Examining Family Achievement Guilt Through a Contextual Lens

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Family Achievement Guilt (Piorkowski, 1981) is a term that refers to the guilt first-generation college students experience leaving their family behind during the transition to academia. Though family achievement guilt has been examined critically by scholars (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Covarrubias et al., 2020), little research exists examining family achievement guilt, and further, support for first-generation college students during their transition to academia through a clinical lens. The aim of this study was to examine the experience of family achievement guilt through a Contextual Family Therapy lens (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013). A mixed-methods approach was used to examine family achievement guilt in relation to measures representing the four dimensions of contextual family therapy theory: facts, transactions, individual psychology, and relational ethics.

121 first-year students from a large, research institution in the Midwest completed a survey examining family achievement guilt (Covarrubias et al., 2020), depressive and anxiety symptoms (Kroenke et al., 2003; 2007) and additional family relationship-oriented variables of interest. Additional variables included relational ethics (Hargrave et. al, 1991), family distance regulation (Draper & Lee, 2001; Levine, Green & Millon, 1986) and attachment (Fraley et al., 2006). Phase one survey results indicated a positive relationship between two domains of relational ethics—trust/justice and entitlement, and family achievement guilt, as well as first-generation status and family achievement guilt, as expected. In addition, depression and anxiety scores were found to be positively related to family achievement guilt and mediated by family achievement guilt in their relationship with trust/justice, entitlement, and first-generation status. Phase two case study analysis added depth to survey results by highlighting themes of family

achievement guilt from a focal student perspective and examining them in conjunction with focal student scores on variables of interest. A focal parent interview was also conducted to explore the parent perspective on family achievement guilt. Though additional research is needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of family achievement guilt through a contextual lens, these results provide evidence for addressing family achievement guilt and depression/anxiety symptoms through a contextual lens clinically, as well as making parent-child relationships a focus in interventions at the collegiate level during the adjustment to academia for first-generation college students.

Dedication

Dedicated to my husband, who knew I would pursue a PhD before I even knew it myself.

Acknowledgements

There were many times when I doubted myself throughout this process. That said, having completed this project, I am proud of my success, and indebted to the ever-impressive female faculty in our program who believed in me and encouraged me in a variety of ways. Some of these women make up my committee, and I'd like to thank each of them below.

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Bartle-Haring, S., Bryant, A., & Whiting, R. (2022). Therapist confidence in their theory of change and outcomes. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.*

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Whiting, R., Bartle-Haring, S., & Bryant, A. (Under Review). Replication and expansion of a study of variations in the associations between attaining a college degree and health outcomes: Part I: Structural racism and physical health.

Fields of Study

Major Field: Human Development and Family Science

Minor Field: Couple & Family Therapy

Cognate: Mixed Research Methods

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the problem

As college students in the United States adjust to their first year of academia, they undergo a variety of changes that require adjustment to a new environment (Gibbons et. al, 2019; Yazadijian, 2007). Many are at risk of dropping out due to institutional barriers and lack of access to resources and support that appropriately reflects their needs (Banks-Santilli, 2014). Certain student populations have been found to be at higher risk for drop-out than others, such as first-generation students. According to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), first-generation college students (FGCS), or students who do not have a parent or guardian with a four-year college degree, are at greater risk for attrition and non-persistence to degree in comparison to their continuing-generation peers. These students are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, part of minoritized populations, and to have fewer resources that aid in acclimating to the collegiate environment (Banks-Santilli, 2014).

In the 2015-2016 school year, 56% of students enrolled at a college or university were FGCS (US Department of Education, 2016). This statistic shows that FGCS make up a significant portion of the student population in academia. Understandably, a fair amount of research has focused on identifying necessary institutional supports for FGCS to enhance retention and persistence to degree. Much emphasis has been placed on the university climate and cultivating a sense of "belongingness" for these students (Gibbons et al., 2019; Boone & Kirn, 2019; Garvey et al., 2020). Accounting for the many minoritized populations that fall under the umbrella of FGCS, higher education administrators have attempted to create space on campus for supports to address racial/ethnic inequities and academic needs and provide opportunities for connection among minoritized groups. Said administrators have made

concerted efforts to make higher education a more inclusive experience both during the application process and after enrollment.

Despite an understanding of the importance of connection for these populations, many universities maintain the ideal that independence and self-sufficiency are required for success in the academic environment (Murillo & Worrell, 2022; Stephens et al., 2012). Although this holds true based on the overall privileged and individualistic structure of higher education, certain college students—more specifically FGCS who come from interdependent cultures or from families who have relied on them heavily—must face this new independence and learn to balance obligations at home with the pressures of academia (Arevalo et al., 2016; Carson, 2009; Guiffrida et al., 2012). Administrators often do not take into consideration the strain this puts on students and their ability to be successful in their academic endeavors. Rebecca Covarrubias and colleagues (2020, 2021, 2022) conducted a variety of studies to examine "family achievement guilt," (Piorkowski, 1981) which attempts to describe the feelings FGCS endure during their adjustment to academia as they leave their home environments and families behind. That said, research specifically exploring the cultivation of this guilt over the course of the lifespan, and more specifically, within the parent-child relationship, has been limited to this point.

This study seeks to fill this gap by utilizing a contextual family therapy lens (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013) to explore family achievement guilt's relationship with family factors such as demographics and relational family processes. Examining these different contextual levels can inform future family-focused intervention work in both institutional and clinical contexts to mitigate feelings of guilt and address mental health symptoms of depression and anxiety during the college transition. Contextual family therapy will be expanded upon in later sections, but in short, it follows the general premise that there are multiple contexts and

relationships people exist within that influence our behavior. Therefore, in addition to studying student perceptions, the parent perspective is also examined to add depth to our understanding for how felt obligations to family and home are cultivated within the parent-child relationship. Being that FGCS make up over half of the student population in academia, a multi-group approach is proposed to study family influence on FGCS in comparison with their continuing generation peers, as well as within-group differences based on demographics and the intersections of different held identities among these groups. This study will deepen our understanding of the increasingly diverse student population in academia today and provide insight for how best to support the unique needs of historically excluded groups.

Review of the Literature

Family Achievement Guilt

Studying the adjustment to college involves not only the exploration of academic confidence and success, but further, the emotional experiences students undergo as they leave their families and home for a new environment. One emotion that is experienced frequently—particularly for first-generation and minoritized college students—is guilt. This project utilizes Piorkowski's (1981) definition of "family achievement guilt" to explore guilt related to leaving family behind during the transition to academia. Family achievement guilt was adapted from the concept of survivor guilt, which initially referred to the emotions felt by holocaust survivors in the aftermath of the Third Reich (Niederland, 1961). In the early 1980's, Piorkowski observed family achievement guilt as it occurred in counseling sessions with first-generation college students (FGCS). FGCS often referred to the guilt they experienced leaving their home and families behind as though it was akin to abandonment. Recent studies have shown that this guilt appears more prevalent for FGCS than for their continuing generation peers, as they worry about

leaving family behind, having more opportunities than their family members, and leaving their primary social-support systems to pursue an education (Pratt et al., 2019). It would make sense that, at times, this guilt and pull back toward home is considered too much to withstand and leads to risk of attrition and non-persistence to degree.

Covarrubias et al. (2020) developed a scale to measure family achievement guilt. Following multiple semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with FGCS, they identified four themes related to guilt: leaving family behind, having more privileges, becoming different than family, and experiencing pressures about not being successful. These themes indicate that guilt is experienced by FGCS, but little is known about *how* this guilt develops in the way of family processes. Additionally, this initial study did not explore identities such as race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation, and socioeconomic status in conjunction with the development of this guilt. This study utilizes the family achievement guilt scale to explore how guilt develops for college students, noting any relations between guilt and the various held identities listed above, as well as relational processes within the family unit—specifically within the parent-child relationship. Further analyses identify any potential links between family achievement guilt and symptoms of depression and anxiety to inform future clinical and intervention work.

Student Experiences

First-generation college student experiences. First-generation college students (FGCS) are defined as students who are the first in their nuclear family to complete a four-year degree (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators). As mentioned above, in the 2015-2016 school year, 56% of students enrolled in higher education were first-generation (U.S. Department of Education.) Forty-six percent of these students were white, 18% were Black or

African American, 25% were Hispanic or Latinx, and 6% were Asian. Further, the median parental income among dependent FGCS was $41,000 in 2015-2016, compared to $90,000 for their continuing-generation peers, indicating that FGCS are largely financially disadvantaged within the higher education system in the U.S.

A variety of research has examined supports for FGCS at the institutional level. One prominent finding is the value faculty-student relationships can have in enhancing retention for this population (Valdez, 2016; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). FGCS are found to be at a great disadvantage when it comes to persisting to degree in comparison to their continuing-generation peers. Many scholars have identified that "high-impact" initiatives such as first-year seminars, common book experiences, study abroad opportunities, and writing intensive courses have the potential to increase persistence and retention for FGCS (Conefrey, 2021; Kuh, 2008).

The federal government has made efforts to address FGCS retention and academic success. The federal TRiO program funds a variety of targeted initiatives for FGCS, underrepresented, and low-income students by utilizing structured initiatives such as summer bridge programs, enhanced academic advising, group activities, and learning community models to provide academic and social support throughout the first year of school (Heasty, 2022; Thayer, 2000). Though these supports exist and are specifically tailored to historically disadvantaged populations, studies show that FGCS have less time in general to participate in on-campus activities due to the necessity for them to work and fund their education and expenses (Pratt et al., 2019). FGCS have been shown to spend less time on campus, which often results in a lack of belongingness and connection, and ultimately, a lack of persistence to degree. Many FGCS, in addition to being the first in their family to complete a four-year degree, also come from low-income families and identify as part of minoritized and historically disadvantaged populations.

This broad spectrum of held identities under the FGCS umbrella indicates a need to consider race and ethnicity as well as income *in addition to* FGCS status when examining family achievement guilt, rather than generalizing FGCS experiences as universal.

Minoritized student experiences. The current student make-up in academia includes a considerable percentage of individuals who identify as part of minoritized racial/ethnic populations. The academic experience as a minoritized student has been known to vastly differ than that of a white student in relation to college adjustment and academic success, largely due to institutional structures that create barriers to success (Parks et al., 2022; Rutledge & Gnilka, 2022). Administrators have attempted to address this disparity by encouraging a sense of belonging through on-campus initiatives such as cultural affinity groups. These efforts also encourage intrinsic motivation and self-reliance (Palmer & Young, 2009). While these efforts are well-intentioned, the overall environment of academia often alienates minoritized student populations via institutionally oppressive and racist practices.

Squire et al. (2018) identified a variety of parallels between the structure of contemporary institutions of higher education and historic plantations, citing over-regulation of spaces for marginalized groups, commodification of bodies of color in advertisement, prominence of bodies of color in athletics, and rhetoric on lack of possibilities of success without college degree as just a few modern practices that parallel structural elements of slavery in the past. In a qualitative study interviewing subjects in adult and higher education, Misawa (2014) identified three specific types of racist bullying in these spaces, including positional bullying (engaged in by a person of power), counter-positional bullying (engaged in by a person of less power, but capitalizing on positionality to bully based on race, gender, sexuality, etc), and unintentional conspirative positional bullying (engaged in by two people or more people targeting someone in

a position of power based on their race, gender, or sexuality.) These types of bullying capitalize on positionality and the structure of higher education to target minoritized populations in a variety of contexts.

During their adjustment to these racist and oppressive academic environments, minoritized students are known to garner a significant amount of support from family systems at home. Schwartz et al. (2005) state that minoritized students are more likely than their white peers to attempt to maintain ties with their communities of origin after leaving for college. This often holds true for Latino/a students, who are more likely to rely on their family support systems while away at school (Suwinyattichaiporn & Johnson, 2022; Cuellar & Maldonado, 1995). These findings suggest that administrators should place greater importance on students maintaining family relationships throughout the college experience, such as through campus initiatives that encourage family involvement.

Family Achievement Guilt Through a Contextual Lens

Contextual family therapy

This study utilizes the framework of contextual family therapy theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013) to situate individual and familial variables within the "context" of the family unit while examining their relationship with guilt. Contextual family therapy is a multi-layered approach which addresses relational dysfunction through the following four dimensions: facts, individual psychology, behavioral transactions, and relational ethics (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). The development of contextual family therapy was spearheaded by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and a team of clinicians in the 1950s who identified a need for systemic models of therapy—particularly one that addressed the multiple dimensions influencing relational functioning within families. The overall identified goal of contextual family therapy is to elicit

healing for individual family members' pain while also addressing relational issues. This theory posits that through increased trust and fairness among family members, families can find equitable ways of functioning that meet the needs of all members. Utilizing an intergenerational approach, contextual family therapy frames family dysfunction as being a result of injuries passed through generations. For this reason, this model not only focuses on the nuclear family in the therapy room but encourages examination of at least three generations when considering family healing.

Facts. As mentioned, four dimensions are taken into consideration when thinking about how families develop and function through a contextual lens. The first of these are "facts." In this framework, facts are what is provided by destiny (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). For example, demographic information such as race, ethnicity, ability, gender, and illness are all considered to be facts. This study examines race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status as "facts" alongside family achievement guilt. It is important to consider how an individual's position in society impacts their adjustment to academia as well as their familial ties, and by examining these demographic variables, this study will add depth to the first-generation vs continuing-generation dichotomy regarding the adjustment to college.

Individual Psychology. The second of the four dimensions, psychology, is the only individual based dimension within the contextual framework—that is, the only dimension not determined by "fate" or by how one is situated in society. Psychology in this sense refers to what happens within the person (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). Psychic and mental functions, cognitive and emotional developments, and symbolic meanings all fall within this category. To explain this dimension further, the contextual framework suggests that we learn and develop our own symbolic meanings via those we interact with. Our understandings transfer between

relationships and perpetuate patterns of interaction. This study utilizes the framework of attachment theory, as well as mental health scores for anxiety and depression, as a means of examining individual psychology's relationship with family achievement guilt.

