysis was used to evaluate the data. The results of this survey led to the authors calling this generation the “Net Generation”, describing traditional-aged college students who began attending higher education in 2000. This generation communicates in many different ways, utilizing instant messaging, text messaging, blogs, file sharing, and social networking sites like Facebook. This allows students not only to communicate with each other, but also with their parents, who have embraced these new technologies. When asked about communication with parents, the participants reported that they speak with their parents an average of one and a half times a day. These conversations are initiated by the students 57.6% of the time. Common topics include checking in, academic
success, social life, work, money, health, daily classroom life, class complaints, living complaints, and meetings with academic advisors.

There is an effect of the use of multiple technologies in the lives of college students. In 2006, Gemmill and Peterson completed a quantitative study exploring the extent to which technology disrupts and occupies the time of college students, and to the degree in which the interruptions contribute to perceived stress. A survey was developed to assess stress, technology use and disruptions, and social support, which was administered to 299 traditional college age students at a mid-Atlantic university. The data was analyzed utilizing multiple quantitative tests, including a t-test, ANOVA, Pearson-product correlation, and a stepwise regression analysis. The results of the data of analysis showed that 97% of all participants owned a cell phone, and had internet access at home. The participants utilized these technologies to communicate with family an average of 4.72 times per day, and with friends 19.32 times per day. Twenty-five percent of the participants had problems with disruptions with beginning, continuing, and completing schoolwork. These disruptions were perceived to be stressful. However, cell phones were a conduit for participants to seek support from family and friends when needed.

Technology use was highest among freshmen students, and lowest among seniors.

Further studies have been completed by professional and advocacy organizations serving parents of college students and professional staff working in student affairs in higher education. The College Parents of America survey (2007) was completed by 1,700 college parents from across the nation. In 2008, the organization of Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA) commissioned a four year quantitative longitudinal study to explore the impact of parental involvement on development in
various areas in the lives of traditional age college students. The participant pool included 368 parents and 1,033 students from six institutions from across the nation. Both studies found a high level of communication between parents and children, with cell phones as the main form of communication (College Parents of America, 2007; Mullendore, King, & Watson, 2008; Mullendore, King, & Watson, 2009).

Trice (2002) studied the frequency and content of e-mails between college freshman and their parents during the first semester. The data were disaggregated and compared by one of three parenting styles which are related to emotional adjustment. Authoritative parents teach their children general principles of conducts, have a high level of intimacy with their children, and foster gradual independence as the child grows up. Authoritarian parents have specific rules, which are enforced with strict discipline, which often includes punishment. In this form of parenting, children stay dependent on the parent for guidance. Permissive parents have very few rules, stay emotionally distant from children, and give independence prematurely. Forty-eight first year students at a medium sized public institution on the east coast completed the Parental Authority Questionnaire, made a copy of all e-mails sent to parents during midterm exams or freshmen course registration (a time of high stress for students) and then again during a low stress week and kept a log of who they contacted during those weeks. The subjects made an average of 6.03 e-mail contacts weekly with parents, the frequency of which increased during stressful periods. Students from authoritative parents made more contacts but did not need academic and social advice as much as the other participants. Students from authoritarian families made more requests for advice, and students from permissive families made fewer requests, and did not seek advice as much as other
participants. The only topic that students from all three groups asked about at the same rate was in relation to financial assistance.

In 2009, Wolf, Sax, and Harper studied parental engagement in students’ academic lives, including mode and frequency of communication. The researchers used data collected in the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey, which was collected from approximately 58,000 students attending one of the nine public research universities in the University of California system. Using descriptive statistics, these data were analyzed to determine the most popular forms of communication. A quarter of the subjects spoke with their parents via phone every day, with an additional 30% communicating via phone a few times a week. While cell phones were used primarily, text messaging and e-mail were also popular forms of communication. A t-test comparing gender in communication showed that women communicated more frequently with parents than male students, and an ANOVA comparing data by academic year (freshman through senior) showed that parental communication was high in the first year and then dropped in frequency as participants progressed in their studies.

The use of technology has changed the way parents and children communicate by creating multiple venues for conversations to take place. What was once a weekly phone call using the community pay phone in the residence hall lobby has expanded into an average of one and a half conversations a day utilizing cell phones or the internet. These students are connected to their parents, and in turn, the parents continue to be involved in the educational process.

Parental Involvement in Higher Education
As the parents of the Millennium generation have a close relationship with their children, they in turn have become more involved in the collegiate process. This phenomenon began in the fall of 1999, when this generation first entered college in large numbers (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Parents continue to support their children by contacting college faculty, staff, and administrators to ask questions or intervene on behalf of the student when there are problems, and came to be called “helicopter parents” (Cline & Fay, 1990). Colleges and universities have responded to this new audience by creating programs and services in an effort to educate and partner with parents, instead of treating them as adversaries (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

One of the largest shifts in education with the entry of millennial students is the amount of involvement that parents provide. Previously, college has traditionally been considered as a time where students could learn how to maneuver complex processes in a safe and supported environment on their own. The lessons learned on campus help to make students better citizens when they enter the workplace (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The parents of millennial students do not share this opinion, and they continue to be highly involved in the educational process past high school graduation (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Mullendore, Banahan, & Ramsey, 2005).

As the Vice Provost of Student Affairs at the University of Southern California, Lynette Merriman (2006) witnessed the rise of involvement of parents in the education of their college age students first hand. At the time of her 2006 study, there had not been much scholarly research completed on this phenomenon. Researching how colleges and universities respond to parent concerns, she completed a mixed methods study. This study included an online survey completed by 310 mid and senior-level student affairs
officers who respond to parent concerns at 149 doctoral/research universities-extensive across the country. The data collected through the survey process was triangulated by information gathered through interviews conducted with twelve student affairs professionals from four institutions (two public, two private) on the east coast. The study found that 93% of the participants in the study indicated that there had been an increase in the number of parent interactions as a part of their daily work between 2001 and 2006. Reasons for parent contact included concern for the student, to resolve an issue, for general information, to complain, to seek a referral, or to seek advice. Parents bypass the chain of command, often contacting the president or the dean of students before calling the office related to the issue.

As noted earlier, this generation of college parents has come to be known as “helicopter parents”. The phrase was coined in 1990 by Cline and Fay in the book “Parenting with Love and Logic” in describing ineffective parenting styles. This style is described as one where the parents rotate their lives around the children, keeping a protective eye on the various activities in the child’s life and ready at a moment’s notice to rescue when needed. The authors caution against this form of parenting:

While today these “loving” parents may feel they are easing their children’s path into adulthood, tomorrow the same children will be leaving home and wasting the first eighteen months of their adult life, flunking out of college or meandering about “getting their heads together”. Such children are unequipped for the challenges of life. Their learning opportunities were stolen from them in the name of love (Cline & Fay, 1990, p. 24).
As this generation of students and parents entered higher education, it was problematic to faculty, staff, and administrators who had not planned for the extra workload created by these contacts. These parents were seen as a nuisance at first, and student affairs professionals and the media began using the term “helicopter parents” (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Institutions began to respond to these new needs by changing their views on parent questions and concerns, viewing themselves as “facilitators” between students and parents (Forbes, 2001) or by actively partnering with them (Mullendore, Banahan, & Ramsey, 2005). This partnership took the form of creating new and improving existing programs that allow for parents to be more involved in the lives of their children at the collegiate level, educating them on processes and procedures as well as developmental milestones that the student is experiencing.

The University of Minnesota conducts the National Survey of College and University Parent Programs every two years (Savage & Petree, 2009). This national quantitative survey includes data from 261 colleges and universities identified as institutions likely to be providing services to parents and family members of undergraduate students. The number of campuses with a dedicated parent/family programs office has risen steadily since 1970, when 3.5% of campuses provided these services. In 2009, this number had risen to 63.9% of campuses. These offices provide services and programming including: phone lines and e-mail addresses that parents can use to talk though their concerns and questions with a staff member; specific programming at orientation and through the academic year that allow parents to interact with university administration as well as with other family members; and newsletters and websites that are catered to parents which share information about the college and the
possible emotional support needs of students at various points during the academic year. These various services help the parent as they learn how to maneuver the collegiate environment with their children.

To summarize this section on the millennial generation and their parents, this generation changed the status quo of higher education. Parents continue to stay involved in the education of their children as they enter college by contacting faculty, staff, and administration to ask questions and navigate problems for their children. At first, these parents were seen as a nuisance and called “helicopter parents”. Today, colleges and universities have realized that parents are partners in student success, and many campuses across the nation have created offices dedicated to providing services and programs specifically for the parent audience (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005; Ward-Roof, 2005; Wartman & Savage, 2008). The second area of research related to this study is first year college students.

**First Year College Students**

The population of first year college students is more diverse than seen in the past; no longer is the average first year student entering college directly from high school. Today’s first year student is more likely to be older, a woman, and racially diverse (Ishler, 2005; Pope et al., 2005). Regardless of the profile characteristics, the transition to college is a milestone in students’ lives, and a successful transition into higher education leads to a higher probability of degree completion. Multiple support sources are often helpful in preparing students for this transition, including friends and family, and high school and college resources.

*Demographic and Profile Characteristics*
Through movies and television shows, American popular culture portrays one archetype of a college freshman, which is a reflection of past college students. This college freshman is eighteen years old, has just graduated from high school, comes from a middle to upper class family, is unmarried, attends college away from home, lives on campus, takes a full load of classes, and the costs are supported by his or her parents. This student is prepared to enter college, and will graduate with a degree in four years. The archetype of “Joe College” still attends college, but has been joined by a diverse group of classmates. Today, there is no such thing as the typical American college student (Ishler, 2005; Pope et al., 2005).

The most comprehensive assessment of first year students is the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey. This survey is conducted through the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, and is focused on first time, first year college students. Data has been collected since in 1966, making this the longest running study of the first year student population. The “Your First College Year” is a quantitative survey, administered to incoming first time, first year college students at participating institutions across the nation, collecting limited demographic information, as well as data on pre-college experiences, motivations, and college expectations. In the fall of 2009, 26,758 students at 457 institution of higher education across the United States participated in this study, and the results were published in a report called “The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends” (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, & Korn, 2007). The results of the report suggest shifts in age, racial and ethnic background, gender, age, and sexual orientation.
One of the changes found in the first year population is age. The age of the average first year student is no longer eighteen years old; as of 2003, students over twenty five years old made up 28% of the population (Ishler, 2005). According to Pryor et al. (2007), the percentage of older first time students rose from 13.7% in 1967 to 29.6% in 2006. Often referred to as nontraditional students, this population is defined by one or more of seven characteristics: delayed enrollment into college, attends classes part time, financially independent from parents, works full time, is married and has dependents, is a single parent, and/or does not have a traditional high school diploma (Flint, 2000, p. 3).

The racial and ethnic demographic of the United States has changed, and the first year population in higher education has also changed. The number of Asian and Latino undergraduate students has doubled since 1980, with the Asian population reported at a level of 10.6% and Latino/a population reported at 8.5% in 2010 (Pope et al., 2005; Pryor et al., 2007). Students of color are enrolling at larger numbers each year at colleges and universities, raising at modest levels each year beginning in the early 1990’s (Ishler, 2005).

Gender is another area of change in the first year population. After a slow start, the percentage of women attending higher education met the percentage of men in 1979, and that percentage has continued to increase annually. By 2003, women made up more than 56% of the entire student population and graduate at a higher rate than their male classmates (Ishler, 2005, & Pope et al., 2005). In 2006, women made up 66.1% of the first year population, compared to 33.9% of men (Pryor et al., 2007).
Sexual orientation is yet another change in the first year population. While the percentage of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) students is not accurately tracked, students who identify as members of this community are visible on college campuses. While GLBT students have always been enrolled in higher education, a majority of campuses today have evolved into safe places for members of this population (Ishler, 2005).

Enrollment status is yet another change to consider when looking at the first year population. Today’s older student is more likely to be part time, and will have attended more than one college while pursuing a bachelor’s degree. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2008), 31.4% of students 35 years and older were enrolled part time at four-year institutions, in comparison to 5.2% with full time enrollment. Given these factors, the average amount of time needed to complete a degree takes longer than the traditional four years (Ishler, 2005).

Today’s first year student is more likely to have a disability of some type, ranging from visual to physical to mental. The largest growing sub-population of first year students report having a learning disability (Ishler, 2005). Between the years of 1986 and 1994, the percentage of students with disabilities attending college jumped from 29% to 45% (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The Americans with Disabilities Act allow for accommodations for all disabilities, and now most campuses have a professional or an office devoted to serving this student population.

While the archetype of a first year college student has changed, the transition from high school to college is difficult for many students. Regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability status, or race, higher education is a new environment that
students must learn how to maneuver, utilizing the assistance of individuals in and outside of the classroom.

*The Transition from High School to College In and Outside of the Classroom*

The transition from high school to college is an enormous milestone in students’ lives. The first major change entering higher education is from K-12 to the college classroom, which brings different expectations. There are also changes outside of the classroom; regardless of residence, all first year students must adjust to the collegiate environment. If this transition goes well, the student has a higher chance of persisting to graduation (Tinto, 1975). Support for this transition can come from three areas: individuals in students’ lives (e.g. friends and family), high school staff (e.g. guidance counselors and teachers), and college staff and programming (e.g. academic advisors, faculty members, orientation programs, and first year experience courses).

In one study, Smith and Zhang (2009) explored students’ perceptions of the helpfulness of various support sources compared with GPA. Participants were recruited from a medium-sized state institution in the Southeast. The 610 participants completed a survey asking questions regarding time spent on academic, social, and work activities during high school versus college, attitudes toward learning, basic demographic information, beliefs about high school preparation for college, specific activities parents and peers did during the transition to college, how helpful these activities were during the transition, as well as participation in orientation and a first year seminar. Data were analyzed using multiple t-tests comparing GPA with attendance at first year seminars and orientation, and support given by college academic advisors, professors, parents, friends, high school teachers, and high school guidance counselors. These analyses showed that
mothers provided the greatest and most effective helping behaviors, with friends as the second most effective source of support. Fathers, high school guidance teachers and counselors were also effective. However, college academic advisors and professors were not as helpful in the transition. College programs such as orientation and first year seminars also had a positive influence on first year students.

Further analysis has been completed on the role of family in the transition from high school to college. The successful transition to college can be affected by the role of family and individual coping skills. For example, Feenstra et al. (2001) investigated the role of family structure, family conflict, family coping, and individual coping on college adjustment in a quantitative study of 139 first year students at a medium-sized university in New England. The participants completed a demographic survey, the Family Environment Scale, Holahan and Moo’s coping scale, and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. These data were analyzed using independent t-tests, correlations, and a series of regressions. The study found that the characteristics of the family environment and the individuals’ coping style were important in the adjustment to the collegiate environment. If an individual’s family had a higher level of conflict and a lower level of coping, there was less positive adaption to college. However, this was not the only factor to consider; if a student had a high level of individual coping, he or she could overcome family influence in adapting to the new college environment.

Parents, peers, and campus involvement are all important factors that contribute to a successful transition to college. Norris and Mounts (2010) examined the way in which these three factors are related to the adjustment during the college transition, focusing on the areas of loneliness, school belongingness, and alcohol/drug use during the first
semester of college in a quantitative study of 96 participants at a large Midwestern university. Participants completed the Parental support for the college transition, McGill friendship satisfaction questionnaire, McGill friendship functions questionnaire, a campus involvement questionnaire, the UCLA loneliness scale, the Psychological Sense of School Membership, and a thirty day drug/alcohol use survey. Five hierarchical regression analyses were used to analyze the data. The study found that while greater parental support did not have an effect on loneliness or alcohol or drug use, it did have an effect on the child feeling a higher sense of belonging at the university. Positive relationships with peers and campus involvement also had a positive effect on the transition from high school to college.

Another aspect of the transition from high school to college for traditional first year students is developing autonomy from parents. Kenyon and Koerner (2009) studied this topic, documenting levels and examining the potential discrepancies of the child and parents’ expectations for autonomous behavior during the transition to college. This mixed methods study included 204 college freshman and 226 of their parents at a public university in the Southwest. Participants completed the College Adjustment and Transitions Study, which included survey questions as well as an open ended question regarding the relationship between parent and child. A paired samples t-test was utilized to analyze emotional and functional autonomy expectations, which showed that students and parents had similar expectations, with both parties holding high expectations for autonomous behavior after the transition to college. However, contradictory findings emerged during an analysis the qualitative data, which showed that parents hold higher expectations in seeing autonomous behaviors from children than they did for themselves.
The researchers attributed this difference to the fact that it is the child who transitioning to a new environment while the parents remain in the home environment. While college age children are ready to be autonomous, they may be in greater need of emotional support during the actual transition to college.

There are challenges and constraints as first year students adjust to college courses, given they are transitioning from high school or from the workplace; college is a different social and academic world. Students are concerned with managing their time; they experience challenges with coursework and keeping up with reading assignments. Students enter higher education at a time where many courses are taught to freshman students in large lecture halls, where individual attention that was given in high schools is no longer present. As a result, these students need to learn how to manage new academic demands without support from the faculty members (Pope et al., 2005).

First year students of this generation have a different academic background than those in previous generations. Given the job market, many students are entering college directly after high school or returning after a break. These students enter the classroom at varying levels of base knowledge and skills as a result of the academic preparation provided by the high school they attended. The more rigorous the high school curriculum, the more prepared the student will be; sadly, not all students have been prepared for college level work (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). A call for reform in high school curriculum to establish baseline levels for college preparation was made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1982. In response, many states increased the levels of foreign language, art and music, biological science, and mathematics required for college admission. However, changes were not uniform across the United States.
Across the country, there is a general lack of preparation in biology, physical sciences, and computer sciences in high schools, and this lack of preparation in high schools has left colleges and universities to offer remedial education. In 2000, a study of all Title IV degree-granting institutions (two and four year) showed that 76% offered at least one, remedial writing or mathematics course (Pryor et al., 2007).