Attachment. This study utilizes Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1978) as a means of looking at the psychology dimension. According to foundational theorist, Bowlby, attachment deals with the bonds existing between individuals influenced by their childhood and adolescent relationships. The creation of personal bonds between individuals and caregivers can be encouraged or hindered by parental behavior over the course of the lifespan. Four specific attachment styles have emerged in the literature overtime. Each of them indicates a different pattern of interaction with others that individuals adopt based on their sense of security in personal relationships. These four styles include ambivalent, avoidant, disorganized, and secure attachment. The scale utilized in this study measures self-reported perceptions of attachment avoidance (aversion to closeness in relationships) and attachment anxiety (neediness and insecurity in relationships) by examining experiences in close relationships for participants.

Transactions. Transactions in contextual family therapy are defined as patterns of interaction within the family (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). Under this dimension fall ideas such as structure, power alignment, roles, and communication sequences. These ideas strongly echo other systemic models and reinforce the idea that contextual family therapy encompasses a wide range of theoretical underpinnings such as general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972), Bowen family systems theory (Bowen, 1976) and structural family therapy (Minuchin, 2018) among others. This study utilizes the construct of family distance regulation (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1992; Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1998; Bowen, 1976) to examine relational processes in conjunction with family achievement guilt.

Family Distance Regulation. Family distance regulation (FDR) is defined as the balance of "separateness and connectedness" in patterns of interaction among family members. Allison & Sabatelli (1998) state that distance regulation should balance intimacy and individuality for family members to ensure positive outcomes regarding mental health and overall development. This study utilizes FDR measures to assess the relationship between separateness and connectedness and the experience of family achievement guilt.

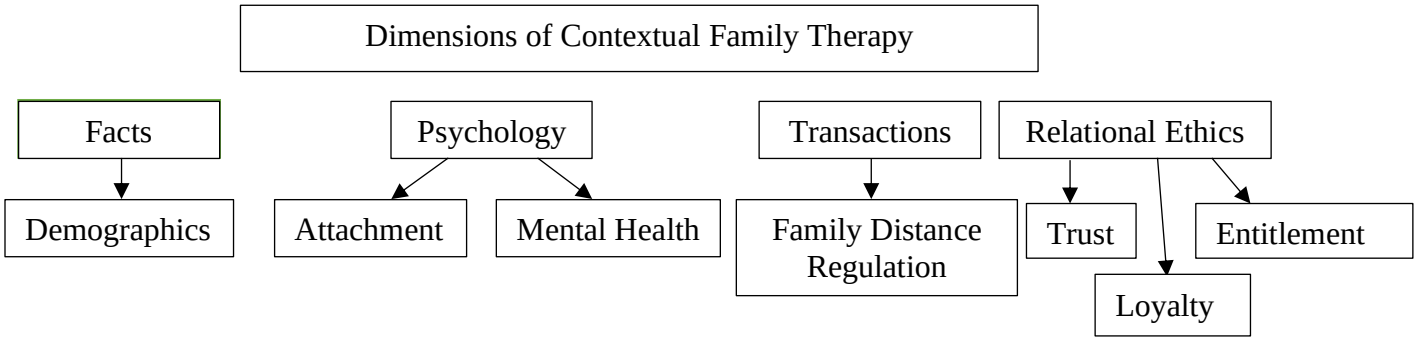
Relational Ethics. The last of the four dimensions included in contextual family therapy is relational ethics, or in other words, the balance of fairness within the family (Gurman & Kniskern, 1992). The contextual framework states that a healthy, functional family is held together through reliability and trustworthiness, as well as a balance of fairness and justice among members. To achieve fairness and justice, the overall emphasis must be placed on equity within the system rather than equality. Each family member's basic life interests must be considered by one another. This need is grounded in the idea that only when one's own needs are fulfilled are they satisfied enough to address the needs of others. The more satisfied an individual is, the more they will be able to give concern and gratitude to other family members or partners. This idea can be boiled down to the tenet "receiving through giving" (Gurman & Kniskern, 1992). The need to show interest in another's needs is defined in contextual family therapy as giving due concern to another member of the system, which encourages reciprocity. This study utilizes measures of vertical relational ethics, or tenets of trust (either earned or inherent—essential to viable relationships), loyalty (the bond existing between parents and children), and entitlement (the "guarantee" of being cared for in a relationship) (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986) present between generations, to explore how these interactions coincide with experiences

of family achievement guilt. Diagram 1 outlines the four different dimensions of contextual theory and the constructs studied within each dimension.

It should be noted that Nagy ((Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986) did not "order" the dimensions of Contextual Family Therapy in terms of cause-effect associations. However, he suggested that intervention be at the level of Relational Ethics, which he believed fed transactions, which in turn would shift individual psychology. Within the model there may be other avenues for intervention, but from Nagy's perspective, it was shifts in Relational Ethics that lead to higher levels of functioning.

Figure 1

Dimensions of Contextual Family Therapy



Note. Each of the variables above have been situated into the dimensions of contextual family therapy for the purposes of this study.

Family Influence: What We Know

Prior research has examined how family influence impacts college decision-making, success, and persistence to college degree. McCarron and Inkelas (2006) found that one of the best indicators of aspirations for attending college is the level of family support in the home. Research suggests that family encouragement to attend postsecondary school begins at an early age, and that parents can shape their children's thoughts regarding college and higher education

over the course of their lives (Connie et al., 2022; Tambara-Leviste, 2022; Galotti & Mark, 1994). This support, combined with access to information about college, and parent knowledge about the demands of college, has the potential to influence overall success throughout the higher education experience, beginning with decision-making, and ending with attaining the degree (Hicks, 2003; Ceja, 2001).

In addition to families being support systems, they are also socialization agents that contribute to identity development (Juang & Syed, 2010). Identity development plays a large role in students' decision-making and overall success in the academic environment, and scholars have found that family relationships play a significant role in this development over the course of emerging adulthood. Erikson (1968) identified that one's interaction with others plays a large role in their identity development, beginning with parents at birth and later, members of their community and society at large. As individuals move through adolescence and emerging adulthood, parents become agents of support, challenge, acceptance, and protest as their children develop and maintain their identities (Juang & Syed, 2010). Their opinions have the potential to impact their students' ultimate decision to attend college.

In addition to overall identity development, ethnic identity development occurs through ethnic-racial socialization (Juang & Syed, 2010), or "the transmission of information from adults regarding race and ethnicity" (Hughes et al., 2006). This transmission, whether explicitly or implicitly, has the potential to provide messages about access to opportunities, racism, and discrimination in institutions such as higher education. As students of color move through the academic environment, they are faced with the task of preserving their own cultural practices and ideals while also adjusting to the collegiate environment. As students are faced with these difficult tasks, the messages about their culture they receive from their families prove to be

important in terms of identity exploration and resolution, as well as overall success and persistence to degree (Luycks et al., 2006). This identity exploration has been examined for FGCS and further, minoritized racial/ethnic students in a variety of ways by scholars over the course of time.

London (1989) examined the process of FGCS "breaking away" from the home when they leave for college. His work is considered some of the first in our field to identify that many FGCS are faced with the task of reconciling their home lives with their educational attainment. London refers to the maintenance of familial relationships as "family membership" and utilizes a psychoanalytic lens to describe the process of individuals leaving the home and establishing adult identities. His work claims that this process of maintained membership often looks different for FGCS, who tend to experience "breakaway guilt" and feelings of loss leaving their family and a "past self" behind. Combined with the pressure to succeed and the responsibility of taking care of parents and family members, FGCS, as well as other students, may experience distress and insecurity and face the necessity of renegotiating relationships with their family members.

Gap in the Literature

Although prior research indicates that supportive familial relationships positively influence the adjustment to college, few observations have been made about the characteristics and processes within the family system that lead to successful or unsuccessful academic adjustment to the collegiate environment, as well as the feelings and emotional health of students once they arrive at school. This study seeks to explore family achievement guilt's relationship with variables encompassed in the four dimensions of contextual theory outlined above. This research has the potential to inform both the fields of higher education and family

therapy/science on how different family characteristics interact relationally and demographically to influence the college experience, specifically the development of family achievement guilt. College students, specifically FGCS, are often grouped into one overarching category, implying that their experience looks much the same across the board. This research has the potential to add depth to their definition by highlighting the complexities of the college experience based on unique intersections of identity and family experiences for each student.

FGCS are of great interest to higher education researchers and administrators, as there is a wealth of literature explaining their traits and characteristics. Though faculty, staff, and peers have been identified as crucial supports for persisting to graduation, a stark gap in the literature remains: a lack of exploration of the influence family processes have on academic success and adjustment for these students specifically, and for college students overall. To address this gap, this study will seek to address the following research questions:

1. Are family transactional processes such as distance regulation associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?
2. Are individual facts such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, first-generation, and gender associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?
3. Is individual psychology, such as attachment style, associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?
4. Are relational ethics associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?
5. Are mental health symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter reviews the chosen mixed methods study design, data collection methods, and analysis strategies for examining family achievement guilt through a contextual lens. These methods were chosen to adequately test the study hypotheses outlined above. This section begins by describing the sequential mixed-methods design chosen and justification for its use.

Study Design

This study utilized a sequential mixed-methods design starting with a quantitative component, followed by a qualitative component, or "QUAN→*qual"* (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). In this sequence, the quantitative portion of data collection drives the study as the "core component," with the qualitative component supplementing findings in phase one to thicken and add depth to the narrative the quantitative data provides. With this type of methodology, quantitative data collection is conducted first, followed by qualitative data collection. For this study, the research questions attempt to identify relations between family achievement guilt and a variety of independent variables situated in the dimensions of contextual family therapy theory (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013). On its own, the quantitative portion adequately addresses these research questions. The role of the supplemental component is to provide explanation for quantitative results by providing further context via the voice of a survey participant and their parent. In addition to adding depth to already collected data, the interview component has the potential to reveal information not anticipated by the researcher in the initial survey design regarding the parent-child relationship and the transition to academia. Each component of the sequential study design is reviewed below.

Phase One: Quantitative Portion

Participants/ Sample

For phase one of the study, traditional age (17-19) first-year college students were recruited from a large, midwestern research university through the Office of Student Academic Success to complete a survey via *Qualtrics* software including demographic information such as first-generation status, household income, and race as well as several independent variables representing the various dimensions of contextual family therapy. A stratified random sample of 800 students was acquired. Stratification was based on gender (50% male), first-generation (50%) or continuing generation status, and minoritized groups (50%). The sample was then surveyed continuously in 400-participant increments until a 25% response rate (200 responses) was reached. Three survey participants self-reported as non-binary during data collection.

Data were collected over the course of six months between April 2022 and August 2022 and ended when participant responses reached 205. At the completion of data collection, the researcher performed data cleaning procedures to enhance reliability, validity, and power of the data. Utilizing Mertz's (2021) recommendations for data cleaning, the researcher removed duplicate participant records, records missing most item responses, and records that took the participant less than five minutes to complete, considering the predicted amount of time needed to complete the survey (~30 minutes). This cleaning process resulted in 121 "usable" participant records for analysis.

Procedures for Data Collection

Survey methodology was utilized as a self-report tool to assess relations between family achievement guilt and the various measures representing the four dimensions of contextual family therapy. These measures are outlined below. Utilizing a survey for data collection allows

the researcher to later perform statistical analysis between and among various scale items (McIntyre, 1999), which is appropriate for the purposes of this study in addressing the research questions above. Distributing the survey at the end of the first year of enrollment allowed students to reflect on the entire year, including the application and enrollment process and the adjustment to the academic experience throughout their first two semesters. Survey participants were entered into a raffle for four, $50 Amazon gift-cards. These gift-cards were raffled off when data collection for phase one was complete using a random participant selector via web browser.

Survey Measures

The following measures were included in phase one of data collection, along with demographic information including race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation, and socioeconomic status, which represent the "facts" dimension of contextual family therapy theory.

Family Achievement Guilt Scale. The family achievement guilt scale (Covarrubias et al., 2020) was created to measure guilt experienced by FGCS psychometrically. The scale includes 34, 5-point Likert-type items across four subscales, each representing one of the four identified themes of family achievement guilt (See Appendix B). Examples of scale items include "I feel bad that I am not there when my family needs me" (leaving family obligations behind), "I feel sad that family cannot experience the opportunities I have in college" (having more privileges), "I feel bad when my family thinks that college is changing me" (becoming different), and "I feel pressured to do well so as to not disappoint my family" (experiencing financial distress or other pressures from home). Each subscale is summed to indicate how strongly the participant relates to each theme of guilt, and subscales are totaled to indicate an overall guilt score. This study utilized the overall guilt score for analysis.

Relational Ethics Scale (RES). The RES (Hargrave et. al, 1991) was created to empirically measure constructs of relational ethics as defined by Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner (1986). With 24, 5-point Likert-type items, the scale measures constructs of vertical/horizontal loyalty, entitlement, and trust/justice (see Appendix A). For the purposes of this study, to assess the parent-child relationship, only vertical items were utilized. Examples of vertical scale items include "I could trust my family to seek my best interests (trust and justice), "Pleasing one of my parents often meant displeasing the other (loyalty) and "I felt my life was dominated by my parents' desires (entitlement). According to Hargrave et al. (1991), one can use these constructs to discern between dysfunctional and well-adjusted participants, and to gauge emotional turmoil/closeness in relationships among family members. A higher score on the vertical subscale indicates better relational ethics. The relational ethics scale has a reported reliability score of .86 (Hargrave and Bomba, 1993).

Experiences in Close Relationships- Relationships Structure Measure (ECR-RS). The experiences in close relationships- relationships structure measure (Fraley et al., 2006) assesses attachment patterns in a variety of close relationships using 9 items, five of which are reverse-coded. Examples of items include "It helps to turn to this person in times of need," "I talk things over with this person," and "I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down." For the purposes of this study, we used the items to examine parent-child relationships, as reported by the child, rated on a 7-point scale (See Appendix C). This measure represents the "individual psychology" dimension of contextual family therapy theory.

Family Distance Regulation. Family Distance Regulation was assessed with two scales: selected items from the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R; Draper & Lee, 2001) and the healthy separation subscale of the Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (SITA;

Levine, Green & Millon, 1986) (See Appendix D). These scales are used to evaluate participant perceptions of feelings of connectedness and separation in family relationships. Participants were asked to answer these questions based on their parent relationships for the purposes of the study. Examples of items from the SCS-R scale include "I feel distant from my mother/father," and "I feel understood by my mother/father." Examples of items from the SITA include "Even though I'm very close to my mother/father, I feel I can be myself," and "My mother/father and I have some common interests and some differences." These measures represent the "transactions" dimension of contextual family therapy theory.

Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2). The PHQ-2 (Kroenke et al., 2003) is utilized to assess for depressed mood over the past two weeks. It is an abbreviated measure typically followed with further evaluation utilizing the PHQ-9 pending a positive screening. This PHQ-2 asks participants to respond to the two items with one of four choices: not at all, several days, more than half the days, and nearly every day. Items include: "Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems: 1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things, 2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless." This measure represents the "individual psychology" dimension of contextual family therapy and is situated as an outcome variable in this study.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder 2-item (GAD-2). The GAD-2 (Kroenke et al., 2007) is a brief tool used to screen initially for generalized anxiety disorder. It is based on the GAD-7, originally developed by Spitzer and colleagues (2006). Similar to the PHQ-2, the GAD-2 asks participants to respond to the two items with one of four choices: not at all, several days, more than half the days, and nearly every day. Items include: "Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems: 1. Feeling anxious, nervous, or on edge, 2.

Not being able to control of stop the worrying." This measure represents the "individual psychology" dimension of contextual family therapy and is situated as an outcome variable in this study.

Data Analysis Procedures and Justification

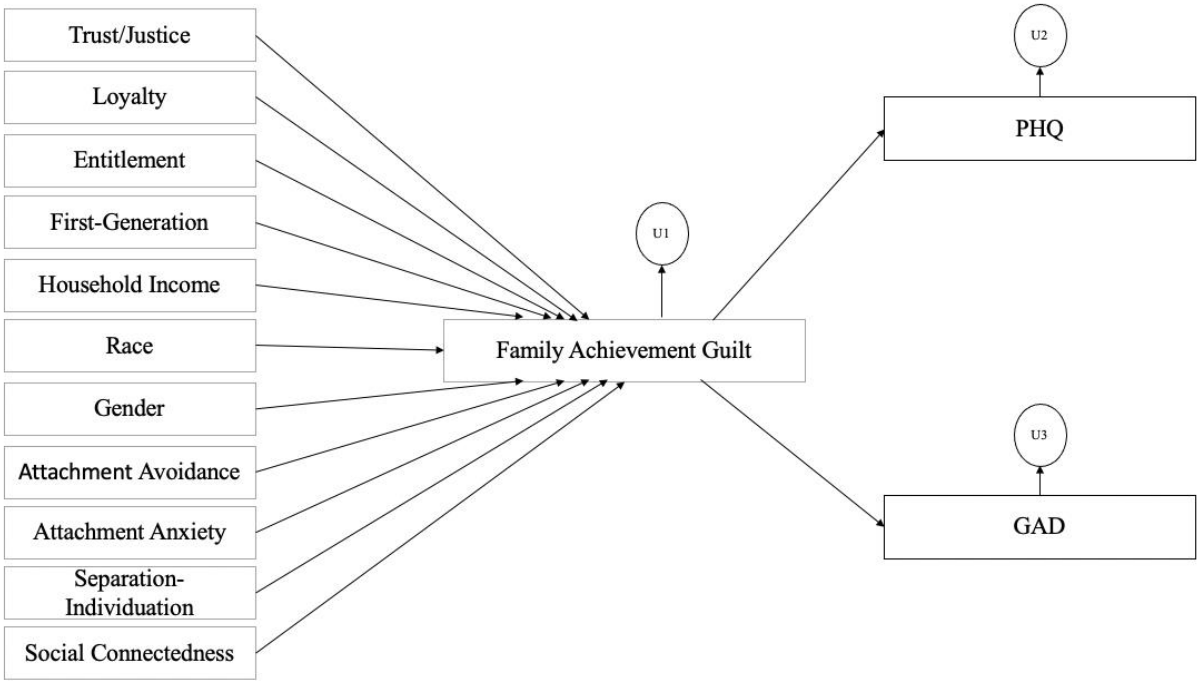
Preliminary Analysis. Preliminary analysis using *SPSS* software examined the descriptive statistics of each variable in question to determine their normal distribution. Reliability tests were conducted to determine internal consistency of each of the variables using Cronbach's alpha. Simple Pearson correlation tests were conducted to examine first order associations among the variables. Although most of the sample identified as first-generation, the researcher conducted a multivariate analysis of variance test (MANOVA) to explore any statistical differences between first-generation and continuing-generation students among the variables of interest. Finally, although racial diversity was lacking in the sample, the researcher conducted a MANOVA to determine statistical differences among racial groups under the first-generation umbrella.

Path Analysis. Following preliminary analysis, path analysis (Wright, 1918) was used to test the strength of each causal relationship between family achievement guilt and the other variables of interest in this study. Path analysis is an extension of multiple regression analysis used primarily by researchers to test the strength of both direct and indirect relationships among variables (Lleras, 2005). This type of analysis allows the researcher to map out the causal model they wish to test in a linear fashion, while also testing correlations among variables at different "stages" of the model and calculating residual variance for each measure not explained by other variables in the model. Using path analysis for this study allowed the researcher to clearly specify how each independent variable was related to family achievement guilt, and further, how

they were related to depression and anxiety scores, both directly, and indirectly when mediated by family achievement guilt. Initially, the researcher intended to utilize depression and anxiety scores as predictor variables for family achievement guilt. As seen below, in the accepted version of the model, anxiety and depression were situated as outcome variables. The researcher made the decision to alter the ultimate path of the model based on the idea that depression and anxiety are variables often addressed in clinical work, and are recognized by most, while family achievement guilt is a relatively novel construct still gaining recognition. By examining depression and anxiety as outcome variables, the researcher was able to identify potential application of findings to clinical intervention to provide justification and relevance to the initial model and ultimately, the findings from this study. With Relational Ethics as exogenous variables, this is in keeping with Nagy's perspective on how to intervene from a Contextual Theory lens as well. The figure below shows the initial "big model" utilized to identify relationships among the variables in the study. Correlations were tested between each independent variable, as well as between depression and anxiety scores. Direct relationships were tested between each independent variable and family achievement guilt, and further, between family achievement guilt and anxiety and depression scores.

Figure 2

Initial Path Model Diagram



Note. Independent variables are correlated with each other in this model, as well as residual mental health variance.

Initially, path analysis was chosen as the methodology for this study not only to study the various potential causal relationships between the independent variables representing the dimensions of contextual family therapy and family achievement guilt, but also because of its appropriateness in testing separate models in two or more discrete groups (Joreskog, 1971). At the outset, the researcher intended to utilize a multi-group model approach to study differences between first-generation and continuing-generation students. While this was successful at some level, most survey participants were first-generation college students. First-generation status was confounded by family income in the initial "big model," and it was not until income was trimmed that significance appeared when testing the relationship between first-generation status and family achievement guilt. The results section will delve into these findings in more detail,

but it is worth noting that the initial interest in testing structural models in two groups was not as relevant once seeing the final composition of the data sample.

Following the quantitative data portion, qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interview procedures to add context to the results garnered in the quantitative portion. These methods are described below, followed by an explanation of the "point of interface" for the two phases of the study.

Phase Two: Qualitative Portion

Case Study Analysis

This dissertation utilizes case study analysis in its second phase to examine the perspectives of a single survey participant and their parent on familial relationships and the adjustment to college. Defining a "case" can be difficult, but generally, the term refers to a phenomenon, or "unit" of interest to the investigator (Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979). Creswell (2013) defines a case as a "bounded system." Bounded systems consist of one or more subjects joined together in some systemic fashion—for example, family members, classmates, coworkers, or individuals who share similar identities might all be grouped together in a "bounded system" in a case study design. A researcher can use case study analysis to explore a single case or multiple cases over time to report on descriptions and themes identified in said cases. Case studies allow for the researcher to examine cultural and historical backgrounds of participants in great depth (Creswell, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the parent-child dyad is identified as the "case" of interest, with each individual classified as an embedded unit within the single case (Yin, 2003). Single case study analysis was chosen for this study due to its effectiveness in thoroughly researching fewer participants to add depth to findings garnered in the quantitative portion of the study.

Single Case Study Analysis. As mentioned above, single case study analyses are an appropriate means of exploring a phenomenon for several reasons (Siggelkow, 2007). In their comparative study exploring single case studies vs. multiple case studies, Gustafsson (2017) identifies that by exploring a single case, the researcher has ample time to conduct research and examine the data thoroughly to garner richer and more informative data (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). In addition, single case studies also allow the researcher to gather a greater quantity of data on one subject or phenomenon, thereby allowing them to question old theory and findings and inform new ones carefully with thorough research. It is important to recognize that the intent of a single case study is not to generalize findings to other cases, but rather to enhance understanding of the identified case itself. For the purposes of this dissertation, a single case study is appropriate for examining the relationship between a first-generation college student and their parent during the transition to college, as the researcher was not interested in generalizing their findings from phase two, but rather in adding context and depth to findings from phase one of the study. While this dissertation explores only one phenomenon, two units of analysis are "embedded" within the single case (the parent and the child) (Yin, 2003). Including embedded units in the single case analysis allowed the researcher to identify themes within the parent-child relationship, as well as the subunits individually to identify similarities and differences in perception and experience.

Participants/ Sample

IRB-approved procedures allowed the researcher to seek interview participants by recruiting from an undergraduate course taught by a colleague within their department. Interested participants submitted their information via the instructor to the researcher, who reached out to everyone to confirm their first-generation status. The researcher chose to interview a first-

generation college student because this was the main population of interest in the study, and most survey participants from phase one identified as first-generation. The participant chosen to be interviewed was ultimately the only first-generation college student who stated interest during recruitment. After confirming that the individual's parent was also willing to participate in an interview for an incentive, the student was sent the survey from phase one to complete, and the researcher scheduled the interviews. Conducted interviews were each about one hour long. Both participants received a $25 Amazon gift card for their participation in the interview process.

The Focal Family. The focal family in this study is a white, middle-class family residing in a large city in a midwestern state. The focal student is 20 years old and identifies as female and cisgender. She is a second year in college, studying psychology on the pre-medical school track. The focal student lives on campus, and her family lives within twenty minutes of the university. She is the middle child of three, with one older brother, and one younger sister. She describes being very close with her sister.

The focal parent, the student's mother, is in her forties. She identifies as female and cisgender and has been partnered with her husband since they were 12 years old. The focal parent got married right out of high school and did not attend college. She got pregnant soon after marrying and stayed at home with her children until her youngest daughter entered high school. At that point, she began working as a property manager for rental properties. The focal parent and her husband have been involved in real estate for upwards of 20 years. Her husband is a real estate agent and manages rental properties alongside his wife. Over the course of the interview process, details emerged to indicate that family members are close to one another and comfortable financially. Both parents were born and raised in the city in which they currently reside with their children.

Procedures for Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews. Two individual interviews were conducted—one each with the student and her mother. Semi-structured interview protocol allows the interview to be focused, while also giving the researcher freedom to probe further into ideas and themes that emerge over the course of the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). In this study, the semi-structured interview protocol allowed the researcher and each interviewee to co-construct meaning surrounding family achievement guilt as the interviewee reflected on their familial and academic experiences across the lifespan, their relationship with the other participant in the study, and shared their perspective on the transition to academia and the first year of college. By conducting interviews separately, the researcher was able to achieve a level of honesty and authenticity in responses that might not have been possible with the other party present in the room. Buber (1947) states that interview methods provide a means for genuine dialogue that might otherwise not be observable to the public eye (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). Interview protocols for both the student and the mother are outlined below.

Interview Protocols

Table 1

Student Interview

1) *Background Information* Questions in this section will ask participants to provide background about themselves and their families (who is in their nuclear family, who was present growing up, etc).	-Who lived in your household growing up? -Talk a little bit about your relationships with the family members in your household. -How would you describe your level of closeness with your parents growing up? -What was the dynamic like among family members in your household?

2) *Family Perceptions of College* Questions in this section will attempt to gather information regarding family perceptions of higher education. Questions will be asked to gauge how college was spoken about in the home growing up, how different family members felt about college overall (its value, necessity, etc), and what kind of encouragement, if any, existed in the home for attending college.	-What did you know about college growing up? -How did your family talk about college growing up? -How do your parents feel about college overall?
3) *The Decision to Attend College* Questions in this section will ask participants to reflect on their decision to attend college—in other words, how they came to the decision.	-What made you decide to attend college? -Who did you speak to about attending college?
4) *The Application Process* Questions in this section will ask participants to reflect on the college application process—resources, support systems, knowledge, areas of difficulty.	-What kind of supports did you have when deciding to apply to college? -What was difficult about applying to college? -How did you feel prepared when applying to college?
5) *The College Decision Making Process* This section of the interview will gather information regarding how participants decided where to attend college.	-How did you decide which college to attend? -What factors contributed to how you decided where to attend college? Specifically: location, academic and extra-curricular offerings, athletics, other opportunities? -Did your parents play a role in your decision making?
6) *Current College Experience/ Perceptions* Questions in this section will ask participants to reflect on the college transition as well as the current college experience. In particular, questions will be asked to gather information on current familial involvement in the participants life/ current perceptions of higher education/ loyalties to home and school. In an attempt to understand how the participant perceives the college experience (what they feel to be valuable, how they choose to spend	-What was the transition to college like for you? -What do you enjoy about attending college? -How did you decide what to major in? -What types of activities do you enjoy participating in? -How have you felt personally since enrolling in college? -What motivates you to succeed? -I wonder if you have experienced any difficulties personally in adjusting to college? -What types of obligations do you balance since enrolling in college?

their time) questions will be asked regarding major choice and extracurricular participation.	
7) *Familial relationships Since Enrolling*	-How do you keep in touch with your family now? -How does your family feel about you attending college? -How have your relationships with your parents changed since beginning college? -I wonder if you can talk a bit about what it was like for you to move away from home? Specifically, what feelings have you experienced? -That's about all the questions I have. Is there anything I didn't ask today about your transition to college that you feel is important for me to know?