Tied to the varying levels of preparation in high school are the study habits and skills that are brought to college level work. The Millennial Generation, as discussed previously, has seen a rise in grade inflation in high schools, and may view their level of academic competence at a higher level than can be demonstrated (Howe & Strauss, 2007). First year students also underestimate the amount of time needed to prepare for classes. These habits begin in high school, where 52.9% of new students reported spending one to five hours a week preparing for class during their senior year of high school (Pryor et al., 2007). Most students believe that they will only need to study less than fifteen hours a week for college courses, which is far below the twenty-six hours recommended by faculty members for full time students (Kuh, 2005). This expectation of higher grades with less preparation continues into college, which combined with the impersonal nature of large lecture classes, infrequent feedback on grades and academic progress, and the lack of daily homework can lead to a lower level of academic achievement for this population (Erickson & Strommer, 2005).

The transition to the first year of college is one that is difficult, but can be successfully navigated with the assistance from those in and outside of the classroom. Once a student has acclimated to the new environment, the next major step in the higher education process is to complete the first year and continue to the second year.
Retention from First to Second College Year

The persistence from freshman to sophomore year is most important in the life of a college student due to major transition issues that need to be successfully navigated in multiple areas, including academics, making friends, and managing emotions. If the student does not adapt well to the new environment, they are more likely to drop out of school (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). It is important for institutions of higher education to make a connection in order to establish a “firm and positive relationship” within the first six weeks of the semester, which is the beginning of this critical transition period for first year students (Upcraft & Garner, 1989, p. 66).

Tinto (1975) extended research in student persistence, and created a theory of student departure that is utilized throughout higher education. In this model, students enter a college with characteristics and a skill set that attach commitment to educational goals and the institution attended. As students continue through their first year, their commitment is increased or decreased based on the quantity and quality of social and academic experiences. Making connections with faculty and staff, as well as with peer groups are positive interactions, and help integrate the student into the campus community. If these experiences are positive, the student is more likely to continue their studies and persist to graduation. Persistence levels vary from institution to institution, and are higher based on the control (public vs. private), type (four year v. two year), and selectivity (high v. low) of the college.

Tinto (1975) provided a theoretical model for student persistence, which brought research in this area from description based to one that is explanatory, predictable, and statistically reliable. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) continued this research by creating a
multidimensional instrument that assessed the major dimensions of Tinto’s model, determining its validity in a longitudinal study of 773 students at a large private university in the northeast. The participants completed the assessment during the summer before the first year of college, with a follow up questionnaire taken in the spring semester. Data were analyzed using a factor analysis. Results of these analyses showed that peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, faculty concern for student development and teaching, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitments all played an important role in identifying freshmen who persisted or dropped out of college. This baseline study provided validity to Tinto’s model, as well as to the assessment that had been created, despite the limited scope of using a non-diverse student population.

Pascarella and Chapman (1983) further investigated the validity of Tinto’s model at three types of institutions: four year residential, four year commuter, and two year commuter. This longitudinal quantitative study utilized the assessment created by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), which had been named the Student Involvement Questionnaire (SIQ). The SIQ was administered to 2,326 full time freshmen at 11 two and four year institutions. During the next year, those who had taken the assessment were checked against institutional records to see if they had re-enrolled for the second year. Discriminate and path analyses were utilized to determine that Tinto’s model had predictive validity for all types of institutions. At commuter institutions, academic integration had a stronger influence on persistence in comparison to residential institutions, where social integration had a stronger influence.
Institutions of higher education have become aware of their role in persistence, and as a result have created programs and services that assist first year students as they transition from high school to college. Such programs include orientation programs that occur in the summer prior to fall enrollment, first year seminars that continue the support through the first semester, supplemental instruction courses which assist with basic courses (e.g. math and English), comprehensive academic advising centers, and learning communities which help build an academic community among students. All of these programs and services help to play a role in retaining students and providing support to them during this time of transition (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Student transition to college life is a key component of persistence from first to second year. Tinto’s (1975) theory of student persistence posits that students come to college with varying levels of educational skill and achievement expectations. While in the college environment, the student must maneuver not only an academic system, but also a social system. The interplay of student background and levels of interaction in the system lead to persistence or dropping out of college. This time of transition is difficult for all students, but can be more difficult for first generation students, who may lack the social and cultural capital necessary. The third area of research in this study is on first generation college students, who are a subculture in the first year student population.

First Generation College Students

Student demographics in higher education shifted after World War II with the implementation of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (otherwise known as the G.I. Bill). Previously, the majority of the student population was privileged white males
following in the footsteps of fathers and grandfathers who had also attended college. The economic prosperity that came after World War II and tuition assistance provided by the G.I. Bill opened the doors of higher education to the general public, changing the population and introducing first generation college students (Davis, 2010).

First generation students come from households where the parents have had no college or post-secondary education experience (Davis, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Without this level of experience and knowledge in the home, the student is disadvantaged, creating obstacles that will need to be overcome in the college environment due to lack of social and cultural capital that is traditionally passed down from parent to child (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009). These students have been the focus of study for numerous researchers in higher education, as the level of parent education has a predictive effect on both college enrollment and degree completion (Pascarella et al., 2004). The following section will discuss the demographic and profile characteristics of first generation students, their pre-college characteristics and experiences, effects on the collegiate experience, and the influence of parental involvement in the lives of first generation students.

**Demographics and Profile Characteristics**

First generation students changed the face of higher education after World War II, bringing diversity to a world which previously consisted of mainly white, elite males. There are a variety of studies throughout the literature which provide a description and analysis on who first generation students are, where they come from, and what they aspire to become after graduation.
One major study completed by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2001) analyzed a subset of first year students in the 1995-1996 academic year that completed the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. In all, 12,000 first year students from all over the nation were involved in the original study, with 10,300 students participating in the follow up study. The same participants were asked to complete a second survey three years after first enrolling in college. Data were analyzed through cross-sectional analysis as a longitudinal study of the sample through 1998. The report focused on the academic preparation and postsecondary success of this population in comparison to the general population of first year students enrolled in higher education (U.S Department of Education, 2001).

The analysis was first used to create a profile of first generation students, which reported this population as older, more likely to be Hispanic, more likely to speak a language other than English at home, low-income, and married before beginning college. They were more likely to have attended high school in an urban community, small town, or rural area. Academic preparation for postsecondary education was at a less rigorous level than for students who were not first generation, which was evidenced through lower levels of advanced math courses completed by high school graduation and lower college entrance exam scores. This lack of preparation had an effect on college choice, as first generation students were less likely to attend private or research institutions, instead choosing community colleges and regional universities. While on campus these students were more likely to take remedial courses and have lower grade point averages than their non-first generation counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
Further findings indicated that first generation students had specific motivation in attending college, especially if coming from a lower income family. This motivation was to better themselves than they had been provided for as children. As a result, first generation students often chose majors in degrees that had the potential to lead to larger salaries such as business or management at higher rates over majors in social sciences. Money was not only an issue post-graduation; this was a concern while taking courses, which lead first generation students to be more likely to work full time and attend college part time than their non-first generation classmates. The sum of these trends had an effect on persistence and attainment. First generation students struggled to find a place while on campus, and as a result of this lack of affinity were less likely to be enrolled in the initial institution of higher education until graduation. Instead, these students transferred to another institution or dropped out of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey is conducted through the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, and is focused on first time, first year college students. Data have been collected since in 1966, making this the longest running study of the first year student population. The survey is distributed at participating institutions across the nation, focusing on pre-college experiences, motivations, and college expectations. In 1971, the survey began asking participants to share the educational level of parents in order to track trends for first generation population. In 2005, a report was created, called “First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971” (Saenz et al., 2007). This report compared data from 1975
(n=154,245) to 2005 (n=254,799), and analyzed differences between first generation and non-first generation students through trend analysis.

Results from the analysis showed that first generation students came from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, with Hispanic students as the group with most representation at 38.2% of the population in 2005. Undocumented students were a rising portion of this population, at 27.7% in 2005. In comparison to their non-first generation classmates, this population was more likely to attend community college instead of a four year institution when first enrolling in higher education. This was due to two factors, including a lack of academic preparation in high school, and a close relationship to family (Saenz et al., 2007).

The participants valued parental encouragement as an important reason for going to college, but this encouragement and support did not come with the social capital that is provided by parents who have attended college. There was limited access to information about applying to college provided by parents, so students tended to look to high school guidance counselors and relatives to fill the void. In order to stay close to family, first generation students were more likely to have chosen an institution within fifty miles from their home, and live there instead of on campus. There was a large concern with financial security in this population, as there was pressure from parents to succeed, which had a higher likelihood to put them in a higher income bracket post-graduation. This pressure affected multiple areas of the student’s college life and choices. Reasons for attending college included getting a better job, making more money post-graduation, and preparing for graduate school. When choosing a campus to attend, the college’s academic reputation, likelihood of being admitted to a graduate or professional program after
graduation, and national ranking are important reasons that were considered. Financial assistance was an important part of the college choice process, and first generation students were more likely to choose an institution with low tuition and/or offered a high amount of aid. Financial prosperity was more important to this population than developing a meaningful philosophy of life while attending college. Along with the idea of making a high salary after graduation, first generation students were also more likely to work more hours while in school and/or hold a full time position, which assisted in paying for college costs. That time spent away from campus could be detrimental for first generation students, and often affected student engagement in campus life and time spent studying for classes (Saenz et al., 2007).

The study also found a trend in the lack of academic preparation for first generation students. The participants reported spending less time studying and doing homework during their last year of high school than non-first generation students. They also reported a lower level of intellectual confidence than their classmates, estimating at lower rates that they would earn at least a B average in college courses and believing that they had a lower level of writing and math ability. There was a higher level of academic challenge for this population as a result of this mindset of inferiority (Saenz et al., 2007).

Recent research on first generation students has expanded to include qualitative surveys, focusing on case studies which provide deep and rich analysis of the individual stories of first generation students. In 2010, Jeff Davis published a book entitled “The First Generation Student Experience: Implications for Campus Practice, and Strategies for Improving Persistence and Success” as a result of his research at Sonoma State University (SSU). Over the course of ten years, he collected 14 personal narratives
written by first generation students at SSU. His analysis of these transcripts echoed many of the characteristics found in previous studies. The first generation students in the study were determined to succeed, supported by a friend or family member who assisted them either emotionally and/or financially as they entered the college choice process. There were also participants who did not immediately enter higher education, choosing first to get married or have children. When entering college, some attended a community college before transferring to SSU.

The participants in the Davis (2010) study had a tendency to be self-sufficient, which could lead to feelings of alienation which impeded their willingness to ask for assistance from college faculty and staff. These participants were described as “future focused” (p. 161), considering only majors that have the potential to produce a large income post-graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). First generation students who were first or second generation American citizens had their own struggles, oftentimes having served as translator and communicator for parents and family members through their lives. The parents of these students had less information regarding the American higher education system than other first generation parents, and as a result, the student did more legwork in the college application process. The college campus was an unfamiliar place, and with no role models to ask for assistance, it took more time to become acclimated to campus norms and expectations than other classmates (Davis, 2010).

The students who gave narratives were family oriented, choosing to attend college because they wanted to provide better lives for their children. First generation students of color struggled not only with entering a new environment on college campuses, they
faced reconciling their “new” lives with the rigid cultural views of family relationships and friends. Close relationships with family members were additional stressors, with some students feeling pressured to drop out and return to the family (Davis, 2010).

The results of these studies show many common themes and characteristics that reflect the first generation student community, including more likely to be Hispanic, speak a language other than English at home, and being from a low socioeconomic status. This population was focused on financial issues, choosing to attend college to raise their income level higher than their parents. There was also a lack of connection to the campus community, which had an adverse effect on academic achievement and persistence. These demographic and profile characteristics affected the overall college experience when compared to their non-first generation counterparts.

Students’ Pre-College Characteristics

First generation students enter higher education with a different set of pre-college characteristics than their classmates who had parents with a college degree. These differences have an influence on the first generation student campus experiences in and outside of the classroom. These experiences can also affect the academic success and intellectual growth of this student population. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) were two of the first researchers in the field to initially examine this population, beginning in the late nineties.

In 1996, Terenzini et al. compared the differences between first generation and non-first generation students in the areas of pre-college characteristics, the college experience, and educational consequences of gains in reading, math, and critical thinking abilities as a part of the National Study of Student Learning. A diverse group of 23
institutions were selected from the IPEDS database including on type, location, size, type of student population, and ethnic distribution, which in the end mirrored the national population of undergraduates by ethnicity and gender. The participant pool consisted of 3,840 randomly selected students who completed the two phases of the study. In the first phase, held in the fall of 1992, participants completed a NCTLA-developed precollege survey of demographic information, aspirations, expectations of college, and orientation toward learning as well as the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP). The second phase was held in the spring of 1993, where participants completed the CAAP, the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ), and a NCTLA-developed follow up survey of first year experiences. A multiple regression analysis was applied to these data (Terenzini et al., 1996).

The results suggested that in comparison to non-first generation counterparts, first generation students in this study were more likely to come from lower income families, be Hispanic, have lower academic skills and degree aspirations, were less involved in high school, had more dependent children, expected to finish school quickly, and received less encouragement from parents to attend college. These students worked more hours in off-campus employment, were less likely to be involved in extracurricular racial awareness workshops, and perceived faculty as concerned with student development and teaching. Despite lower skills in math, English, and critical thinking when entering college for first generation students, both groups progressed at the same rate during the first year in these areas (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Pascarella et al. published the results of a follow up study in 2004. The second phase of the study focused on the college experience and cognitive and psychosocial
development of first generation students in comparison to their non-first generation counterparts. Using the same population as the first study, the participants who had completed the first two phases were invited to return for the second phase of the study. In the third and fourth rounds of data collection, participants completed the CAAP, CSEQ, a NCTLA-developed follow up survey in the spring of 1994 and the spring of 1995. The entire data set was analyzed in three stages. The first stage of analysis focused on determining the net differences between first and non-first generation students in concern to academic and non-academic experiences in college. The second stage of analysis estimated the net differences between the two populations on nine dependent variables (e.g. end of second year science reasoning, end of second year writing skills, and end of second or third year openness to diversity and challenge) with parental education level as the independent variable. The third stage of analysis examined the presence of interaction effects of academic and non-academic experiences of college influenced cognitive and psychosocial outcomes in both populations. All stages utilized a regression analysis to analyze these data.

The results of the Pascarella et al. (2004) study showed that first generation students were less involved in extracurricular activities than their non-first generation classmates, often choosing to work instead. This had a larger negative impact on academic performance and growth. However, if first generation students were committed to their coursework by studying outside of class and participating in class discussions, there was a positive effect on critical thinking and writing skills and learning in the second and third years. The types of courses taken in the first year of college also had an impact on outcomes in the second and third years, with greater development seen through
arts, humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences courses. First generation students were less likely to attend a selective institution than non-first generation classmates (Pascarella et al., 2004).

In the book *How college affects students*, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 624) discuss strategies for academic success for first generation students based on their previous research. Attending full time and working fewer hours to allowed students greater benefit in both learning and general cognitive development, as well as extended the benefits of effort put forth in studying. The extended time spent on campus also allowed the first generation student to become involved in campus extra-curricular activities, enhancing the collegiate experience. This approach may assist in overcoming the lack of social and cultural capital that their parents could not provide.

Pike and Kuh (2005) examined the college experiences of first and second generation college students, focusing on how their experiences affected learning and intellectual development. A stratified random sample of 3,000 undergraduates across the nation who had taken the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CESQ) was selected, with participants chosen from each of the six Carnegie classifications. The data pool consisted of scores from 1,127 participants, with 39% identified as first generation and 61% as second generation college students. A multi-group structural equation model with latent variables was used to analyze the data in three phases. The analysis showed that first generation students were at a disadvantage in the key indicators of college success when compared to second generation students. First generation students were also less engaged and were less likely to experience and integrate diverse college experiences. These subjects perceived the college environment as less supportive, and
made less progress in the areas of learning and intellectual development (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) investigated motivation and integration dimensions (which include the academic and social environments of a college) and how they influence college academic achievement of first generation students. The participant pool consisted of 197 students attending a community college in the southern region of the United States. The subjects completed a survey that asked questions regarding demographics and college motivation and integration. The data were analyzed using two correlational analyses focused on the association between motivation and integration variables. After that, two multiple regressions were utilized to examine the predictive nature of motivation and integration dimensions on academic achievement for first generation and non-first generation participants. Results of these analyses showed that there was an association between motivation and integration dimensions for both groups, but the relationship was stronger for non-first generation students. Motivation and integration dimensions were significant predictors of academic achievement for first generation students, with academic integration contributing to a higher GPA. These findings highlighted the importance of academic integration for first generation students to ensure persistence to graduation and higher grades.

Pre-college experiences and characteristics affect the college experience for first generation students in and outside of the classroom. They were less involved in campus life, which has a negative effect of GPA and persistence. However, if parents are involved in the education of first generation college students, it has been found to play a positive role in persisting to graduation.
Effect of Parental Involvement

While the parents of first generation students may not have the experience to share, they can still influence educational aspirations and attainment for the better. However, they also have the potential to cause dissonance in the life of the child as they enter the collegiate realm. This dissonance must be negotiated as the student progress through their education.

McCarron and Inkelas (2006) examined the influence of parental involvement on the educational aspirations of first generation students compared to non-first generation students, if aspirations resulted in educational attainment or not, and the differences in attainment by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The study used student survey data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), which is distributed by the U.S. Department of Education. A data set consisting of 1,879 first generation participants was utilized in the analysis, which included means and frequencies to convey demographic information and a multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between educational aspiration and parental involvement. A chi square distribution was used to determine the differences in educational aspirations versus attainment. Parental involvement was found to be the best indicator of aspirations to attend college. However, not every participant was as successful in attaining the level of education they had aspired to, with 62.1% of the sample falling short of their aspirations within ten years.