Table 2

Parent Interview

1) *Background Information* Questions in this section will ask participants to provide background about their families	-How would you describe the relationships among your children and family members? -How would you describe the relationship between you and your child?
2) *Family Perceptions of College*	-What did you know about college growing up?

Questions in this section will attempt to gather information regarding family perceptions of higher education. Questions will be asked to gauge how parent spoke to their child about college. How college was spoken about to them, and what kind of encouragement, if any, they created in the home for attending college.	-How did your family talk about college growing up? -How do you feel about your own children attending college? -Did anything worry you about your child going away to college?
3) *The Application Process* Questions in this section will ask participants to reflect on their participation as parents in the college application process—resources, support systems, knowledge, areas of difficulty.	-What kind of supports did provide to your child as they decided to attend college? -What was difficult about your child applying to college? -How did you feel prepared when your child was applying to college?
4) *The College Decision Making Process* This section of the interview will gather information regarding how participants were involved in their child's college decision-making process.	-How much of a role did you play in your child's decision-making process? -What factors were important to you in how your child decided where to attend college? (location, academic and extracurricular offerings, etc).
5) *Current Perceptions/ Familial Relationships* Questions in this section will ask participants to reflect on their child's college transition as well as their current college experience. In particular, questions will be asked to gather information on current family dynamics amongst the child/ parent, current perceptions of higher education, and loyalties to home and school.	-What was the transition to college like for you as a parent? -What do you enjoy or find valuable about your child attending college? -What is difficult about your child attending college? -How do you keep in touch with your child now? -How would you describe your relationship with your child now that they are away at college? -I wonder what feelings you've experienced since your child has left home? -How do you perceive your child to feel about going away to school? -What do you notice about your child since they've left for college?

Positionality

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to note the positionality of the researcher. Positionality refers to the way the researcher is situated within the context of the

study due to their own held identities and the way interact with the identities of their research participants. One's held identities inform their perspective, lived experiences, and interpretation of phenomena, thereby influencing the way the researcher collects, interprets, and applies data, and further, the way the participant interacts with the researcher in how they respond to questions and share their story. Considering that each individual human-being inherently possesses multiple identities, Bourke (2014) identifies that every researcher-participant interaction is unique, and the researcher must take into consideration how their own intersecting identities influence the process through self-scrutiny and a self-conscious awareness of their positionality through the process of "reflexivity" (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Keeping this in mind, the researcher used the principles of reflexivity, or the "continuing mode of self-analysis" (Callaway, 1992, p. 33) to consider how her own held identities played a role in the research process.

The researcher identifies as a white, heterosexual, cisgender female who is a first-generation college student from a single-parent, low-income household. Having experienced the transition to college as first-generation student herself, the researcher acknowledges that her own experiences had the potential to influence how she interpreted the interview data from this study. Ontologically, the researcher embraces a systemic paradigm, often considering how an individual's contexts and the systems they are a part of shape and influence their experience. This led her to continuously refer to the parent-child dyad as the unit of analysis and specifically consider relational processes and transactions between the participants while analyzing the data. Finally, as a former student affairs administrator, the researcher acknowledges how her vocational experience and knowledge gained in her higher education degree program provides a lens for how she interprets parent-child relationships and the adjustment to the first year of college overall. Each of these held identities were taken into consideration by the researcher

throughout the inductive coding process as she identified themes and made observations about participant experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

Inductive Coding. Data analysis was conducted using a general inductive coding approach to develop summary themes and categories from the raw interview data as a means of informing phase one findings and further examining the research questions outlined in the study. The researcher utilized Thomas' (2003) procedures for inductive coding as a systematic way of developing "upper-level" categories and "lower-level" themes to address the research questions. The researcher first coded the student interview with an inductive approach, followed by the parent interview with a hybrid inductive/deductive approach, using categories derived from the first interview as a guideline for identifying common themes across interviews as well as specific themes from each individual perspective. Thomas' approach, adapted from Creswell's (2003) procedures for inductive coding, involves 5 steps, outlined in the table below. The ultimate intent of the inductive coding process is to identify no more than eight major themes in the raw data.

Table 3

Steps for Inductive Coding

1. Data cleaning	Transcribe and format raw data files into common format. Make a back-up of each file.
2. Close reading of text	Read text in detail and become familiar with content.
3. Creation of categories	Identify and define categories. "Upper level" categories are derived from research questions. "Lower level" themes are derived from multiple readings of the raw data using "in vivo" coding using actual phrases/ text fragments.
4. Overlapping coding and uncoded text	In inductive coding, one segment of text can be coded into more than one category, and much of the text may remain uncoded.
5. Continuing revision and refinement of categories	Search for subtopics in each category including contradictions and new insights along the way. Select quotes that convey core themes. Combine categories under "superordinate" categories if meanings are similar.

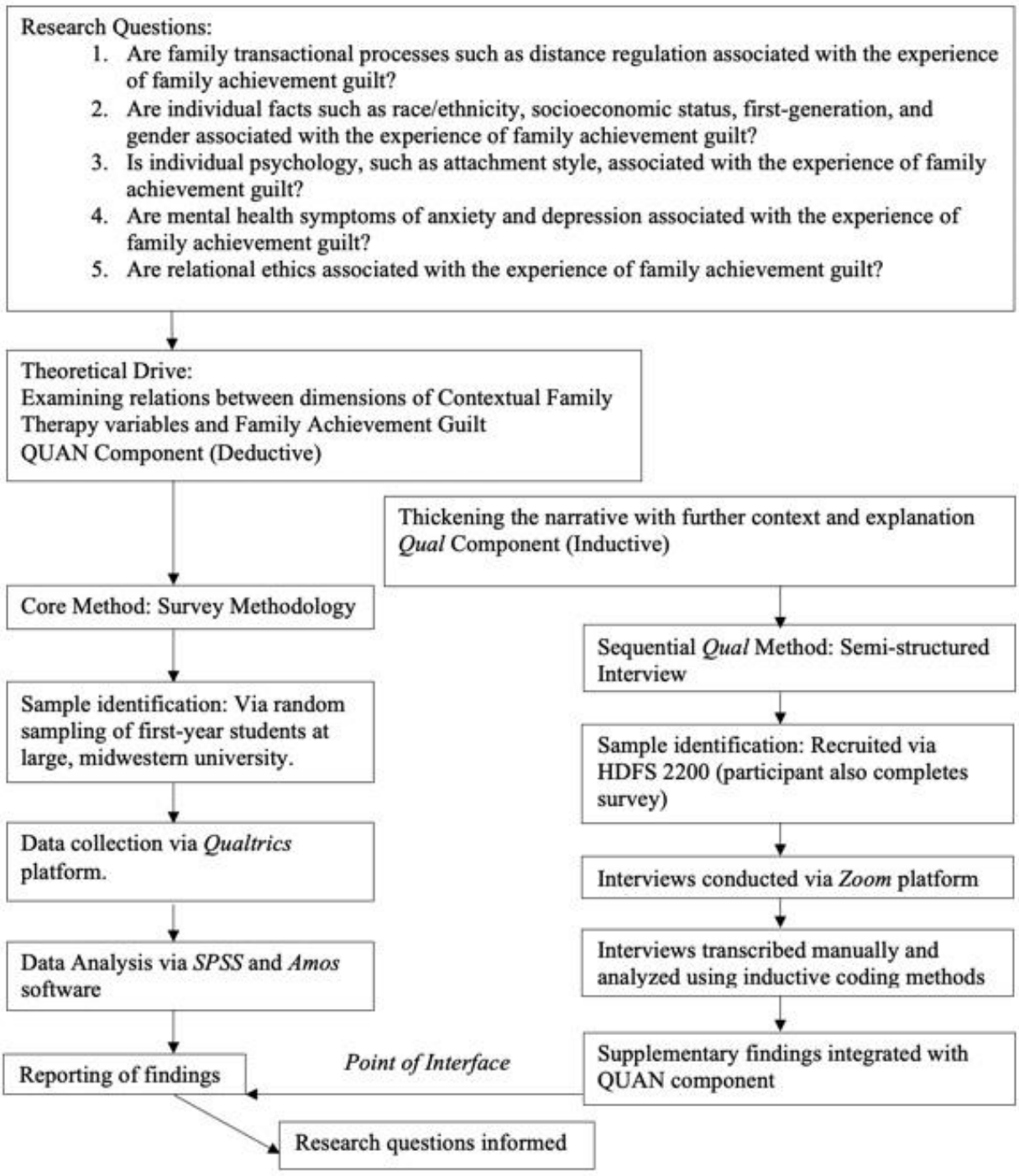
Note. Step descriptions in this table are summarized and rephrased by researcher.

Point of Interface

Due to the sequential design of this study, the point of interface, or the position in which the two research methods meet (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), occurs in the results narrative. As mentioned above, the core component in this study is the quantitative phase one of data collection. The supplemental component, in this case, the qualitative phase two data, are used to embellish or add greater understanding to the results from phase one. For this dissertation, the results section first presents quantitative data results, identifying significant relationships among various independent variables and family achievement guilt. Following this portion of the write-up, qualitative themes created during data analysis are revealed. The start of the discussion section describes the point of interface and gives voice to quantitative results using the qualitative themes created. The figure below maps out the overall research design for this study.

Figure 3

Diagram of Study Design



Chapter 3: Results

Phase One: Quantitative Results

Sample Description

120 participants make up the final sample in this study. 119 participants identified as being between the ages of 18-21 at the time of survey completion, and only one participant identified as being between the ages of 15-17. Gender identification skewed female, with 58.7% (n = 71) participants identifying as female, 38.0% (n = 46) participants identifying as male, and 2.5% (n = 3) participants identifying as non-binary/non-conforming. About half of the sample identified as white (48.8%), while 26.4% identified as Asian, 12.4% identified as Black or African American, 6.6% identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 5.0% identified as "other." It is worth noting that the racial diversity in this sample is greater than at the institution overall, where 7.1% of students identify as Black or African American. 5.2% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% identify as Hispanic or Latino. Most of the sample identified as first-generation college students (78.5%), while 20.7% of students identified as continuing-generation college students. 36.4% of the sample reported an average household income of over $100,000, with the remainder (63.6%) reporting household incomes at $99,999 or under. 11.6% of participants reported household incomes under $20,000. Because most of the sample identified as first-generation, chi-square tests were not conducted to compare demographic differences between first-generation and continuing generation students, and the multi-group model approach was abandoned. However, preliminary analysis did examine statistical differences among racial groups under the first-generation umbrella.

Missing Data

205 survey responses were collected over the course of four months via the above-described participant recruitment efforts. After cleaning the data, 85 submissions were eliminated due to duplicate entries as well as participants spending less than five minutes on the completion of the survey. These cases showed multiple unanswered items and were deemed unusable. The remaining surveys had little missing data, and full information maximum likelihood was used in the path analysis to account for any missing data.

Reliability of Instruments

The following table illustrates the mean (*M),* standard deviation (*SD)* and reliability (α) of each instrument utilized in the study. Using SPSS software to compute Cronbach's alpha (α) for each variable, the researcher determined that the measures used in the analysis were reliable and consistent. That said, the vertical loyalty measure (α = .666) did have a lower internal consistency rating, indicating that it is less reliable than the other two relational ethics domain measures, as well as the rest of the instruments in the study. Ultimately, vertical loyalty was not found to be correlated with family achievement guilt, and this low reliability score potentially lends insight as to why.

Table 4

Instruments Used in Analysis

Instrument	*M*	*SD*	α
Family Achievement Guilt (FAG)	102.52	34.54	.952
Depression (PHQ-2)	1.94	1.58	.761
Anxiety (GAD-2)	2.61	1.76	.814
Attachment (ECR-RS)			
Avoidance	17.21	6.40	.794
Anxiety	11.33	4.88	.869
Healthy Separation (SITA)	15.99	5.67	.843
Social Connectedness (SCS-R)	20.00	11.67	.894
Relational Ethics Scale (RES)			
Vertical Trust/ Justice	18.96	2.96	.746
Vertical Loyalty	10.03	1.90	.666
Vertical Entitlement	9.25	1.96	.740

for first-generation and continuing-generation students. The table below reports means (*M),* standard deviations (*SD),* and statistical significance ($p < .05$) for each variable in the study. As seen, the only variable that held statistical significance between groups was family achievement guilt ($M = 107$, $SD = 34.31$, $p = .04$) In other words, first-generation students scored higher on the family achievement guilt scale overall than their continuing-generation peers. This result was expected and confirms findings from previous studies examining family achievement guilt (Covarrubias, et al., 2015; Covarrubias et al., 2020).

Table 5

Statistical Differences Between Groups

	First-Generation		Continuing-Generation		
Instrument	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*p*
Family Achievement Guilt (FAG)	107.00	33.35	86.50	34.31	**.04**
Depression (PHQ-2)	2.01	1.58	1.68	1.60	.98
Anxiety (GAD-2)	2.70	1.79	2.32	5.18	.50
Attachment (ECR-RS)					
Avoidance	17.13	6.38	17.52	6.61	.28
Anxiety	11.57	4.80	10.35	5.18	.93
Healthy Separation (SITA)	15.90	5.65	16.40	5.88	.88
Social Connectedness (SCS-R)	20.60	11.73	17.44	11.38	.23
Relational Ethics Scale (RES)					
Vertical Trust/ Justice	19.13	2.90	18.23	3.18	.57
Vertical Loyalty	9.92	1.84	10.43	2.13	.28
Vertical Entitlement	9.30	1.99	9.04	1.89	.97

Statistical Differences Among FGCS Based on Race. The researcher conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine any statistical differences between variables for the different racial groups under the FGCS umbrella. The table below reports means (*M),* standard deviations (*SD),* and statistical significance ($p < .05$) for each variable in the study. Data analysis showed limited statistical differences between racial groups within the first-generation group. Only attachment anxiety showed any statistical difference ($p = .02$). Due to the small sample size, there is not much that can be said with these findings, except that race may have some impact on the experience of attachment anxiety for first-generation college students. Further analysis would need to be conducted to make this claim with any certainty, but due to the researcher's initial interest in racial differences among FGCS, she decided to include this analysis as an illustration of attempt

Table 6

Statistical Differences Among FGCS Based on Race

	Asian			Black			Latino/a			White			
Instrument	***N***	***M***	***SD***	***N***	***M***	***SD***	***N***	***M***	***SD***	***N***	***M***	***SD***	***p***
(FAG)	19	108.84	32.24	8	104.25	47.80	6	115.17	14.30	42	103.88	31.61	*.68*
(PHQ-2)	25	2.44	1.08	13	1.15	.99	6	2.33	1.03	47	1.96	1.88	*.19*
(GAD-2)	25	2.40	1.53	13	2.46	1.90	6	4.17	.91	46	2.72	1.82	*.29*
(ECR-RS) *Avoidance*	23	18.87	5.30	13	18.00	3.42	6	18.5	6.41	43	15.91	7.39	*.35*
Anxiety	25	11.64	4.30	13	8.00	4.55	6	15.33	3.27	46	12.07	4.83	***.02***
(SITA)	21	16.05	5.55	9	15.11	4.59	6	14.00	5.37	44	16.27	6.18	*.90*
(SCS-R)	18	19.50	8.60	9	21.00	11.94	6	25.33	11.94	42	19.50	12.53	*.39*
(RES) *Trust/Justice*	25	19.32	3.33	13	19.15	2.51	6	19.33	2.80	46	19.11	2.84	*.87*
Loyalty	25	10.00	1.85	13	11.15	1.68	6	9.17	.75	46	9.67	1.83	*.09*
Entitlement	24	9.13	2.05	13	9.92	1.89	6	10.00	1.67	46	9.11	1.98	*.61*

Correlations. After comparing statistics between groups and among racial populations for FGCS, the researcher computed correlations among all variables in the original model. This process was conducted using *SPSS* software to measure any linear associations with the Pearson correlation coefficient (*r)*. Preliminary analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between several variables, as reported in the correlation table below. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was only concerned with significant relationships between family

achievement guilt and other variables. Correlations revealed significant associations between family achievement guilt and several variables.

First, family achievement guilt was negatively associated with first-generation status (r = -.248). At first glance, this appears paradoxical, but with first-generation status coded as "0" and continuing-generation status coded as "1" in the data set, the negative association here indicates that first-generation students are more likely than their continuing-generation peers to have highly family achievement guilt scores. Second, family achievement guilt was negatively associated with average household income (r = -.365), indicating that the higher the family achievement guilt score, the lower the reported household income. Next, family achievement guilt was positively associated with both depression (r = .261), and anxiety (r =. 358), indicating that the higher the mental health symptoms, the higher the family achievement score. Finally, family achievement guilt was positively associated with two domains of relational ethics—trust/justice (r = .310), and entitlement (r=.282), and one dimension of attachment—attachment Anxiety (r= .201). Considering these statistical relationships, it would appear that higher trust/justice and entitlement in familial relationships, or higher family "functionality," indicates higher levels of guilt for students as they go away to college. Last, higher levels of attachment anxiety were associated with higher family achievement guilt scores.

Table 7

Correlations for Study Variables

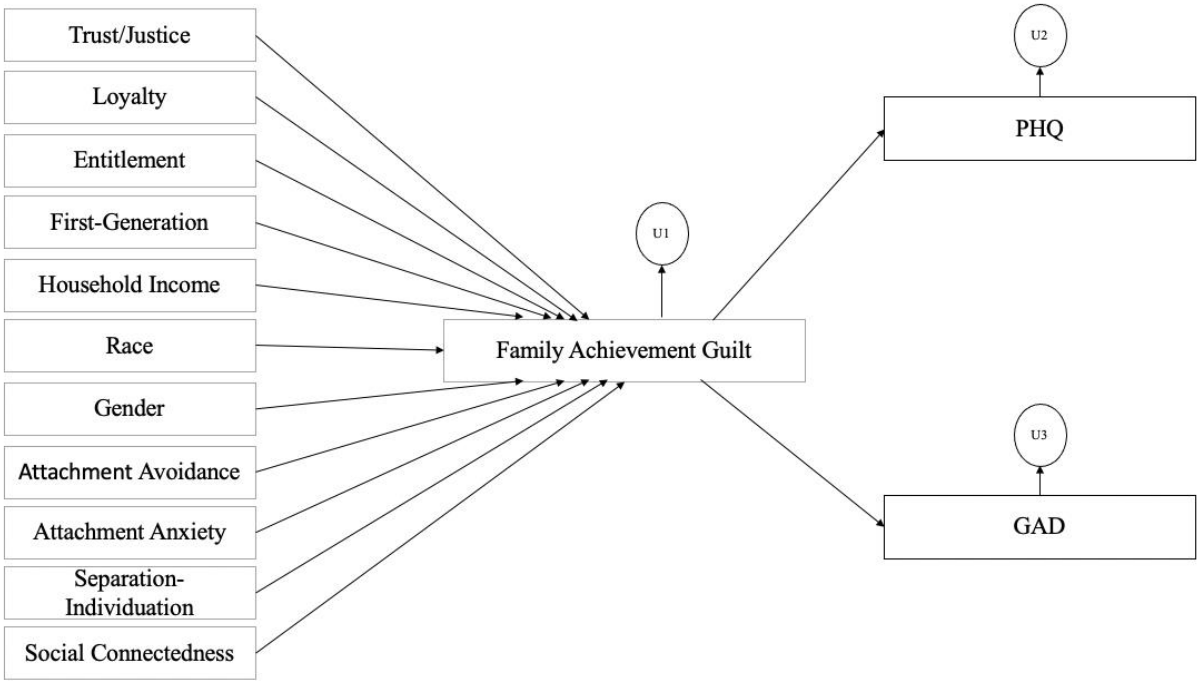
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. FAG	.	-.036	-.194	-.125	-.365**	-.248**	.261**	.358**	.310**	-.010	.282**	-.004	.096	.055	.201**
2. Age	-.036	.	-.115	.074	.113	.047	-.003	-.021	-.097	.050	-.132	-.053	-.062	-.057	-.070
3. Sex	-.194	-.115	.	-.015	.070	.093	.086	.012	.023	.057	-.023	-.025	-.059	.154	-.055
4. Race	-.125	.074	-.015	.	.049	.068	-.094	.010	-.065	-.101	-.050	.014	-.032	-.171	.031
5. Income	-.365**	.113	.070	.049	.	.302**	-.246**	-.116	-.126	.004	-.150	-.087	-.185	-.154	-.020
6. FirstGen	-.248*	.047	.093	.068	.302**	.	-.086	-.086	-.120	.107	-.053	.036	-.106	.025	-.100
7. PHQ	.261**	-.003	.086	-.094	-.246**	-.086	.	.469**	.152	-.140	.198*	.183	.305**	.127	.360**
8. GAD	.358**	.021	.012	.010	-.116	-.086	.469**	.	-.128	.218*	.156	.180	.180	.088	.406**
9. Trust/Justice	.310**	.097	.023	-.065	-.126	-.120	.152	.138	.	.227*	.192*	-.010	.023	-.082	.142
10. Loyalty	-.010	.050	.057	-.101	.004	.107	-.140	-.128	.227*	.	.060	-.279**	-.269**	-.086	-.114
11. Entitlement	.282**	-.132	-.023	-.050	-.150	-.053	.198*	.218*	.192*	.060	.	.198*	.215	.172	.262**
12. SITA	-.004	-.053	-.025	.014	-.087	.036	.183	.156	-.010	-.279**	.198*	.	.417**	.025	-.003
13.Connected	.096	-.062	-.059	-.032	-.185	-.106	.305**	.180	.023	-.269**	.215*	.417**	.	.106	.115
14. Avoidance	.055	-.057	.154	-.171	-.154	.025	.127	.088	-.082	-.086	.172	.025	.106	.	.134
15. Anxiety	.201**	-.070	-.055	.031	-.020	-.100	.360**	.406**	.142	-.114	.262**	-.003	.115	.134	.

*Note. **= Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, *=Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Path Analysis. Following correlations, the researcher conducted path analysis using *SPSS Amos* software to further determine any direct and indirect relationships among variables in the model. The original model tested is shown below. Independent variables are listed down the left side of the model, each tested for their direct associations with family achievement guilt, and potential mediated associations with mental health symptoms. Family achievement guilt is situated to the left of anxiety and depression scores to determine if it is associated with mental health symptoms directly.

Figure 4

Initial Path Model Diagram



Note. Independent variables are correlated with each other in model, as well as residual variance for mental health symptoms.

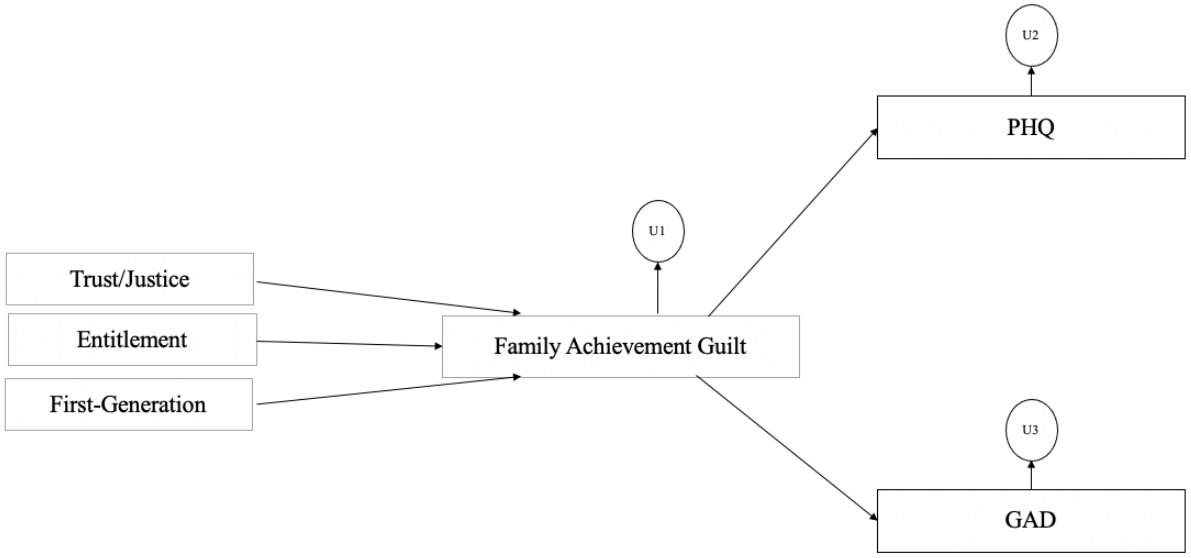
The Accepted Model

Initial analysis revealed a model with unacceptable fit: (X^2 (22, N = 121) = 44.6, CFI =.813, RMSEA =.093, p = .003). Considering these results, in addition to insignificant relationships among many of the variables and family achievement guilt, the researcher decided to trim the model to include only variables with significant correlations to family achievement guilt. The image below shows the trimmed and accepted model in the study, which revealed a much-improved goodness of fit, indicating that the accepted model is more indicative of what the data might look like in the overall population (X^2 (6, N = 121) = 3.8, CFI= 1, RMSEA= 0, p = .697). It should be noted that although attachment anxiety was correlated with family

achievement guilt in the initial simple correlation test, further analysis revealed an insignificant correlation, and therefore, it was not included in the accepted model. The accepted model addresses each of the research questions for the study, and further, provides the framework for analyzing and reporting results at the point of interface. Below, the researcher reviews results of the path analysis regarding each research question.

Figure 5

The Accepted Model



Note. Independent variables are correlated with each other in the model.

Results by Research Question:

1. Are family transactional processes such as distance regulation associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

Path analysis revealed no significant relationships between the "transactions" tested and family achievement guilt. In other words, one's own perceptions of their closeness with family members, specifically in terms of separateness/connectedness with family figures, does not appear to influence their level of family achievement guilt. More specifically, the separation-individuation scale (SITA) showed a non-significant relationship with family achievement guilt, (β = -.53, p = .606). and the connectedness scale (SCS-R) also showed a non-significant relationship (β = .022, p = .836).

2. Are individual facts such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, first-generation, and gender associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

When analyzing the "facts" dimension, computations initially revealed a significant negative relationship between average household income and family achievement guilt (β = -.279, p = .003), indicating that lower household income is related to higher family achievement guilt scores. When average household income was included in the model, first-generation status was non-significant (β = -.083, p = .373). Removing household income led to significance for the first-generation status (β = -.53, p = .032), indicating confounding effects among the two variables. These confounding effects generate curiosity regarding whether or not family achievement guilt is truly related to first-generation status or is rather related to household income. For the purposes of this study, first-generation status was focused on in further analysis. That said, these initial results indicate the need to explore the relationship between household income and family achievement guilt more specifically. Race (β = -.095, p = .285). and gender

(β = -.091, p = .304) were insignificantly related to family achievement guilt scores, meaning that at least within this sample, no certain race or gender was related to higher family achievement guilt scores.

3. Is individual psychology, such as attachment style, associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

Using attachment scores as a means of measuring "individual psychology," testing revealed non-significant relationships between both domains of attachment and family achievement guilt: attachment avoidance (β = -.007, p = .945). and attachment anxiety (β = -.099, p = .284). In other words, attachment style does not appear to impact the amount of family achievement guilt one feels when they go away to college.

4. Are relational ethics associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

The final dimension of contextual family therapy, relational ethics, was measured using the Relational Ethics Scale. Two of the three domains of relational ethics, trust/justice (β = .200, p = .017), and entitlement (β = .162, p = .010) showed significant relationships with family achievement guilt, indicating that more trust/justice and entitlement within a parent relationship leads to higher levels of family achievement guilt for students. Surprisingly, loyalty (β = -.031, p = .747) did not have a significant relationship with family achievement guilt. As mentioned above, the loyalty measure did not have a very good reliability score, which could provide explanation for the non-significant results shown here. These results were perhaps the most enlightening, as they indicate that generally, the more "functional" a family is as defined by contextual theory, the more guilt a student will feel when going away to college.

5. Are mental health symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with the experience of family achievement guilt?