Perna and Titus (2005) also studied the ways in which parental involvement, social networks, and school resources have an effect on college enrollment in children of parents who did not attend college. This quantitative study utilized longitudinal data
collected from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) in 1992 and 1994. A multinomial extension of hierarchical linear model was used to analyze the data. Parental involvement in various forms (discussing education-related topics, volunteers at the child’s school, and initiating contact with the child’s school about academics) was found to have a positive effect on the odds of a child enrolling in college. However, not all contact with the child’s school has a positive effect; if a parent only communicates regarding behavioral issues, the child is less likely to enroll. Other factors that increase the odds of a student enrolling in college are having friends that enroll and resources that are available at the child’s school.

First generation students faced a large culture shift when attending an institution of higher education. These students entered a phase of breaking away from the family that has been a large part of their world for the first part of their lives. London (1989, 1992) was one of the first to examine this experience through a 15 participant case study of the life stories of first generation, low income students in the Boston area. Themes that emerged through the interviews included a struggle for the participants as parents gave conflicting messages. The first message was to attend college and make the family proud. The second message sent was to stay at home and keep the family dynamics intact. One example of conflicting messages cited in the study was a female participant’s father who traveled with her to campus visits and interviews, enthusiastically participating in the application process. However, when she was admitted to an institution, the father became upset and refused to allow her to go. Her mother stepped in as mediator, and the day that the participant left for campus, the father drove her to the airport.
The participants also reported struggling with their personal cultural identity, as the college environment introduced new viewpoints and social norms not present in the current family value system, which caused tension between parent and child. Children that left the home to attend college were ostracized by the family for no longer fitting into the previously set family dynamic. Each student interviewed had to renegotiate relationships with family members and friends, and often needed to make peace with themselves as they lived in the “marginality of two cultures” London (1992, p. 7).

London utilizes Park’s (1950) definition of marginality of two cultures:

These students live and share in the life and traditions of two distinct cultures, never quite wanting or willing to break with their past, even if permitted to do so, and never fully accepted, because of prejudice, in the culture in which they seek a place (London, 1993, p.7)

This lead to a period of a “leaving off” the values of the past and “taking on” a new social identity in order to fit in with campus friends and social norms. This change is demonstrated in multiple areas, including types of food eaten, music listened to, and clothing worn. London (1992) described this as “living in two worlds”, one in which the student strives to find acceptance and the other in which parents and other family members question the changes that are occurring.

This process was explained in a different way in a first person point of view by Laura Rendon (1992) in an article entitled *From the barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American ‘scholarship girl’*. In this article, Rendon shares her journey as a first generation student from a Mexican family and her process in higher education as she
progressed from an associate degree to a doctorate degree. At length, she discusses the idea of “academic shock”, which she defines as:

A feeling of alienation that moves the student from concrete to abstract experience and that takes the student from an old culture that is vastly different in tradition, style, and values to a new world of unfamiliar intellectual conventions, practices, and assumptions. (Rendon, 1992, p. 56)

In order to be successful and persist, the first generation student must be able to reconcile living in two worlds and to manage the academic shock in order to be successful in higher education. This provided an added stressor for the student as he or she maneuvered through the collegiate process. If the student and family resolved the dissonance between the two words of college and home, the student was supported, and had a higher chance of succeeding in obtaining a college degree.

First generation college students come from households where the parents have had no college or post-secondary education experience (Saenz et al., 2007, Gofen, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Davis, 2010). These students attend higher education to break the income barrier that a lack of college degree holds in today’s economy. Parental involvement and support has a positive effect on academic achievement and success, and makes the transition from family to college life an easier process as students live in the marginality of two cultures: the home and family versus campus norms and expectations. In order to be successful, first generation students have to manage the family relationship in addition to the pressures of college coursework.

**Theoretical Framework**
Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the emotional bonds between parent and child. These bonds (otherwise known as a base) are developed through the type of care provided during childhood. The security of this base forms the child’s personality and self-esteem, while guiding the way he or she interacts with others (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008). This theory comes out of the discipline of psychology, where the focus is on the individual.

In the 1950’s, John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, completed research on the relationship between infants and their parents. Named attachment theory, his research focused on the emotional bonds between individuals. Bowlby (1988, p. 27) defines attachment behavior as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world.” This behavior begins in infancy, when the bond is created between primary caregiver and child. As the child grows and develops, the primary caregiver provides a base of support while simultaneously encouraging autonomy (Ainsworth et al., 1978). At best, this base is secure, which allows the child to explore the environment, knowing that his or her return will be welcomed and that all of the physical and emotional needs will be met as they arise. The security of this base (i.e. type of care provided) forms the child’s personality as well as guides the child’s choices, self-esteem, expectations, and interaction with others for the rest of his or her life (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008).

Bowlby’s theory of attachment (1988) includes three basic functions for attachment, which are applied to infants or adolescents. The first function is *proximity maintenance*, which occurs when the child is alarmed by some sort of perceived danger,
which leads him or her to find comfort from the primary caregiver. The second function is *safe haven*, which occurs when the child utilizes the primary caregiver as a source of comfort, support, and reassurance. The third function is *secure base*, which this occurs when children feel comfortable exploring the world around them, feeling confident that they are safe and secure based on proximity to the primary caregiver. The child “uses the mother as a secure base from which to explore” (Ainsworth et al., 1978, p. 22).

Research in attachment theory continued through the 1970’s and 1980’s through the work of Bowlby’s students. Mary Ainsworth and a team of researchers completed an empirical test of the three functions of attachment by developing the “Strange-Situation Procedure”, which was tested with children ranging from birth to age four. In this experiment, a child in the care of the mother was introduced to a new environment. After the child had explored the room, he or she was introduced to a stranger, once with the mother in the room. After a short amount of time, the mother left the room. At each step, the child’s reaction and behavior was observed. From this work, three patterns of primary caregiver attachment were recognized (Ainsworth, 1978; Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008).

The first pattern of primary caregiver attachment is *Secure*. In this pattern, the child utilized the primary caregiver as a secure base when exploring new environments. He or she was happy when the caregiver is in the room, but showed distress when left alone or with a stranger. Once the caregiver returned, the child sought contact, and once finding comfort, returned to exploring the environment. These children are less anxious and more cooperative when compared to other children.
The second pattern of attachment is *Insecure-Avoidant-Dismissing*. In this pattern, the child did not seek a great deal of physical contact from the primary caregiver after a separation. Children who showed these characteristics had a high level of independence, and showed a limited amount of emotion and physical affection.

The third pattern of attachment is *Insecure-Resistant-Preoccupied*. In this pattern, the child showed great distress when separated from the primary caregiver, and was unable to be soothed once the caregiver returned. These children tended to be clingy, and show little interest in new environments.

The type of attachment pattern that a child develops in infancy extends through his or her lifespan. As children enter adolescence, one primary developmental task is to develop the ability to interact with the outside world without parents with social, emotional, and cognitive autonomy. Finding such autonomy shows the adolescent becoming less dependent on parents for day to day decisions and protections. The development of these skills is done in the context of the parent-child relationship that was established in infancy. Adolescents who were raised with a secure attachment pattern still turn to their parents under conditions of extreme stress. They feel comfortable doing so due to the secure base in the parent-child relationship that was established during the early years of life (Allen & Land, 1999). To date, there have been many studies completed examining the various components of attachment style with college age children, including Kenny (1987), Berman and Sperling (1991), and Sorokou and Weissbrod (2005).

An example of connecting attachment theory to the topic of first year students is Kenny’s (1987) landmark quantitative study on extent and function of parental
attachment among first year students. This was one of the first studies completed in this research area with college students. In this study, the extent and function of the parent-child bond following the child’s departure from the family was examined, focusing on self-reports of assertion and dating competence. Participants consisted of 173 first year residential college students at a large urban university in Pennsylvania. Each participant completed a 70-item parental relationship questionnaire focusing on three areas, including affective quality of relationships, parents as facilitators of independence, and parents as source of support. This assessment provided separate ratings for mother and father (This questionnaire evolved into the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, which is used to this day and was used in the current study). They also completed the Dating and Assertion Questionnaire. The data was analyzed by utilizing a stepwise multiple regression. This assessment found that men and women had similar descriptions of the parental relationship, but that female students were more likely to seek out the help of their parents than their male counterparts. Students of both genders found the parental relationship an important source of help when needed, noting a greater sense of self confidence.

Another study that focused on the transition to college focused on the emotional distress due to the changing relationship between parent and college age child. Berman and Sperling (1991) studied parental attachment and emotional distress in the transition to college, which is a disruption of the intimate bond between parent and child. The participants in this quantitative study consisted of 129 first year students at an East Coast university. Participants completed the Profile of Mood States, the Continued Attachment Scales, and the Parental Relationship Variable Questionnaire at the beginning of the first
semester of college and again at the end of the first semester. The analysis of the data was completed utilizing an ANOVA. Continued attachment to parents was equally present for students who lived at home and on campus, but decreased at a higher rate for residential students. Female participants had a higher level of attachment to mothers than the male participants. While men generally experienced a lower level of attachment to parents than female participants, those that did have a high level of attachment had more difficulty with the external separation, which was met with feelings of emotional distress. Women were more comfortable with the physical separation.

Lastly, the contact patterns between parent and college age child during the first year of college has also been studied. Sorokou and Weissbrod (2005) focused on men and women’s attachment and contact patterns with parents during the first year of college in a quantitative study. The 88 participants were first year college students from an undisclosed residential campus in the United States. Surveys completed included the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, and an assessment of need and non-need based contact patterns created by the researchers. The analysis was completed utilizing Mann-Whitney U Tests. Both men and women equally initiated need-based contact with parents, while females initiated significantly more non-need based contact than male participants. Non-need contact coming from parents to female participants was at significantly higher rates than to male participants. Female participants perceived a higher quality of attachment with mothers than males, and both groups reported a similar level of attachment with fathers.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the relationship created between parent and college age child begins at birth through the creation of emotional bonds
(otherwise known as a base). The security of this base forms personality and guides self-esteem, expectations, and interactions with others for the rest of the child’s life, including as they enter college (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008). Research has shown that college age children who have a strong level of attachment to parents view them as an important source of assistance (Kenny, 1987), had less emotion distress (Berman & Sperling, 1991), and initiate need-based contact as needed during the college years (Sorokou & Weissbrod, 2005). This research shows that the relationship between parent and child is a strong source of support during the transition to college. What that relationship looks like is an area of research that needs to be further defined, and is the focus of this research.

**Summary**

In this chapter, an introduction to first year and first generation college students was presented, as well as with a full description of attachment theory, which serves as the theoretical framework that will guide this research. Attachment theory has been applied in great detail to first year students, but few if any studies are applied to first generation students in particular. These quantitative studies focused on the effect of attachment on GPA, the adjustment to the university environment, and the differences between male and female students. The body of research has not focused specifically on first generation students, who often face a more difficult transition from high school to college. Therefore, a qualitative study focusing on the relationship between college age child and parent is warranted. The next chapter will describe the research methods, including research design; site and participant selection; data collection procedures; credibility, validity, and trustworthiness; data analysis; and ethical considerations.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The Millennial Generation children have a close relationship with their parents, and these parents have always been highly involved in the lives of their children in and outside of the classroom (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). The pattern of attachment between parent and child for all generations begins at birth, and provides a source of support for the child, which is vitally important to retention from first year to second year of college, especially in the lives of first generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

This chapter presents the research methods and procedures used in this study, including research design; site and participant selection; data collection procedures; credibility, validity, and trustworthiness; data analysis; and ethical considerations.

Research Design

To explore the attachment relationship between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents, the researcher utilized a qualitative multiple case study design consisting of individual in-depth interviews and focus groups with first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is described by Creswell (2007) as a type of research that “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning an individual or group ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.37). Qualitative research is an emerging process, with an inductive data collection and analysis process that is exploratory in nature. The purpose of this study was to explore the attachment relationship between first year first generation college students who are members of the
Millennial Generation and their parents, which is best explored through qualitative research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

This study was designed as a multiple case study. According to Merriam (1998, p. 19), this type of qualitative research is utilized to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.” This study examined the process, context, and discovery of the parent-child relationship in the analysis of a bounded system. A bounded system is one that has boundaries (such as time or place) consisting of interrelated parts (Creswell, 2007). This study was bounded by the fact that the participants were all first year first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation attending State College, and their parents. A multiple case design was chosen because the approach provided stronger evidence than a single case design by providing for the triangulation of data. Yin (2008) refers to triangulation as the use of multiple sources of evidence (e.g. documentation, interviews, and artifacts) in order to better increase the validity of the research.

Consistent with case study methodology, extensive forms of data collection activities were utilized (Creswell, 2007). The data were collected using in-depth individual interviews with each student and parent, followed by focus groups which include the parent and child from each family. The in-depth interview is a form of interviewing which focuses on the understanding of the lived experiences and the meaning made of those experiences from the participants point of view (Seidman, 2006). The in-depth interview is a “conversation with a purpose” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p. 149), in which the researcher identifies general topics to be discussed and then allows the participant to structure and frame the responses to the topics as the conversation
progresses (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Focus groups are another method of interviewing, where multiple participants (normally between seven and ten) who are unfamiliar with each other yet share similar characteristics while being interviewed in a group setting.

**Site and Participant Selection**

A combination of two sampling techniques was used in this study: criterion and convenience. As Merriam (1998) states, while multiple sampling techniques can be used, case studies require two levels of sampling. The first level requires the selection of the cases and the second level requires the selection of the participants within the cases. The sampling criteria utilized to select the cases includes: a publically controlled four year or above institution with a significant population of first generation students. In establishing the criteria and selecting the institution, it is important to note that the researcher herself was a first generation college student, and was interested learning more about the experiences of first generation college students in the state of Nevada, where she was employed at the time of the study. The site chosen was convenient geographically in order allow the researcher to access the site readily.

**Site Selection**

State College (SC) is a four year college, established in 2002 as a comprehensive institution of higher education dedicated to providing quality educational, social, cultural, economic, and civic advancement for the citizens of Nevada (SC, 2011). It is the first four-year institution in the state’s system of higher education. SC has a student population of over 3,000. A large percentage of these students live in state, with 95.7% of all enrolled students paying resident tuition. A majority of these students are located in
the metropolitan area in which SC is located, and 50% of the student body is classified as first generation (SC, 2011). According to the College Board, SC boasts a first year population of students who are mainly in state (97%), female (73%), and students of color (58%) (College Board, 2011).

**Participant Selection**

In selecting participants for the study, purposeful sampling was utilized. This is a form of non-probabilistic sampling where participants are hand chosen from the bounded system identified for the study. The assumption in purposeful sampling is that the researcher is looking to “discover, understand, and gain insight” from the participants, who are information-rich cases (Merriam, 1998, p. 61; Creswell, 2003). The boundaries of this study have been purposefully selected in order to help the researcher understand the phenomenon of the attachment relationship between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents during the first year of college.

The participants in this study consisted of students attending SC and one of their parents. In order to have a similar subject pool, the researcher purposefully selected three male and three female first generation first year students at SC. Six families were selected to participate in the study, and each family was defined as a “case” in this multiple case study.

In order to recruit participants, the researcher worked with the Director of Institutional Research at SC to obtain the e-mail addresses of all currently enrolled new first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation who began taking classes in the fall 2011 semester. The potential participant pool included
144 students who met these criteria. In June 2012, an e-mail and postal mail was sent to the students who met this criteria soliciting participation for the study, with guidelines for participation outlining that both parents not have obtained a college degree, and the availability of both student and one parent for separate thirty minute long interviews and a sixty minute long focus group with both the student and parent. (see Appendix G) In total, eight students responded to the invitation to participate. Individual interviews took place in July and August of 2012. During the individual interviews, only the child from two of the eight families was interviewed; the parents failed to respond to multiple interview requests. As a result, only six families are included in the results of the study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection method for this multi-method study was completed in two stages. The first stage was in-depth individual interviews with the student and their parent from the six families chosen from the population of first year first generation students at State College. The in-depth interview is a typical form of data collection for case study research, which is extensive in nature (Creswell, 2007). During this stage, before the interview began, the child participant completed the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987). The second stage of data collection was focus groups, where the child and parent interviewed in each case joined other family units to work together on a shared task, allowing the researcher to see the attachment relationship in action, as well as to follow up on the major themes that emerged from the individual interviews. Focus groups are another form of interviewing used in qualitative research, adding to the data gathered through the individual interviews (Morgan, 1997).

*Individual In-Depth Interviews*
The in-depth interview was modeled after the responsive model of qualitative interviewing as outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005). This form of interviewing is “more focused, more in-depth, and more detailed than ordinary conversations” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 108). In order to ensure that each participant was asked similar questions, an interview protocol was created for the study (see Appendix A & B). An interview protocol is a written version of the questions that are to be asked before the interviews begin. This is the most formal way to prepare for an interview, and was necessary to ensure that all subjects’ interviews were covered with consistent topical areas. Past the formal preparation, each interview had its own ebb and flow based on the participant and how he or she answered the interview questions. Allowing the participant to structure and frame the responses as the conversation progressed is an important component of in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Before the individual interview began, the child participants completed the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; Kenny, 1987) to establish the level of attachment between child and parent. The PAQ is a 55 item assessment designed to adapt Ainsworth et al.’s (1978) conceptualization of attachment for use with adolescents and adults. (See Appendix C) This 55 question assessment covers the following areas: affective quality of relationships, parents as facilitators of independence, and parents as source of support. These areas are assessed through questions broken down into the following categories: parental availability, understanding, acceptance, respect for individuality, facilitation of independence, interest in interaction with parents and affect towards parents during visits or reunion, student help seeking behavior in situations of stress, satisfaction with help obtained from parents, and adjustment to separation. The
assessment contains three scales, which include affective quality of attachment, parental fostering of autonomy, and parental role in providing emotional support. The assessment uses a 1-5 scoring system, with a 1 defined as “not at all”, 2 defined as “somewhat”, 3 defined as “a moderate amount”, 4 defined as “quite a bit”, and 5 defined as “very much”. Scores were calculated for each student for each of the three scales (See Appendix I for scoring guidelines). The reliability of the PAQ was assessed by Kenney through test-retest and internal consistency methods. Test-retest reliability was .92 for the measure as a whole and ranged from .82 to .91 for the three scales (Kenny, 1994).