Mental health symptoms, situated in the "individual psychology" dimension of contextual family therapy, were given their own research question due to their placement in the model. The researcher examined both direct and indirect effects of the independent variables in the model on mental health symptoms, as mediated by family achievement guilt. Family achievement guilt was found to have a significant direct relationship with both depression ($\beta = .245$, $p = .015$) and anxiety ($\beta = .331$, $p < .001$), meaning that the more depression and anxiety symptoms a student experiences, the more family achievement guilt they experience. Mediation analysis is described below.

Family Achievement Guilt as a Mediator

The researcher tested the mediation effect of family achievement guilt for each of the independent variables on mental health symptoms, as depicted above in the accepted model. First-generation status, entitlement, and trust/justice were all found to be mediated by family achievement guilt in their relationship with depression and anxiety. The table below shows standardized indirect effects for each of the independent variables. It should be noted that the researcher only conducted preliminary mediation analysis for the purposes of this study. By testing the model both with and without direct effects from the independent variables, the researcher was able to deduce that family achievement is in fact a mediator, as the model did not lose goodness of fit when direct effects were removed. In other words, when trust/justice, entitlement, and first-generation status were mediated by family achievement guilt, their relationships remained significant to depression and anxiety symptoms. This is illustrated by chi-square values for the model with direct effects included (X^2 (0, N = 121) = 0.0), and direct effects removed (X^2 (6, N = 121) = 3.8), Due to missing data, bootstrapping was not performed, and indirect effects were not tested for statistical significance.

Table 8

Indirect Effects with Family Achievement Guilt as a Mediator

Variable	FirstGen	Entitlement	Trust/Justice
PHQ	-.032	.038	.036
GAD	-.058	.069	.066

Variables in Relation to One Another

To compare the relative importance of each independent variable and its association with family achievement guilt, the researcher looked at standardized regression weights. Estimates revealed that self-reported anxiety symptoms (β =.346) were more significant in their relationship with family achievement guilt than self-reported depressive symptoms (β =.233). Out of the three relational ethics domains, vertical entitlement was most important in its relationship with family achievement guilt (β =.238). The table below shows the standardized regression estimates for each variable in the accepted model.

Table 9

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Weights for Accepted Model

Variable	*B*	β
FirstGen	-16.36	-.195
PHQ	.011	.233
GAD	.018	.346
Trust/Justice	2.57	.222
Entitlement	4.16	.238

Note. B. Unstandardized β. Standardized

Summary

Overall, analysis of data for the quantitative portion of the study illuminated that in this sample, several variables initially of interest to the researcher, including race, gender, attachment, and family distance regulation, were non-significant in their relationship with family achievement guilt. Although this was disappointing, it was interesting to see that first-generation status, mental health symptoms, and two domains of relational ethics (trust/justice and entitlement) showed significant relationships with family achievement guilt. The discussion chapter will consider these results and their implications for further study. First, qualitative results for phase two are reviewed below.

Phase Two: Qualitative Results

To begin the qualitative portion of analysis, the researcher first manually transcribed each of the two interviews, deidentifying and cleaning the data. Then, each interview was coded using the inductive approach described above as part one of an inductive-deductive hybrid process. Appendixes F and G show the original interview transcripts. Seven themes emerged during the inductive coding process. For further analysis, the researcher used a deductive approach to situate each theme within the already defined dimensions of family achievement guilt. Themes were broken down into the following categories: student themes, parent themes, and shared themes. These themes are described below.

Leaving Family Obligations Behind

Covarrubias et al. (2020) describe the first constructed theme of family achievement guilt, "leaving family obligations behind," as the experience of not being able to fill roles at home while away at school that were once expected. These roles might include lending financial support to parents, attending family gatherings, and supporting siblings. In alignment with this

theme, interviews in this study revealed the importance of family connection and bond for the focal family. Both the focal student and parent described the importance of closeness among the members of their family, and further, the expectation of keeping in touch and maintaining connection while the student is away at school. This expectation for closeness began well before the college experience. When asked how she and her partner supported their children, the focal parent described the ways in which she attempted to set her children up for financial success, via a college savings plan, and gave her time over the years to let her children know she was "there for them." These statements culminated in the development of the following theme, *Family Bond is Important*, which articulates the importance of maintained connection, and ultimately felt pressure to continue filling familial roles as described with overarching dimension of family achievement guilt, *Leaving Family Obligations Behind.*

Shared Theme: *Family Bond is Important.*

> Bryant: …So you mentioned that school was a really important resource for them in applying. What kind of supports did you provide as they were applying for college?
>
> Parent: You know, I guess one thing when they were born is we—I'm sure you know, it's called the college Advantage plan. Yeah. Now we didn't know what they were going to do, but we wanted to have that in place for them, you know, just to help them get started. Um, you know, we did that, we went to we went to every school function, basketball game, cheerleading and lacrosse game, you know, I volunteered at school, you know, not that we had to, but we, we wanted to, we, we wanted to show, show them. We were always there for them, you know?

While the focal parent's expectations for closeness began with her children at a young age, the focal student describes a significant life event in her teenage years that reminded her of the importance of familial bonding. In describing her relationship with her parents, the focal student identifies that her father's cancer, which came out of remission in high school, led her to consider the importance of having close relationships with her family members. She describes her realization that "life can be taken away," and it is important to maintain relationships with

family members and keep in close contact with them. The focal student describes how her father's cancer brought her family members closer together as they experienced a shared "horrible situation." This personal experience adds a level of depth to the importance of bond, and further, the family obligations dimension.

> Bryant: So you've definitely gotten closer with your parents since coming to college. And you'd say like, some of that distance, maybe, has helped a little bit and growing your bond?
>
> Student: I think, at least with my dad, my dad just came out of remission, like, the summer going into my freshman year of college. So basically, a good amount of senior year he had cancer. So, it was kind of this "is my dad gonna live or die?" situation, and like, we've just gotten closer, the whole family has gotten closer just, you know, bonding over this horrible situation. And then, you know, being able to see the other side has definitely, you know, strengthened our bond to realize, you know, life can be taken away. In a matter of seconds.

Since the focal student has enrolled in school, both interviewees maintain that keeping in touch is valuable to them. Both the focal parent and focal student describe two methods of staying connected while away at school. Specifically, these are the family group chat, and scheduled family dinner. In jest, the focal parent describes the importance of the family dinner, and states that it is expected that all her children attend—with little room for excuses.

> Parent: yeah, that—well, in our family, we have like the second, second Sunday of every month, everybody comes for dinner. So, we make that time every month, you know, and it is a little harder for [Other daughter's name,] you know, two and a half hours away. This past month, things are crazy. So we just went up and saw her on Saturday.
>
> Bryant: So that second Sunday of every month, you know, if you can make it, you come for dinner. I think that's great.
>
> Parent: Basically, you have to be dying. Like you better be there. I need a good excuse. [Laughs.]

The focal student also describes the ways in which she keeps in touch with her family. It should be noted that she does not seem to be pressured or bothered by these expectations. Rather, she is used to them and seems to enjoy them herself.

> Bryant: How do you keep in touch with your family now that you're away at school?
>
> Student: Um, we have a group chat. We've always had a group chat since we all got iPhones. So we text in it pretty much every day. Yeah, random memes and stuff. We send pictures all the time. So we made that, and then sometimes my parents will call you know, when they're, you know, close to campus. They'll ask me out to lunch or I'll say, hey, let's get lunch or something. And I see my dad every Saturday when it's a home game, because he does ushering for fun at the [Football Stadium Name.] And then we have family dinner the second Sunday of every month. So yeah.

Overall, the interviews reveal a common thread among the focal student and focal parent of the importance of being close—not just while away at school, but over the course of the lifespan.

Becoming Different Than Family

In their initial interviews, Covarrubias and colleagues (2020) identified that students described guilt and frustration related to feeling distant from their families due to changing interests, and lack of understanding among family members about the college experience. Although the focal student in this study did not echo any of those sentiments, she and her mother both described the similarities between the two of them, punctuating the idea that similarity is inherent and expected among family members. At one point during the focal parent interview, when asked to describe her relationship with her daughter, the focal parent deviated from the question a bit and began to describe her daughter as similar to her. Similarly, the focal student describes similarities to her mother, punctuating the theme that sameness is accepted, and further highlighting the *Becoming Different Than Family* dimension described above.

Shared Theme: ***We are the Same.***

> Parent: Um, you know, she's always been a sensitive kid. She was—she's kind of shy, but once you get her going, she is right there in it.
> She kind of takes things personally, sometimes. She's a lot like me, I guess. You know, I see a lot of her. And, you know, me in her. So she's—whenever she's feeling something, I felt that same thing too. So, um, but she's a hard worker, she she's always been a hard worker. Things don't come easy to her. But she, you know, she always works hard at it.

Like her mother, the focal student described herself as them being similar to one another in that she goes out of her way to help others:

> Student: I will bend myself backwards and sideways. And like, I will take any time out of my day, even if I don't have it, to help someone else. Like, I've been known to stretch myself very thin and not take care of myself to help other people.
>
> Bryant: Yeah. Where do you think that comes from?
>
> Student: I, I honestly don't know. And like my mom definitely shows traits of that. So I probably just, you know, got it from her. But I've just kind of always been like that. Yeah, yeah.

Although the focal student did not describe any fears of changing or becoming different from her family, the focal parent described a fear of her daughters moving away to school and changing from the people she knew. In the following excerpt, the focal parent describes her fear that the "world" outside of their home would lead her daughters to "lose some of their values." She then goes on to say that she has not seen any evidence of this thus far. The following theme adds depth to the above family achievement guilt dimension by punctuating the fear of becoming different than one another from the focal parent's perspective.

Parent Theme: ***I'm Afraid They Will Change.***

> Bryant: So, to you, education was the most important thing, and that was your expectation for them—was just get a good education. Was there anything you worried about with them going away to college?
>
> Parent: Um if they would change, you know? The world is different now. And, you know, maybe—I know, you have to be your own person, but you know, maybe that they would lose some of the maybe values we have taught them that are important. Or, you

> know, maybe they would just become a different person. I haven't seen that. In either of them or all of them. Sure. You know, they're growing, but they're not changing in that way. I guess. Yeah. They're still good people, I guess.

These words punctuate the idea that college attendance implies change and deviation from the values and lessons instilled in the home throughout childhood. The focal parent was visibly relieved as she expressed that she has not seen a detrimental change in their children since they enrolled in school.

Having More Privileges Than Family

Covarrubias et al. (2020) describe their third theme, having more privileges than family, as the guilt related to having more freedoms, luxuries, and opportunities while away at school than family members back home. The idea of privilege and opportunity emerged in multiple ways throughout interviews with focal family members. To start, when reflecting on her own decision not to attend college, the focal parent identified that she lacked the confidence in herself to pursue a degree. She went on to describe that attending college might have allowed her to "have something for herself." In this way, college seems to represent an independence and individuality that was not afforded to the focal parent for choosing a different path. The idea of having independence and autonomy intuitively connects back to the idea of having more privileges than family, and therefore, the following theme, *College = Independence,* is situated into this dimension. Below, the focal parent describes how being a wife and a mother is her identity, but at times she wishes she had something else for herself. In this way, it seems that attending college or getting an education symbolizes identity to her in some way.

Parent Theme: *College = Independence.*

> Parent: Yeah. I guess, like, for me, I guess I just wish I would have had more confidence in myself to get to college. And I guess maybe I wish I was maybe more educated about what was out there to do in the world? I guess. And my husband, you know, he should have gone to college, he's, you know, that's where he belonged, you know, but, you

know, we chose a different path. You know, I don't know if [Student name] told you, but, you know, I've known him since I was 12 years old. And our—we were kind of those people that were married as soon as we met. And, you know, the thing we wanted in life was to be married and have a family. And, you know, that's what we accomplished. And that's what we wanted, and I wouldn't change a thing. But then you're, you know, you kind of realize that, maybe you need something for yourself, too.

Bryant: Absolutely.

Parent: And I think that started to set in, maybe, once the kids didn't quite need us as much, like, you know, it's kind of like, oh, what am I gonna do now? You know, it's hard now going out and getting a job and not having, you know, skills, I guess, you know?

To the focal parent, college attendance represents the acquisition of skills, and access to opportunity and resources. Both the focal parent and student feel it is important to have connections to resources in general—prior to enrolling in school and throughout the college experience. Understandably, resources can also be viewed as a privilege not afforded to other family members, and thus the following theme, *Access to Resources Matters,* is situated within the above dimension. The importance of having access to resources was so important to the focal parent, in fact, that she and her husband moved to a different city so their children could attend a better high school to prepare them for college.

Shared Theme: *Access to Resources Matters.*

Bryant: What were your expectations for them regarding college? How did you talk to them about college when they were growing up?

Parent: Um, you know, we just always, we always kind of hit home that education is so important that, you know, it's just one of the most important things, you know, and you know, we, we, we moved our kids just so they could have a better education because of where we live. The schools aren't good. So we moved so our kids could go to a better one of the top schools in [The state]. They went to [Highly rated school district in the state.] Our girls, you know, and we kind of had a connection because my dad went to [Highly rated school], and we knew what it was about. And we wanted that for them. I mean, our son was different with the age difference. He, he kind of went on a different path with basketball. But our, our girls, we were just like, you know, education is so important. We will do anything for you to have that.

The focal parent describes the resources provided to her daughter at said highly rated school, identifying that her education provided her with knowledge that she and her husband would not have been able to, never having attending college themselves.

> Parent: Yeah, I mean, from, for two people that, that didn't go to college, having that support of the school that knew how to fill out an application or just even where to start, you know, you know, they had great counselors going, "you need to apply to seven colleges, because, you know, maybe you're not going to get the one you want. So, you need to have options." You know, and there were workshops on how to fill out an application, you know, just everything that, you know, somebody, well, things change, you know, in the time span. So, you know, they had it all right there for them.

In addition to her mother, the focal student also punctuated the importance of having resources provided by her high school for applying to college. Specifically, she described her relationship with the college counselor, who guided her through the entire application process. The focal student went so far as to describe this college counselor as her "rock," and explained that it was her responsibility to gather application information from school and relay it back to her parents. As she described her relationship with her college counselor, the focal student seemed to reiterate the importance of transferring to this school district to reap the benefits of the privileges afforded to her for attending there.

> Bryant: Yeah. So, from their perspective, it sounds like it was really valuable to them that you would go to college. Like that was what you would do once you graduated from high school. So how did they talk to you about college growing up?
>
> Student: Not a lot. Honestly. I was in my college counselor's office at the high school pretty much every day.
>
> Bryant: Oh, wow.
>
> Student: I didn't know anything about anything. So I was, you know, like, where, like, where do I have a chance like, how do you do all of this, like, how do you do all these essays, plus your main college essay, like the supplemental ones, and the main one. How do you put in all your information and how do you do the FASFA? How do you do it? How do you figure out room and board? And just all the questions you could possibly think of were me asking her, because I didn't know. My brother was able to help a little

bit with FASFA. But overall, it was me figuring it out from asking someone else and telling my parents.

Bryant: Oh, wow. So you kind of leaned really hard into that college counselor. Like you, you asked them pretty much all the questions, everything that you didn't know, and then you would bring that information back to your parents once you learned what you needed to do.

Student: Yeah, and basically, you know, I just told my parents like, hey, they would ask like, like, "How are the essays going?" But not too much, because I don't think they really understood. So, it was definitely leaning into her. And she was like, my rock for like, a year and a half, figuring it out, because like, I didn't even know you had to send a grade release to the college for your last semester of high school. Making sure that was right and it was like that with like literally every single form. I signed by myself. I was 18. So like, I had to do it. So every single form I did, I made probably drove her crazy, making sure it was correct and making sure everything's just perfect. Absolutely perfect. Yeah. So yeah.

Resources continue to be of importance for the focal student now that she is enrolled in college. The focal student describes her experience with overcoming her "shyness" to seek help when she needs it. The focal student identifies that college affords her many opportunities for her education and mental health that she would be foolish not to take advantage of while enrolled in school. In this way, she is reinforcing the idea that college attendance affords privilege and resources not otherwise provided outside of academia.

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. Sounds like you have resources now. And like, you know, where to find things. Right? Which is helpful.

Student: Yeah. And, like, I'm in a scholar program, for first-gen students. And I work at the Student Wellness Center. So I've definitely, like been able to access so many resources. And like, if there's a resource that I can't find, someone I know, knows it. Like, like student advocacy. I never heard of them until, you know, spring semester, and that was also a huge resource for how I was able to pull myself together. Because there was a math course I was taking and I was struggling a little bit. I had like a C in the class and I, you know, anything below a b minus is horrible enemy. Right? And I was like, I want a good grade in this class, I need to get it up as much as I can. So, you know, I talked to student advocacy, they, you know, really helped me explain to the teacher and get what I needed out of that class. And I took a two week, I forget what it's called. It's like when you have like, a month or so after the semester technically finishes.

Bryant: An incomplete?

> Student: Yes, I took an incomplete in that course. And, you know, I was able to, you know, get my grade up to I think, the B or B plus. So yeah, yeah.
>
> Bryant: So once you had those resources, you figured out how to use them to your advantage. And it sounds like it's been helpful for you since to know where to go for things. Or if you don't know the answer to have someone you can ask for where to get the help you need.
>
> Student: Yeah, I'm, you know, I'm a shy person at first. And it's just like, I don't want to waste my time and money to like, you know, not get the frickin' answers to what I need. Like these people get paid to have answers for me. So I'm like, Don't be afraid. Just ask them. Yeah, like, it's stupid to have all these resources and not use them if you need them. And I'm like, just, you know what, a million people have asked the same question you're asking. Just frickin' ask [Laughs.]

Experiencing Financial Distress or Distress Related to Other Pressures

The final theme of family achievement guilt, experiencing distress related to pressures, is defined as the pressures to succeed in academia, associated with sacrifices families have made and continue to make for their children to have this opportunity (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Although financial distress is not mentioned by the focal parent or student in either interview, pressure to succeed or perform shows up in a variety of ways for the focal student. Academically, the focal student describes the pressure to achieve good grades. Prior to this, the focal student describes the pressure she felt to be there for her family and take care of things at home during her father's illness. She discusses the need to "step up" and help her mother, who was very affected by the cancer diagnosis. These portrayed feelings culminated in the following theme: *I Need to be Who my Family Needs me to be*, which is understandably situated within the pressures dimension. The following excerpt also echoes tenets of the familial obligations dimension, but due to the emphasis on pressure to "step up" and succeed, it is situated within this dimension.

Student Theme: ***I Need to be Who my Family Needs me to be.***

Bryant: Absolutely. Yeah. So your dad being super sick, and just realizing like, there's so many things in life, that just aren't worth being upset over, right, and that forced you to grow up pretty quick and realize that life can be over in a second. Your family kind of came together.

Parent: Yeah, definitely. Not that my mom completely, like, pulled out of the world, but she kind of disassociated a little bit. You know, obviously, being married for almost 30 years, seeing your partner go through that. And maybe, you know, that realization came a little early, maybe. So I definitely had to, you know, step up and take care of the house, take care of my sister, make sure everything that I could be taken care of was taken care of for her. And just overall, basically, you know, helping with my dad, and it was during COVID. And I was going to school. So you know, you know, keeping the house clean, everything sanitized, making sure I'm not, you know, within six feet of him. Wearing masks, double masking. So yeah.

Bryant: That's so much.

Student: It was a lot. And I was also, you know, junior year, I kind of grew up a little bit because, you know, my GPA wasn't great. And basically the bottom line growing up was, like, you kids are going to college. So I really just like had to buckle down and get my stuff together. And you know, start thinking about college and how to apply and all these different things. And I spent junior year and senior year working my butt off.

The pressure to perform and succeed as a successful and attentive daughter not only influenced the focal student's behavior while she was still living at home, but ultimately influenced her decision on where to attend college. The following except describes her reasoning process for choosing the school she enrolled in:

Bryant: So how did you decide what college to go to?

Student: Um, I, you know, I applied to, I think, eight different schools. I always wanted to do out of state, just like, you know, being away from your parents, being that typical teenager, and being away from your parents and whatever. So, it was between [This University] and [Another University]. And my dad, you know, got cancer around the time it was, you know, coming to the deadline of making a decision on where you're gonna go. So I was, you know, heavily leaning towards [Another University], and then I, you know, decided to stay and choose [This University]. And then I got, I got rejected, and I submitted an appeal. And I won the appeal, and I was able to attend [This University].

Bryant: Oh, wow.

Student: Yeah.

Bryant: So, location was a big part of it.

Student: It was just location, because, you know, I didn't know what was going to happen. And I didn't want to get be a phone call away and a plane ride away, if something happened. So it was definitely like, location and just making sure like, I could take care of things or like, not me myself, but I could be able to be help, if need be.

When asked to describe where this pressure to help her family members derived from, the focal student identified that her motivation was mostly intrinsic. This is an interesting facet of the experience, as the focal student does not associate this pressure with anything her family members expected of her, but rather, what she expected of herself.

Bryant: I wonder, did your parents ever explicitly ask you for help? Or was this something you kind of just felt like you needed to do on your own?

Student: No one. You know, there's always been an expectation of like doing chores? We've always done chores. I think, you know, I kind of took it upon myself, because when my mom like—my dad had surgery to remove the tumor, and my mom was the only one allowed to visit. And she came home around like 10 o'clock at night, and I've never seen my mom like the way she was when she walked in that door. And I just kind of realized, like, I definitely need to step up. And like, you know, make sure my stuff is together, make sure you know, [sister's name] is taken care of. And I'm just doing things to take stuff off her plate. So, you know, it was never, I was never really asked, I just kind of took it upon myself.

The pressure to perform and succeed followed the focal student into academia. Throughout her first year, she had difficulty adjusting to course demands. Again, the focal student describes a "realization" of sorts that she needed to step up and improve her behavior to fulfill the expectations others had of her. Her self-discipline served her well, and she ultimately improved her grades dramatically over the course of her first year of enrollment.

Bryant: Yeah. And so what was that like for you? The transition to college once you got here. Talk to me a little bit about your first year.

Student: Oh my God, my first semester, I finished with a 2.75 GPA. It was definitely—I just went through a lot of personal stuff. So it was hard to—it was hard to focus. I didn't

> really know how to study because I didn't really have to in high school. So, it was definitely a learning curve of everything. Of time management, organizing, studying, you know, asking for help when you needed it.
>
> Bryant: Right.
>
> Student: And it like just, you know, figuring out like, you know, school comes first instead of like going out on the weekend and not doing your homework on Sunday. Like, definitely it was a learning curve of you know, how I should function to be successful at college. And so my next semester I finished with a, I believe, hold on, I can check–spring semester I finished with a 3.70.
>
> Bryant: My gosh! Wow.
>
> Student: So yeah, I just kind of had, I had to get myself together. I was like, I worked so hard to get here and I convinced these people that I deserve here, and I can, you know, be a good student here and belong here. And I was like, I have to get it together. So I, you know, I just felt like I was letting people down that believed in me. So it was definitely like, I need to get it together, and I got it together. And then my summer GPA was a 3.85. And yeah, so it's currently a 3.4 now.

Related to the pressure to succeed and support her family, the focal student mentions her struggles with mental health symptoms several times throughout the interview. She discusses her journey with therapy, as well as her access to support at her university and need to prioritize her own wellness. These statements indicate that for the focal student, understanding and addressing her mental health needs was a large part of her journey in applying to and attending college, as well as navigating pressures throughout the experience. These portrayed mental health needs, though not necessarily a "pressure" themselves, are a product of said pressure, and therefore are situated into this dimension for the purpose of organization and clarity in this write-up. In the excerpt below, the focal student describes her relationship with a therapist during her high school years, and how that experience helped to shape her into the person she is today/determine her career path.

Student Theme: *Mental Health Matters.*

> Bryant: How did you decide what to major in? Psych and pre-med? That's hard! So where did the motivation come from to do that?
>
> Student: Um, when I was about 15 and a half or 16. After I did, like, pretty much, almost two years of therapy, my therapist was like, you know, I think we should try meds. And I was so hesitant, like I didn't want to be on meds. But I just, my parents were like, hey, this isn't really doing anything for you. You know, they said, you need to take that extra step to make you feel yourself and feel better. So you know, I gave it a chance. And that woman--her name is [Therapist Name,] she honestly saved my life. Like, I wouldn't be here without her. And I've always wanted to help other people, I just didn't know what profession I could do. I didn't know what I liked. And that was the progression of I found that I wanted to do. Like I wanted to help other people the way that she helped me.

The focal student then states that since beginning college, she has needed to make herself and her own wellness a priority. In the below excerpt, she describes her mindset in "focusing on herself" and getting into the "right headspace." She indicates that her academic success has been in part due to her ability to prioritize her mental health.

> Student: So, it's like, and I really pushed, like, last year, and hopefully, for the rest of my career to like, you know, put myself first sometimes. So, it's been a lot of focusing on me and getting myself in the right headspace. Going to therapy, taking my meds, and then that's been able to trickle into academics and you know, getting stuff all set there. And then work. It's a wonder, like, the student wellness center is a wonderful place. I'm so glad I applied here.

Summary

Ultimately, the four themes of family achievement guilt appeared in a variety of ways throughout the two focal family interviews in this study. The focal student's voice strongly punctuated the feeling of pressure throughout the entirety of her interview, while the focal parent's voice highlighted the desire for her children to be successful and have more opportunities than she and her husband had. It was very illuminating to observe that while the focal student and focal parent share similar beliefs, their perspective on the transition to college and all that goes with it differs based on their individual roles in the parent-child relationship.

The next chapter will review overall study results and describe the point of interface for the two phases of the study, followed by a section on the clinical implications of these findings to address mental health symptoms for first-generation college students. Additionally, the researcher will discuss opportunities for further research exploring the parent perspective.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

Family achievement guilt is a construct worth studying when considering the needs of first-generation college students. Previous research has extensively examined the voices of FGCS (Covarrubias et al., 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021) to gather insight on the felt obligations and pressures they experience in leaving home to attend college. That said, from a clinical standpoint, not much was known up until now about how family relationships impact the experience of this guilt. The researcher aimed to fill this gap by utilizing a contextual family therapy lens (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013) to examine how different contexts within the family unit and beyond impact the experience of family achievement guilt for FGCS. Results indicate that family relationships, specifically parent-child relationships containing more trust, equity, and care lead to higher levels of family achievement guilt when it comes time for FGCS to leave the home. These higher levels of guilt are ultimately associated with greater symptoms of depression and anxiety. These results add depth to findings from a previously conducted study (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022) which found that parent relationship quality was a stronger predictor of academic persistence than first-generation status. Taken together, these results indicate that parents should be an integral component in clinical intervention addressing mental health symptoms and guilt for FGCS, at the very least leading up to their college transition and throughout their first year of school. This section will review results for both phases of the study and connect findings to the extant literature to further punctuate this idea.

Phase One: Quantitative Recap

Between Group Differences

Although data analysis did not provide much in the way of interesting results for comparing FGCS with their continuing-generation peers, statistical differences did reveal

significance in the experience of family achievement guilt between FGCS and continuing-generation students, indicating that FGCS are more likely to experience family achievement guilt than continuing-generation students. This finding confirms previous research exploring the first-generation experience, implying that the FGCS population has a stronger sense of obligation to their family than continuing-generation students (Covarrubias et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2018). A variety of studies have examined the idea of "cultural mismatch," (Hernandez, 2018) or the dissonance first-generation college students experience between their own inclinations toward interdependence and the individualism perpetuated on university campuses when they enter academia (Stephens et al., 2012). In part, this cultural mismatch is due to a felt sense of responsibility to provide for one's family financially, gain respect, and bring "honor" to the family as the first to attain a degree (Bui, 2002). These felt obligations have been found to lead to higher stress levels and more self-inflicted pressure in an effort to gain approval and bring honor to parents (Tate et al., 2015). Study results echo this sentiment by reinforcing that FGCS are more likely to feel these pressures and ultimately, guilt related to these pressures than their continuing-generation counterparts.