The questions for the in-depth interviews (see Appendix A & B) were developed based on the three scales found in the PAQ; affective quality of attachment, parental fostering of autonomy, and parental role in providing emotional support. Additional questions were based on a review of the relevant literature on the Millennial Generation, characteristics and challenges of the first year of college, and first generation student characteristics and challenges. The research questions guiding the study also played a role in the creation of questions for the in-depth interviews. The interview questions included:

1. Can you tell me about the relationship that you have with your child/parents?

2. How do you think your child/parents feel about your relationship? Would they agree with the assessment you just gave?

3. When you/your child has a serious problem or an important decision to make, who do you look to for guidance?

4. How do you/think your child feel(s) after you/they go to your parents/you for help?
5. Thinking about the past year, how has your experience been as a first generation student/parent of a first generation student?

6. Thinking about the previous year, can you tell me about in what ways and how frequently you and your parents/child communicate?

7. When you communicate with your parents/child, what topics do you most often discuss?

8. Did your relationship with your parents/child change as the year began? If so, in what ways?

9. Do you have anything more that you would like to share with me at this time?

The interview questions were piloted in person with a first year, first generation student who is a member of the Millennial Generation at SC. The researcher completed the individual interview with this student, who also completed the PAQ. The pilot interview provided feedback for the researcher on the wording and order of the interview questions, as well as the amount of time needed to complete the interview.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a method of interviewing where multiple participants who are unfamiliar with each other, yet share common characteristics relating to the study are brought together to discuss topics presented by the moderator. Focus groups provide a more natural and relaxed setting than individual interviews, creating a socially oriented atmosphere where participants discuss the topics provided with each other (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). During the discussion, the participants not only got to share their own opinions, they also had the opportunity to interact with the other group members in a supportive environment (Morgan, 1997). Morgan (1997) recommends that each focus
group begins with the moderator facilitating an icebreaker question, which allows all of the participants to give a brief introduction. After participants have met each other, the moderator introduced an exercise that each case completed together (see Appendix E). The exercise challenged the participants to work together to solve a puzzle. The researcher watched each family unit complete the activity together, which allowed the family attachment relationship to be seen in person. After this exercise was completed, the discussion focused on following up on the exercise, as well as following up on the major themes that emerged from the individual in-depth interviews (see Appendix D). The focus group took an hour to complete, and was audio recorded.

As a result of purposeful sampling, the participant pool resided in the metropolitan area in which SC is located. This allowed for the opportunity for in-person interview and focus group participation. The interviews and focus groups occurred in a conference room located on the campus of SC to eliminate outside noise and distraction.

Credibility, Reliability, Trustworthiness

Researchers using qualitative methods must ensure that their work is appropriate and credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four issues of quality associated with qualitative research; credibility; transferability; dependability; and conformability.

*Credibility* is establishing that the findings are plausible based on the data collected from the participants. In the current study, each interview was transcribed by the researcher, a process which requires multiple playbacks of the recording. Also, before beginning data analysis, interview transcripts were read multiple times. *Transferability* is establishing if the findings could be applied outside of the study. The sample chosen for this study was from a specific State College; however, the anonymity of the participants makes the idea
of transferability plausible for other institutions, especially those who serve low-income, first generation, and racial and ethnic minority populations. Dependability is the quality of the data collection and techniques; if the study were to be repeated with the same techniques it would yield consistent findings. The researcher utilized Merriam’s (1998) case study protocol to provide additional support to the dependability of the analysis. Confirmability addresses whether the findings were supported by collected data. This was completed by sharing the emerging themes with the participants during the focus groups to confirm the accuracy of the data. Member checks, such as these, contribute to the credibility of the responses (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation was also utilized to address the credibility of the study. According to Yin (2009), triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data in order to better increase the validity of the study. The multiple sources of data used were the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, individual in-depth interviews, and focus groups. These, along with member checks, are two strategies suggested by Merriam (1998) to address the issues presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was an extensive process. The researcher transcribed the interviews shortly after each session. This immediate transcription allowed the researcher to review the data collected while it was still fresh in her mind before moving on to the next set of interviews. The transcripts were then be uploaded into Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program. The program assisted the researcher in coding the data and in creating network views of emerging themes and relationships.

The constant comparative method of analysis was used to code the data and identify emerging themes (Creswell, 2007). This method allows for adjustment of the
data collection in order to identify emerging themes, as well as provide a thorough analysis of the data collected. Each interview was first analyzed individually using this method. After this step was completed, a cross case synthesis was conducted to reveal common themes and contrast differences within the six families participating in the study (Merriam, 1998).

While this was not a grounded theory study, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data (Creswell, 2007). Open coding was the first stage of the process, where the data was examined line by line and assigned codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This step started the process of conceptualizing and labeling the data collected from all six cases. After assigning initial codes, the researcher created a frequency table of all codes, which assisted with the categorizing process. During this process, redundant codes were streamlined and then grouped around particular concepts (see Appendix K). After this stage of analysis, the concepts were shared with the participants during the focus group as a form of member checking.

Once the themes were identified and verified through the member check process, axial coding was used to establish several main categories within each of the cases by linking the data together (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some examples of the main categories include: child experience during the first year of college, child problem solving strategies and sources of support, and parent/child relationship. The researcher reviewed each transcript to assure the themes actually existed in the context of the interviews.

The final step in coding the data in the constant comparative analysis was selective coding. In this stage, all of the remaining categories were placed into core
categories, which provided foundation for the findings. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), selective coding is “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p. 116). Utilizing Atlas.ti, a network view was created to show the hierarchy of the codes as organized under the core categories (see Appendix L). The core categories in all six cases related to the four research areas: 1) the attachment base between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation before the child attends college; 2) the areas in which the parent/child relationship changes during the first year of college; 3) the major support sources and problem solving strategies of first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation; and 4) the shared family experience during the first year of college.

Through the data analysis process, Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program was utilized by the researcher to aid in the organization, coding, and categorization of the data. Computer programs like Atlas.ti assist as they analyze data more closely and effectively, but do not complete the analysis for the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Once themes were identified, this software allowed for the creation of visual representations of the data which graphically showed the results of the study. These network views contributed to creating models illustrating the cross-case analysis findings, which are presented in Chapter 5 (see Appendix L).

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations of qualitative research fall under the category of human subjects protection, which is the protection of the participants in the study from harm. In
order to assure that participants will be protected, a review and approval from the Institution Review Board was secured. The review of the informed consent form signed by the participants before each interview had an accurate description of the activities they would be involved in as well as the rights, responsibilities, and risks they could possibly be exposed to during the study. Also, the researcher was available via phone, e-mail, or in person after the interview is completed to answer any remaining questions and information the participants wanted to share after reflecting on the interview experience.

Confidentiality of the participants was assured, which means that they were not distinctly identified in conversation or in the study (Creswell, 2005). To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned an individual number at the close of the individual in-depth interview, which was then replaced by a pseudonym that was used in all written documents relating to the study. All study materials were kept in a safe and secure location during the duration of the study.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the study’s design, including research questions; research design; participant selection; data collection procedures; data analysis; credibility, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness; and ethical considerations. In examining the relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents, the use of a qualitative multiple case study design will be used because of the exploratory nature of the study. The multiple case study included individual in-depth interviews and focus group participation with the child and one parent or parent surrogate in six families. Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program, was used to code and assist in the analysis of the data.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter four presents the six cases of first year, first generation State College students who are members of the Millennial Generation and one member of each parental unit. This qualitative study focused on four research questions. The first question focused on the attachment base between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and parents as evidenced through frequency and modes and communication, as well as topics discussed within those forms of communication. The second question focused on areas in the relationship between first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents that changed during the first year of college. The third question focused on major support sources and problem solving strategies of first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation, given the lack of social and cultural capital traditionally provided by parents. Lastly, the fourth research question explored shared family experiences during the first year of college for first year, first generation students and their parents.

Data were collected from one child and one parent of six families via an assessment tool (Parental Attachment Questionnaire, Appendix A, Kenny, 1985), individual in-depth interviews, and focus groups. The data was analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998), which included using open, axial, and selective coding to identify the emerging themes in each of the cases, compared across cases to add to the rigor of this study (Yin, 2003).

Chapter Organization

This chapter begins with a description of each family, which includes a description of the family, Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) scores, and an
analysis of the parent-child attachment relationship. These descriptions are followed by vignettes of each family. These vignettes tell the story of the parent-child attachment relationship before and during the child’s first year of college, as well as the problem solving process and sources of support of the child during the year. This section focuses on addressing the research questions by presenting findings within the individual family vignettes. The final section of the chapter provides the results of a cross-case analysis, where each family attachment relationship and experiences during the first year of college were compared.

**Family Descriptions**

*Family #1: The Mendez Family*

Travis Mendez and his mother Colleen are members of a large family of Latino descent: Travis is the eldest brother to three siblings. He is majoring in Biology at State College. His siblings include two younger brothers (aged 13 and 8), and one younger sister (aged 18). Colleen is a single mother and sole caregiver, and Travis has never had a relationship with his father. Colleen supports the family by working overnight shifts at a local manufacturing plant. Spanish is the primary language spoken in the household, but Colleen completed the interview in English.

Mother and son have a strong level of attachment, which is evidenced through both the interviews and Travis’ responses on the PAQ. His overall mean score on the PAQ was a 4.08 out of 5.00, with the strongest score in the “Parents as a Source of Support” subsection (4.46), followed by “Affective Quality of Relationship” (4.15), and “Parents as Facilitator of Independence” (3.64). He describes his relationship with Colleen:
My relationship with my mom is… first of all, my mom and dad are separated, so I was raised in a family that was apart. My whole life I have been raised by my mom. I think it helped us to have a super strong relationship. I think that I am too attached to my mom. I'd say it is a really strong relationship.

*Family #2: The Matson Family*

Johnny and Laurie Matson were the second family to participate in the study. Johnny is undecided in his major at State College. Laurie is a stay at home mother with three children: Johnny, his twin sister, and a younger sister who is 14. Their father is not in their lives, and has not been a source of support for approximately twelve years, which is when the family moved from the east coast to Nevada. Johnny’s twin sister is also enrolled in college, studying at a major university in the northern part of the state. They both participated in the Upward Bound program at State College as juniors and seniors in high school. Upward Bound is a federally funded program that provides pre-college preparation to the children of low income families where neither parent holds a bachelor degree (SC, 2012). Johnny is biracial; his mother is Latino and his father is Caucasian.

Mother and son have a moderate level of attachment, as demonstrated in both PAQ scores and through the interview questions. The overall mean score on the PAQ was 3.48 out of 5.00, with the highest score found in the “Affective Quality of Relationships” subscale (3.81), followed by Parent as Facilitator of Independence” (3.57), and the lowest score found in the “Parent as a Source of Support” (3.00).

Johnny’s PAQ scores contrast with how he explains his approach to problems in the interview, saying: “When I have a problem and I can't figure it out by myself, I
normally go to my mom. If it is something more like school, my classmates know better. It depends on the situation. Most of the time it is my mother.”

However, Johnny had some challenges during his first year of college. His mother explains the situation in the interview:

He took classes in the fall. He failed two of them and got C's in the other two. He then didn't get registered for spring in time. He then tried to play like he was going to school. But I knew. That lasted like one month, and I had the suspicion. We forced him to tell the truth.

Family #3: The Gailey Family

Rosalie and Megan Gailey were the third family to participate in the study. Rosalie has not yet chosen a major at State College and was a participant in the State College Upward Bound program, which led her to enroll in classes at SC. Megan is a stay at home mother who is raising three daughters; Rosalie and her two younger sisters, aged 12 and 8. Megan is married to Rosalie’s father, and he is also a source of support for Rosalie. They are of Caucasian descent.

Rosalie has a moderate to strong level of attachment to her mother and father. Her overall PAQ score was 3.86, with both the “Affective Quality of Relationship” and “Parents as Source of Support” subscales with the highest scores of 4.00, followed by “Parents as Facilitator of Independence” (3.57). Rosalie explains the relationship in the interview:

My parents have always supported me with like helping me out when I have trouble with anything. Even from the beginning, from when I was born, they were always there to help me out. Though at times, it seems like they were hard on me
but they always had my back at the end of the day. I overcame a lot of struggles when I was younger and they have helped me accomplish through that.

Megan identifies that Rosalie sees her as a source of support, and also recognizes that she may not be the first individual her daughter approaches when there is a problem. When asked who her daughter goes to for support, she answered: “Probably her friends or sister. I think eventually she comes to us, as maybe the third person advice. I don’t think she comes to me first. Of course, I’m her mom, you know. It’s that generation thing, I guess.”

**Family #4: The Howell Family**

Kimberly and Betty Howell are members of a large family of Asian-Pacific Islander descent. Kimberly is an education major at State College. Betty and her husband have five children: two daughters (Kimberly and her older sister, who is 22 years old and a recent graduate of the local community college) and three sons aged 16, 14, and 10. Betty works at a local food manufacturing company.

Mother and daughter have a moderate to strong level of attachment in their relationship. Kimberly’s mean PAQ score was 3.90, with the highest score in the “Parents as a Source of Support” (4.31) subsection, followed closely by “Affective Quality of Relationships” (4.26), and proceeded by “Parents as Facilitator of Independence (3.14). Kimberly and Betty speak almost daily, which is in part due to Kimberly’s dependency on her mother for a source of transportation to school. Betty describes their communication, including a difficult conversation in the interview:

In the previous year, we would talk every day when I dropped her off. I would check on how her studies were going and stuff. There was one time where she
said that she didn't want to go back to school, that she wanted to work. That pissed me off. I was so mad. I told her that all of the time we thought that she was going to graduate from college, so why would she not want to go back? I told her that even though she was old enough to make her own decisions, she was not. She had to go back.

*Family #5: The Wharton Family*

Matt and Clara Wharton were the fifth family to participate in the research. They are of Caucasian descent. Matt is an education major at State College, participating in the Step Up To Teaching program. This program is a partnership between the local school district and State College and offers high school students who commit to teaching in high need areas in the Las Vegas area after graduation a full ride scholarship. Students enrolled in this program begin taking college level coursework during the last two years of high school (SC, 2012). The Whartons are a large family: Clara has had four children, including three sons (Tyler and two older brothers, aged 23 and 20) and one daughter (aged 24). Clara’s daughter is also enrolled as a student at State College in the nursing program. Clara is married to Matt’s father, who also serves as a source of support. Clara works at a support staff member at a local high school.

Mother and son have a strong level of attachment. Matt’s mean PAQ score was a 4.24 out of 5.00, with the highest score found in the “Parent as Facilitator of Independence” subscale (4.71), followed closely by “Affective Quality of Relationship” (4.48) and then “Parents as Source of Support” (3.54). The strength of the relationship is evidenced in the interviews. Matt explains the relationship he has with his parents as: “I have a really good relationship, a strong relationship. I enjoy spending time with my
parents, especially my mom.” Clara has a high level of trust with her son, explaining: “He is the most responsible of all of my children, and has been that way for a long time. I don't have to worry about him much.”

Family #6: The Mata Family

Vivian and Stanley Mata are members of a family of Latino descent. Vivian is an Education major at State College, and is a participant in the STEP UP To Education program. Stanley, who owns a small landscaping company, is divorced from Vivian’s mother and has not remarried. His daughter Vivian maintains constant contact with her mother, who lives locally and is also a source of support. Vivian’s parents have four children: three daughters (Vivian and two younger sisters aged 12 and 15) and one son (aged 17). Vivian’s mother has remarried, and has had two children from that marriage, a 3 year old daughter and a 2 year old son. Vivian lives with her father, while all of her younger brothers and sisters live with her mother. Spanish is the primary language spoken in the family, but Stanley completes the interview in English.

Vivian and Stanley have a moderate level of attachment. Vivian’s mean PAQ score was 3.56 out of 5.00, with “Parent as Facilitator of Independence” as the highest scoring subsection at 4.43. The second highest scoring subsection was “Affective Quality of Relationship” at 3.85. The lowest score was found in the “Parents as Source of Support”, at a score of 2.46. Vivian’s independence and the support of her father were a common theme in both her and Stanley’s interview. Vivian explains this in her interview:

I am pretty close to them. They are very supportive emotionally. Financially, I am kind of independent. Not because they were not there but because that is just who I am. I am pretty close to them - I can't see my life without them in it…. Growing
up, I didn't see enough of my dad. Much more of my mom. After they separated, I saw more of my dad and got closer to him. Honestly, I feel more comfortable on my own than with either of them.

**Family Interviews and Vignettes**

*Introduction*

In June 2012, the researcher contacted all new (i.e. first year) students who began taking classes at State College in the fall 2011 semester, and were identified as first generation in the student information system. Individual interviews took place in July and August of 2012. For each family, the child was interviewed first. The child completed the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; see Appendix C; Kenny, 1985) before beginning the interview. The parent participant was given a blank copy of the PAQ to review before the interview. Each interview followed the interview protocol to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions in the same order (see Appendix A & B). Each interview was recorded.

The individual interview asked the following questions:

1. Can you tell me about the relationship that you have with your child/parents?
2. How do you think your child/parents feel about your relationship? Would they agree with the assessment you just gave?
3. When you/your child has a serious problem or an important decision to make, who do you look to for guidance?
4. How do you/you think your child feel(s) after you/they go to your parents/you for help?
5. Thinking about the past year, how has your experience been as a first generation student/parent of a first generation student?

6. Thinking about the previous year, can you tell me about in what ways and how frequently you and your parents/child communicate?

7. When you communicate with your parents/child, what topics do you most often discuss?

8. Did your relationship with your parents/child change as the year began? If so, in what ways?

9. Do you have anything more that you would like to share with me at this time?

After each family was interviewed, the researcher downloaded and transcribed the recordings. The researcher then completed an open coding process utilizing Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program. During this coding process, each interview was analyzed individually to break the data down into concepts. Once these concepts were identified, the researcher invited the families to participate in a focus group. At this focus group, the researcher watched the family dynamic in action, as each family worked together to solve a “Thinking Outside of the Box” puzzle (see Appendix E). After completing the exercise, the researcher discussed the concepts that emerged from the research with the participants (see Appendix F) as a form of member checking.

Table 1 provides a summary of the participant demographics, which includes pseudonyms, gender, ethnicity, student major, and parent profession.
Table 1. Table of participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family ID</th>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Student Gender</th>
<th>Parent Pseudonym</th>
<th>Parent Participating</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Student Major</th>
<th>Parent Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>Travis Mendez</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Colleen Mendez</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>Johnny Matson</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Laurie Matson</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>White/Latino</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Stay at Home Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>Rosalie Gailey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Megan Gailey</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Stay at Home Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>Kimberly Howell</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Betty Howell</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>F5</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Clara Wharton</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>Vivian Mata</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Stanley Mata</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family #1 - Travis & Colleen Mendez

Travis and Colleen have a strong attachment relationship, with an overall mean score of 4.08 out of 5.00. Colleen is the sole caregiver for four children. In order to provide for her family, she works twelve hour overnight shifts at a local manufacturing plant. Travis describes their weekly schedule as: “Mom works from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. and I go to school from 7:00 to 3:00. I don’t see my mom a whole lot. Every other day I don’t see her but we still communicate” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Colleen shared: “I am tired all of the time but always makes time to talk to my son” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Despite the scheduling difficulties, they have mostly face to face conversation. Travis explains: “My mom she is not very technological. She takes maybe like a day to answer a text and just tells me in person instead” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). When asked what topics were discussed during the first year, both Travis and Colleen shared that they discussed “school stuff” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012), which
included sharing stories from Travis’s daily life at State College and information that he learned in his classes. In his interview, he stated “I share lots of little random facts that I find interesting.”

The relationship between Travis and Colleen did not change much from high school to college. Travis took classes mostly during the day, which is a traditional high school schedule. As a result, their relationship was described as “kind of an extension” of high school. Travis did explain that “In the last year, I can take care of myself more. In the beginning, I needed her (Colleen) a lot but it is better… I am really trying to make myself more independent. Not too much, but some” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012).

Even though Travis is a first generation student, he looked to his mother for guidance. He described his problem solving process:

It depends on the problem. I'd say it's like a boy issue, because I don't talk to my dad I look for a male friend. Other than that, if it is like a life decision or . . . it really depends on the problem. For most of the time I look to my mom. She is wise and powerful and might know what to do ” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012).

Colleen shared that she is “glad and happy that he (Travis) is coming to me instead of others” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Even though she lacks the social and cultural capital traditionally provided by parents who attended college, she goes with Travis to find the answer to his questions, often utilizing connections she has made with key staff members in the college to find the answer. This
is difficult for her, and even though she does everything she can to help Travis, it makes her feel disappointed.

When asked about what was experienced during the first year of college, both Travis and Colleen did not share much information beyond a discussion of their experiences with conflicting schedules. Neither participant identified any particular situation, good or bad, that occurred during the past year.

Travis and Colleen participated in the focus group. Their interactions with each other were kind and supportive. During the “Thinking Outside of the Box” exercise, they worked together to attempt to solve the puzzle. After a few minutes of working on puzzle, they did not know how to solve it. At that time, Colleen asked the researcher for assistance. This was an example of the relationship described in the interviews as described by Travis in action:

Like if I am looking for a certain office, like an advisor, I wonder where I should go. I will ask my mom, telling her why I don't know what I am asking you, but can you help me? She will go with me find it out. My mom will ask for me” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012).

Family #2 – Johnny & Laurie Matson

Johnny and Laurie Matson have a moderately attached relationship, with an overall PAQ score of 3.48. Laurie does a great deal to care for Johnny, as she wants him to succeed. She describes this relationship:

I wish he was a little more independent, but I recognize because of his ADHD, he needs me to keep on top of him because he will forget everything. He is like the
absent minded professor. He is very bright, but sometimes I need to help him (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

Johnny had a difficult first year of college. When it came time to register for spring courses, Johnny had difficulty logging into the online registration system. He did not ask for help and as a result, did not enroll for the semester. During the first month of the semester, Johnny pretended to be attending classes. Working together, Laurie and Johnny’s twin sister figured out what occurred, and eventually Johnny confessed. He never addresses this situation in his interview, while what transpired and the consequences were the primary subject of Laurie’s interview. As a result, the two interviews were focused in different areas.

When asked about the frequency and modes of communication, Laurie and Johnny did share similar answers. The two speak mostly in person, but the communication that occurs is more often than not initiated by Laurie. She explains: “In person, every day we talk. Now, sometimes it is a one way communication. He will say everything is okay. It is not my problem with communication, I open the door. But sometimes he is a little closed off” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Johnny admits to not spending a great deal of time with Colleen, saying: “She probably thinks it (their relationship) is distant since I spend most of my time upstairs” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012).

When Johnny and Laurie do communicate, they discuss a wide variety of topics. When asked about what topics they normally discussed during the previous year, Laurie shared how she talked to Johnny about how he needed to be “more open with his feelings” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). Throughout her interview,
she discussed focusing on how she wants to help Johnny evolve and develop as a person. Johnny focused more on general topics, and gave a wider view of their discussions. He explains their communications:

I talk to my mom like every day but not always about school. We talk about regular stuff. Sometimes I will tell stories. I remember one day in class we were having trouble with the computers and I fixed it (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012).

When Laurie and Johnny were asked questions regarding their relationship and how it changed during Johnny’s first year of college, the interviewer again received answers that were not similar. While Johnny’s missing a semester of classes was the focus of Colleen’s interview, Johnny did not address it, and his answers to this question were focused on practical areas. It is clear through these interviews that while Colleen is focused on helping Johnny, he is unaware of how much assistance he is receiving. He explains their relationship during his first year of college: “I don't remember it changing it much. It is mostly financial. I take care of my own phone and transportation because I take the bus” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012). Laurie’s answer focused more on the emotional issues and her goal of helping him improve:

If anything, I think that he started to believe that I am open to communication. At the end of last year, he was thinking that I would attack him. I think that I had to demonstrate to him that he needed to do it not for me, but for him (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).
While Johnny seems not to be aware to the extent of assisting his mother Laurie is attempting to provide to him, he does identify her as a key source of support, but only after he attempts to solve the problem for himself:

When I have a problem and I can't figure it out by myself, I normally go to my mom. If it is something more like school, my classmates know better. It depends on the situation. Most of the time it is my mother (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

While Laurie lacks the social and cultural capital needed to assist her son through college processes and procedures, she does have a gambit: Johnny’s twin sister, who attends college at a research institution located in the northern part of Nevada. While Johnny does not identify his sister as a source of support, Laurie does. When asked who she feels Johnny turns to when he has a problem to solve, she answered: “There are times where he asks me. There are other times that he goes through his sister because he is scared to tell me himself. She will tell me” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012). The two worked together to support him during his first year of college.

The shared family experience during Johnny’s first year of college was a rough one. As explained earlier, he had major issues with the school’s online registration system, as a result, did not take classes during the spring semester. He did take classes during the summer semester, and is back on track. When asked about his first year, he said: “I can tell you one thing. It is stressful. I have so much work to do” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012). This was the most open and emotional answer from Johnny in his entire interview.
Laurie is focused on Johnny completing college, as she has concerns about the economy and how he needs to finish college in order to obtain a good paying job. In the interview, she shared a conversation she had with Johnny after they worked through his struggles with the registration system:

If you get your average up, if you don't demonstrate that you are worth it, you are not going to get any help. If you don't get any help, then no chance to go to college. With the economy the way it is, you are not going to get a job. And you have to speak up because I can't maintain your whole life (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

Johnny and Laurie declined participation in the focus group, telling the researcher that they already had plans during the dates and times scheduled. The researcher could not see them work together in a shared task. This was disappointing to the researcher, as it would have been informative to see the two of them work together on the shared problem solving exercise.

**Family #3 – Rosalie & Megan Gailey**

Rosalie and Megan Gailey have a moderate to strong level of attachment, with a mean PAQ score of 3.86. During Rosalie’s first year of college, they maintained an open relationship, communicating daily and in person. During her first semester, Rosalie struggled with a math course. She describes the situation:

I had the Millennium Scholarship when I started but I lost it because I was in the remedial math class. At SC, they have a module system. If you mess up on one little thing, you can't move on to the next module and have to retake it (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).
Due to losing her scholarship, academic performance and classes were a major topic of conversation during Rosalie’s first year of college. Megan describes the communication as:

She would come home from school and I would ask her about her day, and she would tell me about it; if she had a good day or a bad day or if she had a test, or if one is coming up, what was going on in her classes… We would talk every day almost about how things are going (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Rosalie’s answer to the question was similar: “We usually did talk about school and how I was going to do better in it. They really want me to get my Millennium Scholarship back. They are always telling me to do good in my classes” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

While Rosalie and Megan had difficult conversations through the year, Rosalie recognized that these conversations came out of love and support. When discussing the relationship and discussion, she shared: “Even though they are both (Megan and Rosalie’s dad) pretty stern on me sometimes at the end of the day they know I tried my best” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

While academic performance and the focus on regaining a lost scholarship was difficult subject that the Gailey family discussed on an almost daily basis, it did not change the attachment relationship between Rosalie and Megan. They both described the relationship as an extension of high school. However, what was interesting is the attachment relationship between Rosalie and her father. Even though he was not the parent participating in the study, he was discussed frequently in both interviews. Megan
used the word “we” often while describing the previous year, signifying a team approach of support. Rosalie described the relationship as:

(The relationship between) Me and my dad has changed a little bit. It seems like he is harder on me now, but I almost feel like we are closer now because he always wants to make sure I am doing my best. Sometimes he has given me my space now that he feels that he was putting a lot of pressure on me. He wants to let me do my thing (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Rosalie views her parents as a source of support, she looks to her older sister, who is a student at a research university in the Las Vegas area for assistance when she has questions about school. She is aware of the social and cultural capital her parents lack:

I look to my sister. She always did super good in school. I look to my parents too, even though I do feel more comfortable asking my sister when it comes to school. When it comes to college my parents don't know what to do sometimes since they didn't have that experience (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Rosalie also utilizes her friends as support and in times of decision making, saying: “A lot of times I do ask my really close friends too because they are going through what I am going through. They are all in college just like me right now” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Megan is also aware of this, telling the researcher when asked who her daughter looks to for advice that Rosalie goes to:

Probably her friends or sister. I think eventually she comes to us, as maybe the third person advice. I don't think she comes to me first… I guess it depends on
what the problem is. If it is something to do with school, probably not me (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

When asked how Rosalie feels after going to her mother for help, she admits her lack of knowledge about college processes and procedures, but how the family is impacted by the loss of scholarship. She explains:

She probably thinks I don't know everything. That will come later as she gets older, I hope. I don't know if she thinks I know what I am talking about. But sometimes, I probably don't because I didn't go to college. I don't know a lot about what she is having to deal with. I know what high school was like and getting good grades, but I know it is a lot different. But I tell her you have you pay for this, and we have to help pay for this so you just have to do good. No way around it (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

The shared family experience during the first year of college for Rosalie and Megan was one of struggle and pride. As previously discussed, Rosalie struggled with her class work, which led to the loss of a scholarship. Megan also struggled with assisting her daughter with other college processes:

It is a little frustrating because there are a lot of things that we still don't understand, like financial aid. There are a lot of things that you have to figure out and I don't know the answers. It's hard to get a hold of people. You call and no one answers the phone. To me, it was frustrating trying to help her get things done and figure things out (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Rosalie and Megan participated in the focus group, and their interactions with each other displayed a solid, attached relationship. Megan did not speak for her daughter,
nor did Rosalie defer to her mother to answer questions on her behalf. They worked as a team on the “Thinking Outside of the Box” puzzle, with Megan allowing Rosalie to take the lead in working out the solution while providing support. She was also verbally encouraging through the exercise. This is just as Rosalie describes Megan in her interview, saying: “My mom always tells me words of encouragement. She knows that I am trying really hard at the end of the day” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012) As a result of this exercise, the researcher was able to see the relationship that was discussed in the interviews in action.

Family #4 – Kimberly & Betty Howell

Kimberly and Betty Howell have a moderate to strong level of attachment, with a mean PAQ score of 3.90. Their relationship is maintained through daily in person communication, partly due to Kimberly depending on her mother Betty as a source of transportation to her classes. When asked about her relationship with her mother, Kimberly shared: “They are really open to me. I don't think that I am as open to them as much as I should be. But they are there when I need to ask question or need help” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Main topics of conversation during Kimberly’s first year of college included “Mostly family stuff… Sometimes school. I would tell her what happened during the day sometimes” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Betty shared that they discuss: “School. Her boyfriend. Even though I think that sometimes she thinks I am too nosy” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

When asked how the relationship between Kimberly and Betty changed during the first year of college, Betty identified that it did not change and was an extension of
the relationship they had when Kimberly was in high school. Kimberly, however, had a different view, sharing: “It is better now than it was before because now I can actually talk to her. Before I would talk to my sister, and now she is not here. I now talk to my mom more instead of her” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Kimberly is referring to her older sister, who recently moved out of the house after graduating with a degree in nursing from the local community college.

When facing a problem or important decision to make, Kimberly identified: “I don't look to anyone really. I try to work through it on my own and then talk to my parents to see what they think” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). While she begins the decision making process on her own, she does appreciate her mother’s input, saying: “I feel much better like I have a better idea of what I am going to do next instead of decide all on my own. They have good opinions” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Betty and her husband do lack the social and cultural capital gained through attending college, and as a result, Kimberly does look to outside sources when she has questions about school, including school support staff through the Upward Bound program and her older sister. Betty is aware that she is not the first point of contact when Kimberly has questions. When asked who her daughter goes to with problems, she replied: “Not me of course (laughs). Her sister or her dad. And then I am always the last” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Even though Betty may be the last person that Kimberly turns to when she has a problem, she did share that her mother is helpful to her.

The shared family experience during Kimberly’s first year of college as shared in the interviews focused on her struggle in making the transition from high school to
college. She described her first year as: “It was really... I didn't think it was that easy. Well, it was easy, but the time management was the hardest for me. There was nobody there to tell me to work on my homework, turn in my work, or go to class” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). This difficult transition led her to consider dropping out of school and working full time. After speaking with Betty, Kimberly did complete the semester, and continues to take classes at State College. This is a source of pride for Betty, who wants her daughter to make a better life for herself. In the interview she shared:

Right now she has a boyfriend and they are really close. I told her that they should both help each other out and go to college. He needs to help her finish school, and she needs to encourage him to go back to school. If they want a better future, they need to finish school to make more money. That is what I tell both of them (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

The Howell Family signed up for the focus group, but on the day it occurred, they did not attend. As a result, the researcher could not observe the relationship shared in the interviews in action.

*Family #5 – Matt & Clara Wharton*

Matt and Clara Wharton have a strong attachment relationship, with an overall mean score of 4.24 out of 5.00. This relationship is strong due to daily in person communication, which was developed and maintained in part to Clara and Matt sharing a car in high school to commute to the school when she worked and he attended classes. Clara worked as a support staff at Matt’s high school, and she took him to and from school every day for four years. Matt identifies his relationship with Clara as: “I have a
really good relationship, a strong relationship. I enjoy spending with my parents, especially my mom” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). Clara agrees, saying: “Well, it is what I would consider a good relationship. We get along very well” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

Matt and Clara speak multiple times a day, mainly in person. They do communicate via cell phone, but only when the discussion was of an urgent nature. Matt had issues with his financial aid during his first semester, he shared that he did talk to his mother via phone during or directly after working with staff in the office for assistance in resolving the issues. Clara shared: “We talked a lot about his girlfriend. Most recently, we have been talking about moving. He has helped us find a new home. We don't really talk about school too much” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

Clara and Matt’s strong attachment relationship did not change much from high school to college. Clara shared: “It (our relationship) was more of an extension (of high school). He is the most responsible of all of my children, and has been that way for a long time. I don't have to worry about him much” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). Matt is aware of this level of trust, saying: “My parents trust me mostly. They don't try to restrict me. I have a lot of freedom” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

When asked about how he approaches a serious problem or decision to make, Matt shared:

At first, I try to work it out by myself. That is the kind of person that I am. Then I guess it would depend on what it is - sometimes I would bring it to a friend. I would definitely almost no matter what it is bring it to my sister. I am very close
to my sister. Then I would bring it to my parents. It is usually my mother if it is a serious problem (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

Clara is aware of the strong relationship that Matt has with his older sister, who is enrolled in the nursing program at State College. When asked who her son turns to when he has a problem, she responded: “His sister… I think after he analyzes what they decided together, then he comes to me” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). She realizes that Matt does respect her opinion, saying: “I think that he wants to have my approval. But I think that he feels his sister understands better, where he is at or where he is coming from” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). As a result of his relationship with his sister, the lack of social and cultural capital on the part of Clara and her husband is overcome through their oldest daughter.

Even though Matt does not ask his parents first when he has a question or problem, he does respect his parent’s advice. In this interview, he said:

I feel usually relieved, because I usually . . . even after I go to my parents I work it out by myself. I just kind of take what they say and add it into my own mixture of thoughts. It's not like they work it all out for me. I do feel relieved to get their opinion. It feels good (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

The shared family experience during Matt’s first year of college was described differently by both parties. When asked about his experience as a first year, first generation student, he replied:

It's been rough. The first semester, fall semester 2011, was rough. But it was necessary, I guess. I knew I had to keep going, keep doing it… It's hard growing up. There was family problems and financial problems. I couldn't work. I couldn't
find a job. My financial aid did not come through until March. It was just stressful. There was a lot going on (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

When asked about her experience as a first generation parent during the past year, Clara shared:

I had it pretty easy… he is very driven. He had some questions about if teaching was what he really wanted to do, but even when he was doing that, he knew that he was going to get there. He just didn't know what he wanted to do after he graduated… with both of them (Matt and his sister) I have been very lucky and have not had to have the "don't do what I did" conversation with the both of them more than once. With the other two (children), I have to have that conversation much more often (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

Through her interview, Clara shared how proud she is of Matt, and how she believes that he will graduate and be successful in the field of education. She does want her children to make a better life for themselves through a earning a college degree.

The Wharton family signed up to participate in the focus group, but did not show up on the day it was to take place. As a result, the researcher could not see the attachment at work through a shared problem solving exercise.

*Family #6 – Vivian & Stanley Mata*

Vivian and Stanley Mata have a moderately attached relationship, with an overall PAQ score of 3.58. Vivian and Stanley’s relationship has not always been at the level it is now. Vivian describes this in her interview: “Growing up, I didn't see enough of my dad. Much more of my mom. After they separated, I saw more of my dad and got closer to
him” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). After her parent’s divorce, Vivian was the only sibling to live with her father. Stanley is happy to share his home with her. When asked if Vivian lives at home, he answered: “Yes, she does. I don't mind it. I think she is going to be there a long time. I am okay with it” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). 

When Vivian and Stanley do talk, it is normally in person communication, occurring a few times a week. Topics discussed revolve mostly around the family and friends. Vivian explains their communication topics:

I don't really talk about my private life with them, except for when I had a huge breakup. They were there for me then. Topic wise, it would be random things. Maybe about my brothers and sisters and how they are doing, as I involved in their lives. So basic household management (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).

Vivian does not share much information with either of her parents regarding her life in college. She explains: “My mom didn't know what was going on with college. My dad knows very little except for the big news I would share. I don't talk to them much about it as I did when I was in high school” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). 

The relationship between Vivian and Stanley improved during her first year of college, but it was not due to Vivian’s academic level; it was due to issues in her personal life that had nothing to do with school. When asked if her relationship with her father changed during the past year, she answered: “I think at some point, in the beginning when I started it did. But that was more because I was with somebody. It was only when
we broke up that I became closer to my family” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). Stanley agrees that the relationship improved, saying: “It changed. It got better. We are so close now, more than before” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).

During the interview, Vivian identified herself as someone who does not rely on her parents as a source of support. She approaches problems or questions independently, not asking for assistance from anyone. She does respect her parent’s opinion, as well as her little brothers and sisters. In the interview, she shared: “Sometimes I try to do things so that they (her parents) are proud of me. In that way, they are part of the decision. I also want to set a good example for my brothers and sisters” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).

Stanley is aware of the fact that he is not Vivian’s primary source of support, saying: “She doesn't ask much. Now she asks more, little by little. But mostly she does it herself” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). Stanley is aware of his lack of capital, but always tries to support his daughter emotionally as much as he can. In his interview, after asked how he thinks his daughter feels after asking him for support, he shared: “Good, I guess. Sometimes I don't have the right answers. I don't know everything. But I try. I do what I can. I try to make her happy. Make her confident. Tell her next time, it will be better” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). Vivian appreciates the support, saying: “I feel good (after asking for her parent’s advice) because usually they are proud of what I am doing. It is good” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).
The shared family experience during the first year for the Mata family during Vivian’s first year of college was good. Vivian shared that her first year: “It has been positive. I did pretty well in school, kept up with work and with my social life as well” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). When asked what her secret was, she shared: “I would have to say time management” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). Stanley was also happy with Vivian’s first year: “She is doing well. She is doing great. She is happy and I am too. She is going forward and it is good” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). If there was any stress experienced by Vivian, she did not share it with her family, and instead managed it internally. No specific incidents or situations, negative or positive, were shared during either interview.

There is a great sense of pride in this family. Vivian wants to make her family proud, and is always thinking of how to set a good example for her younger siblings. Stanley is overwhelmingly proud of his daughter, sharing this multiple times during the interview.

The Mata family declined participation in the focus group, as Stanley was scheduled to be out of town when the focus groups were scheduled. As a result, the researcher could not see Vivian and Stanley work together in a shared task.

Focus Groups

Only two families completed the focus groups. Two families refused participation when contacted to participate due to other obligations scheduled during the time of the focus groups. As a result, two sessions of scheduled focus groups was shorted to one. Four families agreed to participate, but two did not show up to participate as scheduled. The low attendance rate at the focus groups may be due to a lack of comfort in
the research process; these parents, who never attended college, lack the experience of participating in research studies. While they were comfortable sharing information with the researcher, they may not have wanted to share their experiences and feelings with a larger group. Also, the amount of time required to participate in a focus group in addition to the individual interview and lack of compensation for participation in the study could also be reasons as to why there was such a low level of participation in this stage of the research.

Cross-Case Analysis of Family Responses

Findings of this study indicate an almost similar experience for the six families participating in the study. Almost all of the families communicated in person on a daily basis. Topics discussed centered around three main areas: daily college life, family issues, and romantic relationships. Most of the parent-child attachment relationships did not change from high school to college, and in the two cases that there was a change, the relationship improved. There was variety in how the child participants approached problem solving and sources of support, however, the parent was always part of the process. In four of the families, another sibling had attended or was currently attending college. This sibling served as a source of social and cultural capital for the child, providing support the parents could not due to their lack of college experience.

Table 2 compares the six families in the areas of family communication and child sources of support. As an example, Rosalie and Megan Gailey, which were identified through a PAQ mean score of 3.86 to have a moderate to strong level of attachment, communicate in person daily. During Rosalie’s first year of college, they discussed daily college life and Rosalie’s academic performance. The relationship did not change from
high school to college. When Rosalie is facing a difficult situation and needs advice, she does ask her parents at some point, but they are not her first point of contact. She normally talks to her older sister, who is a student at the research university in the Las Vegas area or her friends who are enrolled in classes with her. Her sister and friends provide the social and cultural capital that her parents cannot.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Mean PAQ Score</th>
<th>Frequency of Communication</th>
<th>Forms of Communication</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
<th>Relationship Change</th>
<th>Child Support Sources &amp; Problem Solving Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travis &amp; Colleen Mendez</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>In Person; Limited Cell</td>
<td>Daily College Life; Facts Learned in Classes</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>Child contacts parent; they solve the problem together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny &amp; Laurie Matson</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>Daily College Life; Family Issues; Areas of Personal Growth for Child</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>Child attempts to solve on own; then contacts sister; then contacts parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalie &amp; Megan Gailey</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>Daily College Life; Academic Performance</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>Child contacts sister; sometimes friends; then parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly &amp; Betty Howell</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>Daily College Life; Family Issues; Romantic Relationships</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>Child attempts to solve own; then contacts sister; then contacts parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt &amp; Clara Wharton</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>Multiple Times Per Day</td>
<td>In Person; Limited Cell</td>
<td>Daily College Life; Family Issues; Romantic Relationships</td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>Child attempts to solve on own; then contacts sister; then contacts parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian &amp; Stanley Mata</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>Multiple Times Per Week</td>
<td>In Person</td>
<td>Family Issues; Romantic Relationships; Friends</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>Child attempts to solve on own; then contacts parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the shared family experience during the child’s first year of college, the families participating in the study had similar experiences. The parents have a close
attachment relationship with their children, yet do not act as traditional Millennial Generation parents due to their lack of social and cultural capital in the collegiate world. These parents provide emotional support while allowing the child to take control of his or her own education. Almost all of the parents shared in their interviews how proud they were of their children for attending college. Half of the parents shared their concerns with the current economy and the positive impact a college degree could have in the lives of their children. When looking at the experience of the child, all but one had a stressful first year of college. Half of the children had difficulty maneuvering college processes and procedures. Most of the children struggled with the transition from high school to college.

Table 3 compares the six families in the shared family experience during the first year of college.

**Table 3. Shared Family Experience During First Year of College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Parent Proud of Child for Attending College</th>
<th>Parent Focus on Economy &amp; Impact of College Degree</th>
<th>Child Had Stressful First Year of College</th>
<th>Child Had Difficulty With College Processes &amp; Procedures</th>
<th>Child Struggled with Transition from High School to College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travis &amp; Colleen Mendez</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny &amp; Laurie Matson</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalie &amp; Megan Gailey</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly &amp; Betty Howell</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt &amp; Clara Wharton</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian &amp; Stanley Mata</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

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This study focused on examining the relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation at State College and their parents, as well as the shared family experiences during that first year of college. This was completed through a qualitative multiple case study design consisting of individual in-depth interviews and focus groups. This type of qualitative research is utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved (Merriam, 1998).

After completing the individual interviews, family vignettes were created to provide the researcher an ability to recognize emerging and common themes. These themes provided data to answer the research questions. The next chapter provides an overview of the study, answers the research questions identified in Chapter 1, provides implications for theory and practice, discusses limitations and future research, and summarizes the overall study.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation at State College and their parents. Chapter 1 introduced the study by providing background information, including the purpose, research design, research questions, and significance of the study. The next chapter reviewed the literature and presented a conceptual framework of attachment theory. Literature was included on the Millennial Generation, first year college students, and first generation college students. Chapter 3 detailed the qualitative research methods and the multiple case study design used for the study. The fourth chapter presented the findings from the six cases, revisiting the research questions to construct a cross-case analysis of the findings from the individual cases. The final chapter provides a discussion of the findings, a review of the research questions and relationship to the previous literature, a discussion of implications for theory and practice, limitations, future research, and conclusion.

Discussion of Findings

The first year of college is one that is crucial for all students entering higher education due to the major transition issues that must be successfully navigated in order to persist to the sophomore year (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). While the transition to the college environment is difficult for all first year students, first generation college students tend to struggle more than their non-first generation counterparts due to a lack of social and cultural capital that is traditionally
passed down from parent to child (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Gofen, 2009). Parental support has shown to have a positive effect during this transition by providing coping mechanisms, which leads to a higher level of autonomy (Feenstra, Banyard, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Since the late 1990’s, there has been a cultural shift in the relationship between parents and college age students, who are classified as members of the Millennial Generation. Parents of this generation are highly involved in the lives of their children past high school graduation, often using technology such as cell phones and social media to communicate (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the emotional bonds between parent and child. These bonds (otherwise known as a base) are developed through the type of care provided during childhood. The security of this base forms the child’s personality and self-esteem, while guiding the way he or she interacts with others (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008). The base of attachment set during infancy extends through his or her lifespan, which includes the first year of college (Allen & Land, 1999). To date, there have been many studies completed examining the various components of attachment style with college age children, including Kenny (1987), Berman and Sperling (1991), and Sorokou and Weissbrod (2005).

In this study, first year first generation students at State College who are members of the Millennial Generation and one of their parents were asked about the parent-child attachment relationship, how that relationship changed, and the family’s experiences during the first year of college. The base of attachment established during childhood was
measured using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ, Kenney, 1987), observations on the parent-child relationship and the first year of college was obtained via individual in-depth interviews, and the parent-child relationship in action was observed through focus groups. Both the children and parents participating in the study were open and honest during the interviews, giving a first person glimpse into the shared experience of families experiencing college for the first time. This experience was not an easy or positive experience for all but one of the families participating in the study, and each family struggled in different areas. However, the parent-child relationship either remained at the same level of attachment or improved during the child’s first year of college for all families. The following section will discuss the four research questions that were the driving force behind this study.

Research Question 1

What is the quality of attachment relationship between the first year, first generation student who is a member of the Millennial Generation and parent as evidenced through frequency and modes of communication and the topics discussed within those forms of communication?

An analysis and comparison of the families participating in the study revealed multiple, emergent themes that address the first research question. All of the families shared similar experiences during the child’s first year of college, some echoed themes from the literature, while others did not match findings from previous studies. The themes emerging from the analysis were: 1) frequent communication between parent and child during the first year of college; 2) in-person communication between parent and child, with some limited cell phone use; 3) communication topics focused mostly around
school, family, and the child’s personal life. Within these major themes, the researcher identified sub-themes which help to describe the parent-child relationship during the first year of college.

In regards to the frequency of communication, four families participating in the study reported to communicate on a daily basis, while one family communicated multiple times a day and one communicated multiple times a week. Betty Howell sums up the answer given by most of the parents and children by saying: “In the previous year, we would talk every day”. The children of the Millennial Generation are loved and supported by their parents, and a key component of this relationship is maintained through frequent conversation (Howe & Strauss, 2007). In the review of the literature, multiple studies identified communication between parent and college age child occurs an average of one and a half to two times a day (Hofer, 2008; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). As a result, the participants in the study match up with the general description of the relationship of the children of the Millennial Generation and their parents.

When asked about modes of communication, all of the participants identified that they communicated mainly in person. Only two families discussed the use of cell phones in communication, but on a limited basis. Travis Mendez explains his mother’s use of her cell phone when communicating with him: “My mom she is not very technological. She takes maybe like a day to answer a text and just tells me in person instead” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 5, 2012). This is not consistent with the literature on the Millennial Generation, which has also been called the “Net Generation” (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). It is not only the children of this generation who utilize technology to a high degree; parents have also adapted to various forms of communication to
maintain communication with their children, including cell phones, text messaging, e-mail, and social networking sites (Akoi & Downes, 2002; College Parents of America, 2007; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; (Mullendore et al., 2008; Mullendore et al., 2009; Wolf, Saxe, & Harper, 2009).

The lack of use of cell phones and other forms of technology may be due to the children participating in the study living at home while attending college during the first year. First generation students are more likely to have chosen an institution within fifty miles of the family home, and live there instead of on campus (Saenz et al., 2007). This living arrangement allows for parent and child to see each other in person, where the studies cited were completed at residential campuses, where the student lives away from home to attend college. This finding shows a difference between first generation Millennial students and non-first generation Millennial students. When the child lives at home, it eliminates the need for the parent to hover over the child and his or her education, which is traditional of parents of the Millennial Generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000, 2007). Also, the parents participating in the study were single parents and/or had multiple other younger children who were growing up in the same household. These multiple obligations keep the parent from focusing as intensely on the child’s academic career.

The families participating in the study were asked what topics were generally discussed in the first year. The topics identified did vary by family, but all centered around three areas: school; family; and the child’s personal life. These major areas can be broken down further into specific topics. School specific topics included: daily college life, facts learned in classes, and academic performance. Specific family topics were not
identified in the interviews; this is due to the fact that the child plays a key role in the daily management of the house, including caring for younger siblings. Specific topics relating to the child’s personal life included work, friends, and romantic relationships. Johnny Matson describes the communication he has with his mother: “I talk to my mom like every day but not always about school. We talk about regular stuff. Sometimes I will tell stories (about what happened in school)” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

These themes connect well to the previous literature relating to the Millennial Generation. Conversation topics as identified in the literature included checking in, academic success, social life, work, money, health, daily classroom life, class complaints, living complaints, and meetings with academic advisors (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007). While these frequent conversations between parent and child benefit the relationship, it does allow for parents to continue academic and behavioral regulations with the student, which prevents students from enjoying the college experience as well as inhibits the development of an adult relationship with parents (Hofer, 2008). This was evidenced in the relationship in the Gailey Family. Rosalie failed a math class in her first semester, and as a result, academic performance was a main topic of conversation between her and her parents. She described the experience as: “It wasn't exactly a walk in the park. This is when my dad was like you need to start taking this very seriously… I try to tell him that I really am trying my hardest…” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

Rosalie did end up retaking and passing the math class, and also had a high level of performance in her other classes during the spring semester. While these conversations
helped to keep her focused on her grades, she was not able to develop an adult relationship with her parents during the first year.

All of the child participants in the study lived at home during the first year of college, which made it convenient for the families to communicate in person on a daily basis. First generation college students choose to live at home when attending college due in order to stay closer to family (Sanez et al., 2007). It is much easier for parents and children to talk about the events of the day over dinner or when sitting around the television; the time spent in the same home negates the need to use technology. The ability to speak daily at great length allows for a wide range of topics to be discussed. This differs from families where the child lives on campus to attend classes; these families mainly communicate via cell phone, e-mail, or via social media sites, which can limit the number of topics discussed and the amount of time spent discussing them.

Table 4 shows a visual representation of the most common themes and the subcategories that populate those themes in research question 1.

Table 4: Themes and Subcategories for Research Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Communication</th>
<th>Modes of Communication</th>
<th>Topics Discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Daily</td>
<td>• In Person</td>
<td>• School (includes daily college life and academic performance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple Times a Day</td>
<td>• Limited Cell Phone Use</td>
<td>• Family Issues (no subtopics identified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple Times a Week</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Child’s Personal Life (romantic relationships, friends)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Specific interview questions were used to identify these themes (see Appendix A & B).

- In thinking about the previous year, can you tell me about in what ways and how frequently you and your child communicate?
- When you communicate with your child, what topics do you most often discuss?

Research Question 2
Given the foundation of the attachment base established during childhood, in what areas does the relationship between first year, first generation students and their parents change during the first year of college?

An analysis and comparison of the families participating in the research study showed that the parent-child relationship did not change or improved during the child’s first year of college. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) focuses on the emotional bonds between parent and child, which are developed through the type of care provided during childhood. A child with a secure base explores his or her environment, knowing that his or her return will be welcomed and that all physical and emotional needs will be met by the parent (Austrian & Mandelbaum, 2008). Adolescents who were raised with a secure attachment pattern turned to their parents under conditions of extreme stress due to the secure base set established during childhood (Allen & Land, 1999). All of the children participating in the study had a secure base of attachment with their parents. Johnny Matson describes the attachment relationship with his mother Laurie in his interview: “When I have a problem and I can't figure it out by myself, I normally go to my mom” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

The research further showed that continued attachment on parents was equally present for students who lived at home, but decreased at a higher rate for residential students (Berman & Sperling, 1991). All of the participants lived at home during their first year of college, which does not match the trends in the literature, as many of these studies are completed at residential campuses.

The participants were asked if the relationship changed between high school and college. Most of the participants had answers similar to Clara Wharton, who said: “It was
more of an extension (of the relationship during high school)” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). If the relationship was identified as changed, a follow up question regarding in what ways it changed was asked. In the two families where the relationship changed and became closer, both the child and parent were able to identify in what areas, and both answers focused around open communication. The Mata family is one such example. Stanley, the father, shared: “It changed. It got better. We are so close now, more than before” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012). His daughter Vivian shared: “… in the beginning when I started (college) it did. But that was more because I was with somebody. It was only when we broke up that I became closer to my family” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).

The parent-child relationship of the participants for the most part remained the same as they were in high school. This is due again to the fact that the child participants lived at home during their first year of college. While the daily schedule may have changed due to the non-structured nature of college course scheduling, the families spent at least some time every day together; the secure base established during the child’s life is still intact. The parent-child relationship for these families will most likely change when the child moves out of the family home, but for the first year remained the same.

Table 5 shows a visual representation of the most common themes and the subcategories that populate those themes in research question 2.
Table 5: Themes and Subcategories for Research Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Base Set During Childhood</th>
<th>Areas of Change in Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Range between 3.48 to 4.24 out of 5 (Moderate to Strong)</td>
<td>• Relationship Did Not Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationship Improved (open communication)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Specific interview questions were used to identify these themes (see Appendix A & B). Each child participating in the study completed the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; Kenney, 1987)

• Did your relationship with your child change as the year began? If so, in what ways?
• How do you think your parents/child feel about your relationship? Would they agree with the assessment you just gave?

Research Question 3

What are the major support sources and problem solving strategies of first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation, given the lack of social and cultural capital traditionally provided by parents?

In the individual interviews, the children and parents were asked about the major support sources and problem solving strategies for the child. There are many differences between high school and college inside and outside of the classroom. Regardless of residence (at home or living on campus), all first year students must adjust to the collegiate environment in order to succeed academically and socially. Support for the transition often comes from family and friends, and college staff and programming (Tinto, 1975).

First generation students come from households where the parents have had no college or post-secondary education experience (Davis, 2010; Gofen 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In her interview, Megan explains: “… I didn't go to college. I don't know a lot about what she is having to deal with. I know what high school was like and getting good grades, but I know it is a lot different” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012).
All but one of the child participants identified an attempt to solve the problem or answer the questions on their own first, followed seeking parental advice or support. Kimberly Howell shared in her interview: “At first, I try to work it out by myself. That is the kind of person that I am.” After she decides the possible courses of action, she goes to her parents. When asked how she feels after she consults with her parents, she says: “I feel much better like I have a better idea of what I am going to do next instead of decide all on my own. They have good opinions” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Matt Wharton echoed this approach in his interview: “I don't look to anyone really. I try to work through it on my own and then talk to my parents to see what they think” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). As children attend college during the first year are ready to be autonomous, but they may be in greater need of emotional support during the actual transition to college. For this support, they often turn to their parents (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009).

The parents participating in the study provide the emotional support that the child participants need, but at the same time, they do not over-involve themselves in the education process. This is due to the lack of social and cultural capital on the part of the parents; they did not attend college themselves, and as a result, do not have the knowledge or contacts that other parents have. Parents of first generation college students typically work long hours and raising large families (Sanez et al., 2007). All of the families participating in the study were large, with three or more children, and all but two of the parent participants worked full time. There are many competing interests in the lives of these parents and children, and as a result, the children are trusted to “take the wheel” when it comes to their education. Clara Wharton explains: “He is the most
responsible of all of my children, and has been that way for a long time. . I don't have to worry about him much” (J.Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012).

Even though there is a lack of knowledge, parents are important in the college enrollment process for first generation students. Parental involvement was found to be the best indicator of aspirations to attend college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), and when parents have discussions on education-related topics with their children, it has a positive effect on the odds of a child enrolling in college (Perna & Titus, 2005). Mothers provide the greatest and most effective helping behaviors, with friends as the second most effective source of support.

First generation students value parental encouragement as an important reason for going to college. However, the limited amount of social and cultural capital provided by parents can provide obstacles that need to be overcome by the student. To overcome the limited amount of knowledge provided by parents, children turn to relatives who have attended college to fill the void (Saenz et al., 2007). Four of the six families participating in the study included an older sister who had attended (or was currently attending) another institution of higher education in the Las Vegas valley. Rosalie Gailey explains: “I look to my sister… I look to my parents too, even though I do feel more comfortable asking my sister… When it comes to college my parents don't know what to do sometimes since they didn't have that experience” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Matt Wharton concurs: “I would definitely almost no matter what it is bring it to my sister. I am very close to my sister” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). All of the children reported asking their parents for assistance at the end in the decision making process, regardless of how many individuals were consulted.
The last group of individuals asked for assistance with a problem or question during the first year of college was identified as friends or classmates and college faculty or administration. Megan explains “A lot of times I do ask my really close friends too because they are going through what I am going through. They are all in college just like me right now” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Friends and classmates, while lacking an established amount of social and cultural capital, can assist a first generation student navigate the first year of college. College faculty and administration, who provide individual assistance as well as administer programs focused on assisting students through the transition from high school to college, are also a source of support. Kimberly Howell explains: “I normally went to… (the staff at) the Upward Bound program at SC” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). The Upward Bound program is designed to provide support for first year students who are raised in low-income households where the parents did not attend college (SC, 2012). Programs like this have a positive influence on first year, first generation students (Smith and Zhang, 2009).

The participants in this study differ from the first generation students studied in the literature, as they live at home and attend a college which is focused on the needs of underrepresented, first generation students who come from families of low socioeconomic status. The lack of social and cultural capital provided by their parents can be overcome through friends, family members, and college faculty and staff who can provide the knowledge and support needed to maneuver through the first year of college.

Table 6 shows a visual representation of the most common themes and the subcategories that populate those themes in research question 3.
Table 6: Themes and Subcategories for Research Question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Attempts to Solve Problem on Own First</th>
<th>Child Contacts Member of Family for Assistance</th>
<th>Child Contacts Individuals Outside of Family for Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Parent Contacted Eventually</td>
<td>• Parent as Contact</td>
<td>• Friends or Classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sibling (who had already attended college) as Contact</td>
<td>• College Faculty or Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent Contacted Eventually</td>
<td>• Parent Contacted Eventually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Specific interview questions were used to identify these themes (see Appendix A & B).
- When you/your child has a serious problem or an important decision to make, who does he or she looks to for guidance?
- How do you/does your child feel after you go to your parents/you for help?

Research Question 4

What is the shared family experience during the first year of college for first year, first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents?

During the first year of college for a first year, first generation student who is also a member of the Millennial Generation, the college experience is one that is shared with his or her family. Parents of the Millennial Generation are highly supportive of education, even before the child enrolls in kindergarten. These parents assist with homework, serve on school committees and participate in fundraisers. The level of involvement does not decrease as the child attends college; while the parent may be less involved at the school itself, she or he remains involved in the academic life of the child through asking about classes and assisting with navigation of school processes and procedures (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

An analysis and comparison of the families participating in the research study showed that the families participating in the study had similar shared family experiences during the child’s first year of college. These experiences included: 1) the parent being proud of the child for attending college; 2) parent focus on the economy and the impact of a college degree; 3) a stressful experience for the child during the first year of college;
4) child having difficulty with college processes and procedures; and 5) the child struggling with the transition from high school to college. These experiences match up with the experiences of first generation college students found in the literature (e.g. London, 1989, 1992; Davis, 2010; Pascarella et al., 2004; Sanez et al., 2007).

There is a great deal of pride in families for children who are the first to attend college. In a time where it seems as if college is an expected next step after graduating from high school for all students, it is more special for parents who did not have this experience (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Davis, 2010; London, 1989, 1992). In five of the six families participating in the study, the parents expressed pride in their children. Stanley Mata shared in his interview: “I feel proud of her. I don't do much to help her…she does many things for herself. She went to Chaparral High School and got a scholarship to State College. I am proud of her” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 15, 2012).

The current state of the economy, paired with the value of a college degree, is a key reason for parents who did not attend college to encourage their children to enroll in classes (Saenz et al., 2007). Parental involvement like this has been found to be one of the best indicators of aspirations to attend college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), as well as to have a positive effect on the odds of a child enrolling in college (Perna & Titus, 2005). The parents motivate their children to attend, attempting to instill a motivation to do better themselves, and be able to provide more than they had been provided for as children (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Betty Howell shared how she motivated her daughter Kimberly in the past year, telling her: “I told her that they (she and her boyfriend) should both help each other out and go to college… If they want a better future, they need to finish school to make more money” (J. Turek, personal
communication, August 13, 2012). Laurie Matson had a similar message for her son Johnny: “If you don't get any help, then no chance to go to college. With the economy the way it is, you are not going to get a job” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012).

The first year of college was difficult for all but two of the children participating in the study. While there are many reasons for a stressful transition, the two most described reasons were: 1) having difficulty with college processes and procedures and 2) the transition from high school to college in and outside of the classroom. These two subthemes match the themes found in the literature (e.g. Ishler & Upcraft, 2000; Tinto, 1975).

Stress during the first year of college due to difficulty with college processes and procedures were identified by three of the six families participating in the study. One of these processes was using the online registration system. Johnny struggled with this when registering for the spring semester. His mother Laurie explains: “The part of it was that he didn't know his password and didn't know what to do. He wanted to keep it private” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012). The consequence of Johnny not asking for help was that he did not enroll for the spring semester. This led to stress in the family, as he pretended to attend class for the first month of the semester. Laurie figured out what had happened, and after Johnny told the truth, they got him back on track and enrolled for the summer and fall class sessions.

Matt Wharton struggled with the financial aid process. In his interview, he shared: “There was family problems and financial problems. I couldn't work. I couldn't find a job. My financial aid did not come through until March. It was just stressful. There was a lot
going on” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). In the middle of the spring semester, he was able to resolve his issues with his financial aid, and found a summer job that not only paid well, but was related to his major. Rosalie Gailey also struggled with the financial aid process. During these struggles, Laurie Matson, Clara Wharton, and Megan Gailey lacked the social and cultural capital needed to assist their children. However, the family worked together to navigate the college systems and processes.

The transition of high school to college in and outside of the classroom is a shock for all first year students. Surviving the transition gives the student a higher chance of persisting to graduation (Tinto, 1975). Parent support is helpful during this process; it has been found to have a positive effect on the child feeling a higher sense of belonging on campus (Norris & Mounts, 2010). The transition was most difficult for the participants of the study in the classroom; four of six families identified this as a major stressor during the first year. Students entering college directly from high school have a base knowledge provided by the high school attended. Sadly, not all students are prepared for college level work (Pryor et al., 2007). The Millennial Generation saw a rise in grade inflation in high schools, which may give students a higher view of academic competence than can be demonstrated in college classes (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Rosalie Gailey experienced this in her entry level math class during her first semester: “I was in the remedial math class. At SC, they have a module system. If you mess up on one little thing, you can't move on to the next module and have to retake it” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 14, 2012). When she failed the class, she lost her Millennial Scholarship, which she was still working to re-establish.
Study habits and skills brought to college level work also play a role in academic difficulty during the first year of college. First year students underestimate the amount of time needed to prepare for classes, and struggle with the lack of structure that was provided in K-12 education (Pryor et al., 2007; Kuh, 2005). Johnny Matson explained his experience during his first year: “I can tell you one thing. It is stressful. I have so much work to do” (J. Turek, personal communication, July 28, 2012). Kimberly Howell described: “Well, it was easy, but the time management was the hardest for me. There was nobody there to tell me to work on my homework, turn in my work, or go to class” (J. Turek, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Again, the lack of social and cultural capital on the part of parents also plays a role in the difficulty of the transition from high school to college. Parents who have attended college classes understand the work and time needed to be successful, and can share this knowledge with their children (Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Gofen, 2009).

The participants in the study had a similar experience to other first generation students and their families, with one exception; they were allowed to share the experience as a family due to the child living at home. The parents participating in the study had great pride in their children for attending college, while being painfully aware of the rewards a college degree can provide in today’s economy. The children participating struggled with college processes and procedures, and in making the transition from high school to college. These are all common themes found in the literature, regardless of residential status (Pryor et al., 2007; Kuh, 2005; Sanez et al., 2007).

Table 7 shows a visual representation of the most common themes and the subcategories that populate those themes in research question 4.
Table 7: Themes and Subcategories for Research Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Experiences During First Year of College</th>
<th>Child Stressors During First Year of College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pride in child for attending college</td>
<td>• Difficulty with College Processes &amp; Procedures (including financial aid and online registration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on economy and the importance of obtaining a college degree</td>
<td>• Struggle with Transition from High School to College (including time management and higher academic standards)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Specific interview questions were used to identify these themes (see Appendix A & B).
- In thinking about the previous year, how has your experience been as a (parent of a) first generation student?

Implications for Theory

A review of the conceptual framework established in Chapter 2 shows the development of attachment theory as the study of the emotional bonds between parent and child, and the effect that the bonds have on the child as he or she grows and develops. John Bowlby (1988) defined attachment theory as the emotional bonds between infants and their parents, who provide a base of support while simultaneously encouraging autonomy. The security of this base forms the child’s personality as well as guides his or her choices, self-esteem, expectations, and interactions with others for the rest of the lifespan. He also outlined three basic functions for attachment, including proximity maintenance (when a child seeks comfort from the primary caregiver when alarmed by some sort of perceived danger), safe haven (when a child utilizes the primary caregiver as a source of comfort, support and reassurance), and secure base (where the child feels comfortable exploring the world around them, confident that they are safe and secure based on proximity to the primary caregiver).

Attachment theory is well explained and defined through childhood. However, once a child reaches adolescence, there are no theories that explain the attachment relationship itself through adolescence and adulthood. The research did begin to develop
further with Kenney’s Parental Attachment Questionnaire (1987), where the extent and function of the parent-child bond following the child’s departure from the family was examined. Kenney’s study, similar to previous studies, did not only focus on the bond itself; it measured the bond in relation to other factors such as assertion, dating competence, and emotional distress. The relationship on the attachment bond and how it evolves is important for further study and development as it extends into the lives of college age children, including deeper definition the basic functions of the attachment relationship.

The results of this study show that a strong attachment relationship between a first year, first generation college student who is a member of the Millennial Generation and his or her parents provides a base of support from which the child can explore the college world. Even though the parent participants lacked the social and cultural capital needed to assist their children as they maneuvered through the first year of college, they provided all of the functions of attachment, including proximity maintenance, safe haven, and secure base. This support assisted the child participants to make it through the first year successfully. While the children did not have the benefit of a base of knowledge about college provided by parents, they filled that need through other sources, including siblings, friends, and college faculty and staff. As a result, all six students successfully completed their first year of college, and were enrolled for future semesters.

This study found that in the study population, there is a positive effect of the attachment relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents on persistence. This finding adds
to the previous figure outlining the areas of the literature as viewed through the lens of attachment theory.

Figure 2. Effect of Attachment Theory on Persistence for First Year, First Generation College Students in the Millennial Generation.

Implications for Practice

Although a case study of six families at a small state college in an urban setting located in a southwestern state cannot provide guidance for all higher education administration, faculty, and staff across the nation, the implications of this study can provide some insight into the relationship between first year, first generation college students for those working at State College and other small commuter campuses with the mission of serving low-income, first generation students.

The first implication for practice from this study is that colleges must recognize that parents and families have a significant positive impact on first year, first generation college student success and persistence. This study established that the parents
participating in the study were a key source of support in the lives of their children, even though they lacked the social and cultural capital regarding campus life and processes. As a result, campuses need to include parents and family members as a part of the campus community, recognizing them as a part of the child’s support team. Colleges should provide education, communication, and services that reach the parents of first generation, first year students. Areas that should be included in this education are college processes and procedures and academic and financial deadlines. Education should occur through websites, mailings, and programs like Parent Orientation. After parents are educated, they should be provided with support, which can be done through the establishment of an individual (or office of individuals, depending on the size of the population) who is dedicated to taking parent phone calls and e-mails.

The second implication for practice is for colleges to support first generation college students, providing education on processes and procedures, as well as and reminders regarding important academic timelines. This study has found that first generation students are in charge of their own college education due to parent lack of social and cultural capital, as well as work and multiple other children to raise at home. They do have a great deal of emotional support at home from parents, but what is lacking is the actual knowledge that would better assist the child when he or she is on campus. This education could be provided through directed mailings (postal or e-mail) to first generation students, as well as the creation of a website that presents this information that can be accessed by both parents and students when questions arise.

**Future Research**
Based on the findings of this study, further research is warranted on the topic of the relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents. First, it would be helpful to replicate this study at the other institutions in the Las Vegas Valley, including a major research university and the community college. A cross-comparison analysis could be completed on the data to validate the findings, as well as to provide a comprehensive case study of the southern Nevada area. From there, the research could be expanded nationwide, focusing specifically on geographic areas or institution type.

This study was completed with families where the children lived at home during the first year of college. This is not the case for all college students; there is a large population who attend classes on large residential campuses. This study could be replicated at an institution that has a first year on campus living requirement, which would ensure a sample of families where the child lives away from home during the first year of college. A cross-comparison analysis could be completed on the data to learn if there are any differences in the attachment relationship between children who live at home and children who do not live at home during this key time in the college career.

**Conclusions and Summary**

This study was designed to examine the relationship between first year, first generation college students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents at State College. This is an important population in higher education, as this population begins their college careers at a disadvantage while maneuvering the difficult transition from high school to college in and outside of the classroom. If this transition goes well, the student has a higher chance of persisting to graduation (Tinto, 1975).
Support during this transition, particularly from parents, can be the difference between a student successfully completing the first year and persisting to graduation.

What was missing in the research between child and parent was an examination of what actually occurs within the relationship during the child’s first year of college in various areas. This study found that in families where a strong attachment relationship was established during childhood, the parent and child spoke in person on a daily basis, discussing such topics as school, family and household management, and their personal lives. The relationship between parent and child did not change from high school to college; the secure base established during childhood remained strong or even improved. These children have the support of their parents, but have been put in charge of forging their own path when it comes to obtaining a college degree. In order to gain the knowledge and connections lacking from parents during the first year of college, the child participants either attempted to solve the problem on their own or turned to friends, classmates, family members, or college faculty and staff when they had questions. Eventually, all of the children did ask for help from their parents, even if it was to discuss the options and to make a final decision. The support of parents, even without helpful knowledge, is important to these children. During the first year, the children struggled with maneuvering college processes and procedures as well as the transition from high school to college. Parents were incredibly proud of their children for attending college, but were keenly aware of the importance of a college degree in finding employment in today’s economy.

The culmination of this study provides a level of depth not commonly found on this topic, given that the vast majority of studies are of a quantitative nature. By
examining what occurs in the parent-child relationship, the study shed light far beyond the mere effect of the attachment relationship. The subsequent findings offer insight into the communication patterns of first year first generation students who are members of the Millennial Generation and their parents, and present a clear view of how the student navigates their first year of college with a knowledge base absent of non-first generational parental input. Overall, the findings paint a picture of a supportive family relationship, where there is great pride on all sides to be the first in the family to attend college.
APPENDIX A

CHILD INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In this study, I am examining the relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents. In planning these questions, I have used the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, which measures the level of attachment between young adults and their parents. Before we begin, I am going to have you complete the PAF.

(Participant completes the PAF)

The first set of questions I am going to ask you are about the relationship you have with your parents. While answering, feel free to also talk about any ideas or thoughts that came up as you were completing the PAF.

1. Can you tell me about the relationship that you have with your parents?

2. How do you think your parents feel about your relationship? Would they agree with the assessment you just gave?

3. When child have a serious problem or an important decision to make, who do you look to for guidance?

4. How do you feel after you go to your parents for help?

Now I am going to ask some questions about your experience as a first year, first generation student.

1. Thinking about the past year, how has your experience been as a first generation student?

2. Thinking about the previous year, can you tell me about in what ways and how frequently you and your parents communicate?

3. When you communicate with your parents, what topics do you most often discuss?

4. Did your relationship with your parents change as the year began? If so, in what ways?

5. Do you have anything more that you would like to share with me at this time?
APPENDIX B
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In this study, I am examining the relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents. In planning these questions, I have used the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, which measures the level of attachment between young adults and their parents. Your child will be completing this before we begin his or her interview. Before we begin, I will show you the PAQ, so that you can see what your child will have completed.

The first set of questions I am going to ask you are about the relationship you have with your child. While answering, feel free to also talk about any ideas or thoughts that came up as you were reading the PAQ.

1. Can you tell me about the relationship that you have with your child?
2. How do you think your child feels about your relationship?
3. When your child has a serious problem or an important decision to make, who does he or she look to for guidance?
4. How do you think your child feels after he or she goes to you for help?

Now I am going to ask some questions about your experience as a parent of a first year, first generation student.

5. Thinking about the previous year, how has your experience been as a parent of a first generation student?
6. Thinking about the previous year, can you tell me about in what ways and how frequently you and your child communicate?
7. When you communicate with your child, what topics do you most often discuss?
8. Did your relationship with your child change as the year began? If so, in what ways?
9. Do you have anything more that you would like to share with me at this time?
APPENDIX C

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The following pages contain statements that describe family relationships and the kinds of feelings and experiences frequently reported by young adults. Please respond to each item by filling in the number on a scale of 1 to 5 that best describes your parents, your relationship with your parents, and your experiences and feelings. Please provide a single rating to describe your parents and your relationship with them. Please respond in reference to the parent who is participating in this research study with you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>A Moderate Amount</td>
<td>Quite A Bit</td>
<td>Very Much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0-10%)</td>
<td>(11-35%)</td>
<td>(36-65%)</td>
<td>(66-90%)</td>
<td>(91-100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, my parents.....

___1. are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled.
___2. support my goals and interests.
___3. live in a different world.
___4. understand my problems and concerns.
___5. respect my privacy.
___6. restrict my freedom or independence.
___7. are available to give me advice or guidance when I want it.
___8. take my opinions seriously.
___9. encourage me to make my own decisions.
___10. are critical of what I can do.
___11. impose their ideas and values on me.
___12. have given me as much attention as I have wanted
___13. are persons to whom I can express differences of opinion on important matters.
___14. have no idea what I am feeling or thinking. (go to next column)
___15. have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.
___16. are too busy or otherwise involved to help me.
___17. have trust and confidence in me.
___18. try to control my life.
___19. protect me from danger and difficulty
___20. ignore what I have to say.
___21. are sensitive to my feelings and needs
___22. are disappointed in me.
___23. give me advice whether or not I want it.
___24. respect my judgment and decisions, even if different from what they would want.
___25. do things for me, which I could do for myself.
___26. are persons whose expectations I feel obligated to meet.
___27. treat me like a younger child.
During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons….

28. I looked forward to seeing.  36. to whom I enjoyed telling about the things I have done and learned.

29. with whom I argued.  37. for whom I felt a feeling of love.

30. with whom I felt relaxed and comfortable.  38. I tried to ignore.

31. who made me angry.  39. to whom I confided my most personal thoughts and feelings.

32. I wanted to be with all the time.  40. whose company I enjoyed.

33. towards whom I felt cool and distant.  41. I avoided telling about my experiences.

34. who got on my nerves.

35. who aroused feelings of guilt and anxiety.  (go to next column)

Following time spent together, I leave my parents….

42. with warm and positive feelings.  43. feeling let down and disappointed by my family.  

( go to next column)

When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make….

44. I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance.  47. I work it out on my own, without help or discussion with others.

45. I seek help from a professional, such as a therapist, college counselor, or clergy.  48. I discuss the matter with a friend.

46. I think about how my family might respond and what they might say. (go to next column)  49. I know that my family will know what to do.

50. I contact my family if I am not able to resolve the situation after talking it over with my friends.
When I go to my parents for help……

___51. I feel more confident in my ability to handle the problems on my own.

___52. I continue to feel unsure of myself.

___53. I feel that I would have obtained more understanding and comfort from a friend.

___54. I feel confident that things will work out as long as I follow my parent's advice.

___55. I am disappointed with their response.

(go to next column)
APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

In this study, I am studying the relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents. All of you have completed an individual interview with me regarding your relationship with your parent/child. In this focus group, I am hoping to learn more about how this area by having each family unit complete an activity, followed by a group discussion on the major areas that emerged from the individual interviews.

**Step 1: Individual Introductions**
Ask all participants to introduce themselves to the group, including name, family member they are attending with, and one interesting fact about themselves.

**Step 2: Complete Activity (with Follow Up Questions)**
Pass out one copy of the “Thinking Outside of the Box” activity to each family unit (parent & child). Give approximately five minutes for the participants to complete the exercise.

Now that we have completed this exercise, I am going to ask you all a few questions on both the exercise itself and how you worked with your parent/child to complete it.

1. How did you solve the exercise?
2. How did you work with your parent/child to complete the exercise?
3. What role did each of you play in the completion of this exercise?
4. What did you learn from completing this exercise?

**Step 3: Individual Interview Theme Follow Up/Member Checking**
Follow up on Individual Interview Themes. Pass out handout with themes outlined. Give approximately give minutes for the participants to review the handout.

In the twelve interviews completed, there were some common themes that were shared by most of you. I’d like to follow up on these to learn more about them.

1. What did you think about these themes?
2. Do you agree with them? If so, what one was the most true to your relationship and experience last year?
3. What themes did you not agree with?
4. Are there any themes that I am missing or need to highlight more than others?
FOCUS GROUP ACTIVITY

Thinking Outside of the Box

Below are nine dots arranged in a set of three rows. Your challenge is to draw four straight lines which go through the middle of all of the dots without taking the pencil off the paper. If you were using a pencil, you must start from any position and draw the lines one after the other without taking your pencil off the page. Each line starts where the last line finishes.

Work with your partner to solve this problem. The goal is to draw four straight lines without taking your pencil off the page. Each line must start where the last line finished.
APPENDIX F

CHILD INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Exploring the Relationship between First-Year, First-Generation College Students and Their Parents

INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Vicki Rosser (Principal Investigator)
Jerica L. Turek (Student Researcher)

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: DR. VICKI ROSSER, 702-895-1432

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between first year, first generation college student and parents. This research study is being conducted so that more can be learned from you and your family regarding the transition from high school to college.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: you are an undergraduate first year, full time, first generation student at Nevada State College.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: submit to an interview and participate in a focus group. The interview will consist of the completion of the Parental Attachment questionnaire, followed by questions regarding your relationship with your parent and communication frequencies and modes. The focus group will consist of the completion of a thinking outside of the box activity that you will complete with your parent, and then discussing themes that emerged from the individual interviews with the group. The interview and focus group will be audio recorded.

Benefits of Participation
There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more the relationship that you have with your parent and how it may or may not have changed during the first year of college.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you are under no obligation to answer it. The confidentiality of your data will be preserved at all times, and you may rescind your willingness to participate at any time with no negative consequences. There is no physical risk associated with the interview process, and no anticipated psychological risk beyond that of any negative identification you may have with your parent. Due to the nature of focus group participation, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participant Initials ______

Approved by the UNLV IRB, Protocol # 1201-4028M
Received: 02-10-12 Approved: 02-15-12 Expiration: 02-12-15
TITLE OF STUDY: Exploring the relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents

However, any information gathered in this study will be kept confidential by the researcher; neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be reported.

Cost/Compensation
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 90 minutes of your time (30-60 minutes for the individual interview and 60 minutes for the focus group); depending on what you choose to contribute. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this doctoral dissertation study, you may contact Jerica Turek at 702-274-7662 or the Principal Investigator and UNLV Professor, Dr. Vicki Rosser, at 702-895-1432. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality:
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Audio recordings, filed notes, and transcribed data will be kept in a secure place on the UNLV campus for a period of 3 years and destroyed thereafter by erasure of digital recordings and shredding of field notes and transcriptions.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. PARENT SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED IF YOU ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18. A copy of this form has been given to me.

__________________________   __________________________
Signature of Participant     Date

__________________________   __________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1201-4028M
Received: 02-19-12 Approved: 02-13-12 Expiration: 02-12-13

Participant Initials ___
APPENDIX G

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Educational Leadership

TITLE OF STUDY: Exploring the Relationship between First-Year, First-Generation College Students and Their Parents
INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Vicki Rosser (Principal Investigator)
                Jerica L. Turek (Student Researcher)
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: DR. VICKI ROSser, 702-895-1432

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between first year, first generation college student and parents. This research study is being conducted so that more can be learned from you and your family regarding the transition from high school to college.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: you are the parent of an undergraduate first year, full time, first generation student at Nevada State College.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: submit to an interview and participate in a focus group. The interview will consist of questions regarding your relationship with your child and communication frequencies and modes. The focus group will consist of the completion of a thinking outside of the box activity that you will complete with your child, and then discussing themes that emerged from the individual interviews with the group. The interview and focus group will be audio recorded.

Benefits of Participation
There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more about the relationship that you have with your child and how it may or may not have changed during the first year of college.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you are under no obligation to answer it. The confidentiality of your data will be preserved at all times, and you may rescind your willingness to participate at any time with no negative consequences. There is no physical risk associated with the interview process, and no anticipated psychological risk beyond that of any negative identification you may have with your child. Due to the nature of focus group participation, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participant Initials ______

Approved by the UNLV IRB. Protocol #1201-1028M
Received: 02-10-12 Approved: 02-13-12 Expiration: 02-13-13

1 of 2
**Title of Study:** Exploring the relationship between first year, first generation college students and their parents

However, any information gathered in this study will be kept confidential by the researcher; neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be reported.

**Cost/Compensation**
There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 90 minutes of your time (30-60 minutes for the individual interview and 60 minutes for the focus group), depending on what you choose to contribute. You will not be compensated for your time.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about this doctoral dissertation study, you may contact Jerica Turek at 702-274-7662 or the Principal Investigator and UNLV Professor, Dr. Vicki Rosser, at 702-895-1432. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Confidentiality**
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. Audio recordings, filed notes, and transcribed data will be kept in a secure place on the UNLV campus for a period of 3 years and destroyed thereafter by erasure of digital recordings and shredding of field notes and transcriptions.

**Participant Consent:**
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant _____________________________ Date _____________________________

Participant Name (Please Print) _____________________________

Approved by the UNLV IRB Protocol #1201-402EM
Received: 03-10-12 Approved: 02-13-12 Expiration: 03-13-13

Participant Initials ________
APPENDIX H

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Name,

My name is Jerica Turek, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Under the direction of Dr. Vicki Rosser, I am conducting a research study titled “Exploration of the Relationship Between First Year First Generation Students and Their Parents”. This IRB-approved research attempts to learn more about the relationship between first year first generation college student and parents. The completion of this study is the final step for my doctoral degree in Higher Education Leadership at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

You have been identified as a possible participant for this research because you are identified as a first year, first generation student enrolled full time at Nevada State College. This research will consist of two phases, which will involve you and one of your parents. Phase one will be a 30-60 minute individual interview, in which you and your parent are interviewed separately. The second phase is a 60 minute focus group, where you and your parent will join two other families to discuss your experiences as a first generation college student.

In order to be able to fully participate in the study, you and one of your parents must meet these two criteria:

1. Both of your parents must not have attended college.
2. You and one of your parents must be able to commit one hour on two separate days to complete the two phases of the research study.

If you would like to participate or have any questions for me regarding this research study, please feel free to call me at 702-274-7662 or send an e-mail to jerica.turek@nsc.nevada.edu. Please also share this information to your parents, as I can answer any questions they may have about the research as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jerica L. Turek
Doctoral Candidate
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
APPENDIX I

SCORING GUIDE FOR PARENTAL ATTACHMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Recode the following questions \[ (1=5), (2=4), (4=2), (5=1) \] where the first number is the respondent's answer, and the second number is the value to which it should be recoded. Questions to be recoded:

3 6 10 11 14 16 18 20 22 23 25 26
27 29 31 33 34 35 38 41 43 47 52 53
55

Scale 1: Affective Quality of Relationships
1 2 4 14 16 20 21 22 26 28 29 30
31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 40 41 42 43
52 53 55

Scale 2: Parents as Facilitators of Independence
5 6 8 9 10 11 13 15 17 18 23 24
25 27

Scale 3: Parents as Source of Support
3 7 12 19 39 44 46 47 48 49 50 51
54
APPENDIX J

SAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS

Family #4 Child Interview

Researcher: I am here interviewing F4C on August 13 at 11:09 a.m. in her home. F4C, in this study, I am examining the relationship between first year first generation college students and their parents. In planning these questions, I used the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, which measures the level of attachment between young adults and their parents. You have just completed this questionnaire. Now we will move on to the interview. In this first set of questions, I am going to ask about the relationship that you have with your parents, mainly your mom who is the person I am interviewing. While answering, feel free to talk about any ideas or thoughts that came up as you filled out the PAQ.

Family 4 Child: Okay.

Researcher: Can you tell me about the relationship that you have with your parents?

Family 4 Child: They are really open to me. I don't think that I am as open to them as much as I should be. But they are there when I need to ask a question or need help.

Researcher: Your mom and dad are both in your life?

Family 4 Child: Yes.

Researcher: And you live at home with them?

Family 4 Child: Yes.

Researcher: Do you have any other brothers and sisters?

Family 4 Child: Yes, I have an older sister and three younger brothers. My sister is 22 and my younger
How do you think your parents feel about your relationship with them? Would they agree with what you just said?

I don't know (laughs).

When you have a serious problem or important decision to make, who do you look to for guidance?

I don't look to anyone really. I try to work through it on my own and then talk to my parents to see what they think.

So you get their opinion and then decide?

Yes.

How do you feel after you go to your parents for help?

I feel much better like I have a better idea of what I am going to do next instead of decide all on my own. They have good opinions.

So you respect your opinions?

Yes. They are helpful to me.

In the past year, when you had questions about school, who did you go to? Did you go to your parents?

No. I normally went to Mr. Black, who works in the Upward Bound program at NSC.
24 Researcher: Now we are going to talk about your experience last year as a first year first generation student. In thinking about the past year, can you tell me more about your experience?

Family 4 Child: It was really... I didn't think it was that easy. Well, it was easy, but the time management was the hardest for me. There was nobody there to tell me to work on my homework, turn in my work, or go to class (laughs).

Researcher: It was very different from high school, wasn't it?

26 Family 4 Child: Yes.

Researcher: In what ways and how frequently did you and your parents communicate during the last year?

27 Family 4 Child: Every day. My mom took me to school and picked me up after class, so we would talk then.

Researcher: What topics did you most often discuss with your mom in the past year?

29 Family 4 Child: Mostly family stuff.

Researcher: Did you ever discuss school?

30 Family 4 Child: Sometimes school. I would tell her what happened during the day sometimes.

Researcher: Did your relationship change with your mom?
as the year began or what it kind of an extension of high school?

Family 4 Child: It is better now than it was before because now I can actually talk to her. Before I would talk to my sister, and now she is not here. I now talk to my mom more instead of her.

Researcher: That is all of my formal questions. Do you have anything else you want to share?

Family 4 Child: No. Not really.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you!

Family 4 Child: You're welcome.
## APPENDIX K

### FREQUENCY TABLE FOR CODES

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Family 1</th>
<th>Family 2</th>
<th>Family 3</th>
<th>Family 4</th>
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REFERENCES


Pike, G., & Kuh, G. (2005). First and second generation college students: A


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jerica L. Turek

Degrees:
  Bachelors of Science in Psychology, 2000
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  Masters of Arts in Student Affairs Administration, 2002
  Michigan State University

Dissertation Title:
  Exploring the Relationship Between First Year First Generation College Students and Their Parents

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  Committee Member: Doris L. Watson, Ph.D.
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