It is worth conjecturing that perhaps continuing-generation college students do not feel as great a sense of obligation and pressure, and further guilt, as do FGCS in part because of the worldviews they possess. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that FGCS and continuing-generation students make choices about where to attend college based on very different values. For example, FGCS tend to choose colleges based on the ability to live at home or maintain ties to their family, while continuing-generation students are more likely to choose schools with a "good reputation." This difference in values illustrates a potential difference in priorities for each student population. Perhaps it is the difference in upbringing, or social-class differences (Jury et

al., 2014), but it appears that FGCS, in comparison with their continuing-generation peers, perceive the value of higher education differently and pursue it for different reasons. Further, once arriving at school, they worry about different things. Little research explores what continuing-generation students worry about once enrolling in school, but it is common knowledge that FGCS experience the pressure to provide financially and bring honor to their families. These differences are worth studying further and are confirmed by the results of this dissertation.

Within-Group Differences

Although within-group analyses for FGCS were restricted due to the small sample size and lack of diversity in racial groups, limited findings punctuate the need to explore differences among this population further in an attempt to abandon the literature's somewhat homogeneous perception of the FGCS experience. Four racial groups were represented in the sample within the FGCS group: Asian American, Black or African American, Latino/a, and White. Analyses showed a statistically significant difference between racial groups for only one variable of interest: attachment anxiety. These results indicate that attachment anxiety, defined as insecurity in caregiver relationships (Bowlby, 1978), varied among racial groups in this sample of FGCS. Very little research exists examining links between attachment and race, but one recent study posits that experiencing racism as a Black adolescent is associated with greater attachment avoidance (Stern et al., 2022). Results from this dissertation add to this finding by showing that race—and one can speculate the inherent experience of racism as a minoritized population—is somehow related to dysfunctional attachment. Although not much can be said with this finding due to the small sample size and the lack of generalizability, this statistically significant difference between racial groups is worth exploring further, not only for attachment style, but for

other variables of interest as well that have the potential to add further depth and complexity to our understanding of the first-generation experience. Within-group differences are important to explore to give a voice to the FGCS population, who are often perceived with a lack-mindset and thought to have a universal academic experience.

Full Sample Findings

Being that the majority of the sample identified as first-generation, more extensive analyses were conducted on the sample as a whole, rather than with a multi-group model approach. Across the entire sample, analysis revealed statistical significance between family achievement guilt and several variables both during preliminary analysis and path analysis. These statistically significant relationships included first-generation status, household income, depression, anxiety, attachment anxiety, trust/justice, and entitlement. Each of these statistically significant relationships are reviewed in the context of existing literature below.

Household Income. First, regarding household income, results revealed that lower income was associated with higher family achievement guilt. These findings support previous research that states FGCS are more likely to support their families financially, and experience pressures related to leaving their family behind/ not being able to provide for their family once enrolled in school (Covarrubias et al., 2020). Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that FGCS with higher household incomes were more likely to persist to degree than those with lower incomes, indicating that household income is an important predictor of pressure to provide and other economic constraints that have the potential to impact academic success. Keeping this in mind, it is important to consider the necessity of familial support and absolution from financial responsibility, or at least reevaluation of such, as a student prepares to move away from home. One can speculate that involving parents in the college transition, both clinically and through

institutional efforts, has the potential to ignite conversation mitigating financial pressure and responsibility, and further, alleviating guilt. Bartle-Haring et al. (2020) found that the relationship students have with their parents is a stronger predictor of persistence to degree than first-generation status. With this in mind, it makes sense that including parents in conversations about stressors and achievement guilt would have a positive impact on academic outcomes for FGCS.

Depression and Anxiety. In addition to household income, depression and anxiety were statistically related to higher levels of family achievement guilt. In essence, those students who feel guilty for leaving home are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression throughout their first year of school. This comes as no surprise and provides evidence for the need to incorporate family in clinical work supporting this population, as symptoms of anxiety and depression could be related to the guilt students experience in leaving their family behind and these pressures must be discussed and worked through. Stephens et al. (2020) found that FGCS show greater levels of cortisol, and less positive emotions than their continuing-generation peers in times of stress. They attribute this difference to the "cultural mismatch" FGCS experience in academia mentioned above. Similarly, Aspelemeir et al. (2010) found that first-generation status is a risk factor for exacerbating low self-esteem. This study provides evidence for the fact that the more guilt a student feels related to leaving their family behind, the worse their mental health is. For clinicians and administrators attempting to support college students, and more specifically FGCS, this is an important point to keep in mind during intervention. If one can employ interventions that decrease guilt, they should, in theory, be able to decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression as well. Suggestions for intervention will be outlined later in the chapter, utilizing this idea as a foundation for informing future work in this area.

Attachment Anxiety. Another variable of interest that showed a positive significant correlation with family achievement guilt was attachment anxiety. As a reminder, attachment anxiety is the experience of insecurity in caregiver relationships (Bowlby, 1978). Results of this study indicate that the more insecurity one feels in their caregiver relationship, the more guilt they feel. Although these variables were ultimately not correlated in more significant analysis, this preliminary finding is worth exploring further based on previous research findings. Mattanah et al., (2004) found that secure attachment to parents is predictive of positive academic adjustment to college. Similarly, Tubman (2002), found positive correlations between secure attachment and social competence/adjustment. It is worth noting that little research has been conducted since the early 2000's exploring attachment style and academic achievement for college students. The results of this study ignite an interest in the relationship between student wellness and attachment, specifically regarding family achievement guilt.

Changing the Narrative: Relational Ethics Matter!

Two final variables were found to be significantly related to the experience of family achievement guilt as a result of path analysis. These were two domains of relational ethics: trust/justice, and entitlement. As depicted above, first-generation status is often stigmatized with "negative" characteristics, contributing to the lack mindset for this population. While this study further confirmed this dominant narrative in a variety of ways, its results also reveal important strengths and potential for this population to thrive if they are served appropriately and adequately based on their needs. Specifically, family achievement guilt was found to be positively associated with two domains of relational ethics—trust/justice, and entitlement. As a reminder, trust/justice refers to earned or inherent trust in familial relationships, which is essential for viability. Entitlement refers to the "guarantee" of being cared for in a relationship,

simply just for existing. This study was specifically concerned with the parent-child relationship. It appears that higher trust/justice and entitlement in parent-child relationships, or higher family "viability," indicates higher levels of guilt for students as they go away to college. In other words, the more equitable the familial environment, the more guilt students feel for leaving.

So, what does this mean? And how can practitioners use these findings to their advantage in serving the FGCS population? Are more comfortable and satisfying home environments related to more difficulty leaving, and further, more guilt for first-generation college students? Virtually no research exists exploring relational ethics for college students, with the exception of one recent article examining relational ethics and alcohol use (Patton & Weigold, 2022). Results from this study indicate that relational ethics are worth paying attention to when it comes to the wellness of college students, and more specifically, FGCS. One might think that higher equitability in the home would lead to less guilt as students pursue new opportunities, but these results suggest otherwise. This paradoxical conclusion leads us to consider how the parent-child relationship can be utilized in a clinical setting to reduce guilt, and ultimately, symptoms of depression and anxiety for this population. The following section reviews qualitative findings to consider this paradox further.

Phase Two: Qualitative Recap

As mentioned in phase two, the four themes of family achievement guilt appeared in a variety of ways throughout the two focal family member's narratives. The focal student's voice strongly punctuated the feeling of pressure throughout the entirety of her interview, while the focal parent's voice highlighted the desire for her children to be successful and have more opportunities than she and her husband had. These differing perspectives highlight the dissonance between the focal parent and focal student regarding the experience of family

achievement guilt due to obligation and pressure. This dissonance is considered through a contextual lens below.

Differing Perspectives

Contextual family therapy theory posits that the more satisfied an individual is with their level of care, the more they can show care and concern for other family members (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 2013). In this way, although it seems counter-intuitive at first glance, it would make sense that students who are better cared for and feel more equity in their parent relationships have a more difficult time leaving their familial obligations behind, due to their own level of concern for family members. These results are transformative in our understanding of family achievement guilt, as they lend insight into *how* said guilt is cultivated for FGCS. It is not simply the financial strain this population faces that lends itself to this guilt, but further, the care FGCS feel they "owe" their families to maintain equability and fairness. This realization is striking and warrants further research for understanding how students interpret this fairness and the need for reciprocity in comparison with their parents.

The qualitative phase of this study revealed a stark difference in the focal student interpretation of the college experience compared to the focal parent. While the focal student stressed multiple times her felt obligation to support her mother throughout her father's illness, and her ultimate decision to attend college close to home to be accessible in case her family needed her, the focal parent made no mention of her child's felt responsibility for taking care of her or the rest of the family. Primarily, the focal parent referred to the family bond as being important in letting the focal student know that they were supported in their educational endeavors. She also mentioned the variety of ways in which she tried to set her children up for success, by connecting them to resources and providing access to information through better

schools, smart financial decisions, and volunteer efforts throughout the years. McCarron and Inkelas (2006) stress that family support for higher education should begin at a young age. The focal parent fulfilled this expectation by creating opportunities for her children with better schooling, involvement in activities, and college funds. That said, the focal parent's apparent ignorance to her child's felt pressure and obligation highlights the necessity for conversation and understanding among family members about the student's perceived role and felt expectations as they leave home for college. These findings directly contrast the individualistic push that most university settings instill through their culture. By involving parents in the transition, whether it be clinically or through university efforts, students may feel more supported and comfortable leaving the home. Scholars agree with this notion in that parental involvement in treatment for college students is recommended due to increased dependence on parents and loyalty in the family unit (Pedrelli et al., 2015). Further, parents have the potential to provide valuable information about the student to mental health providers, validating the idea of collaboration and involvement of parents in the college experience (Morris, 2021). Keeping this in mind, the next section will reveal the "point of interface" for the two phases of the study and discuss how both sets of findings can be used in tandem to inform future clinical work and research.

Point of Interface

To examine how the supplemental qualitative portion of this study intersects with the "core component" of the analysis (phase one results), it makes sense to look at the focal student's scores on measures representing the dimensions of contextual family therapy included in the accepted model, in conjunction with her scores on the family achievement guilt scale. As a reminder, first-generation status and two dimensions of relational ethics (trust/justice and entitlement) were found to be positively correlated with family achievement guilt in the overall

sample. These variables represent the "facts" and "relational ethics" dimensions of contextual family therapy theory. Family achievement guilt was also correlated with greater severity of mental health symptoms, which represent the "individual psychology" dimension of the theoretical framework. The table below reveals the focal student scores for each of the significant measures identified in phase one of analysis compared to overall scores for first-generation and continuing-generation students.

Table 10

Focal Student Scores Compared to First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Scores

Measure	Focal Student Score	First-Generation *M*	Continuing-Generation *M*
Relational Ethics			
Trust/Justice	17	19.13	18.23
Entitlement	7	9.30	9.04
Loyalty	8	9.92	10.43
Family Achievement Guilt	76.00	107.00	86.50
Mental Health Scores			
Depression	2.00	2.01	1.68
Anxiety	6.00	2.70	2.32

Family Achievement Guilt. The focal student scored a 76, or 45% on the family achievement guilt scale overall. While this number on its own is not particularly striking, scores in the specific themes of family achievement guilt are very telling. The focal student scored low on guilt related to having more privileges than her family members (12.5%) as well as becoming different than her family members (12.5%). In contrast to these results, she scored 66% in guilt related to leaving her family obligations behind, and 100% in guilt related to experiencing pressures to succeed. These scores are emphasized by two of the themes identified during qualitative analysis: "family bond is important" and "I need to be who my family needs me to be." As seen above in interview excerpts, the student emphasized the pressure she feels to succeed, both as a daughter and a student, multiple times throughout the interview.

Unsurprisingly, survey results reveal that this pressure to succeed is the primary source of her guilt. In a close second, the focal student's guilt in leaving her family behind/ not being present for family when needed comes to light with her 66% score in the family obligations domain. It appears that fears of becoming different or having "more" than her family members are not of concern for the focal student, but most prominently, she worries about not being accessible to her family when needed, and not measuring up to their expectations.

Relational Ethics. As described in the first chapter of the dissertation, trust/justice refers to either earned or inherent trust and fairness in viable familial relationships (Gurman & Kniskern, 1996). The focal student scored a 17, or 71% in this domain. In the entitlement domain, which refers to the "guarantee" of being cared for in a relationship (Gurman & Kniskern), the student scored a 7, or 58%. Finally, in the loyalty domain, or the existing bond between parents and children (Gurman & Kniskern), the student scored an 8, or 67%. While loyalty was not found to be positively correlated with family achievement guilt in the overall sample, it is worth noting the focal student's score in this domain, which further affirms her belief in the importance of the familial bond as depicted in her interview. The high scores across all three domains of relational ethics indicate perceived familial trust, fairness and equitability, and overall "functionality" of the focal family unit, according to contextual family therapy. This functionality is punctuated by two themes that emerged in the inductive coding process: "family bond is important," and "we are the same." That said, considering this perception, trends across the sample overall as well as for the focal student specifically indicate that higher scores of relational ethics are related to higher scores of family achievement guilt. In this way, it appears that students who perceive greater trust, fairness, and equitability in their familial relationships experience more guilt when going away to school.

Mental Health Symptoms. In representation of the "individual psychology" dimension of contextual family therapy, the focal student scored very low on the depression symptoms scale, and severe on the anxiety symptoms scale used in this study. The focal student's anxiety scores follow trends in the overall sample, indicating that family achievement guilt is associated with higher anxiety symptoms. As mentioned above, family achievement guilt was found to mediate depression and anxiety symptoms and trust/justice, as well as depression and anxiety symptoms and entitlement. Several times throughout the interview, the student mentions her mental health symptoms as playing an important role in her collegiate journey. Two identified themes, "access to resources matters" and "mental health matters," highlight her belief that it is important to take advantage of resources provided on campus for advocacy and support, as well as to address mental health symptoms overall for better quality of life. The focal student describes her experience with a therapist during her teenage years, and how helpful that relationship was for her. In addition, she describes how she struggled in her first semester of college and was able to "pull it together" and succeed, indicating that her anxiety symptoms were prominent, but addressed through her access to resources and support over the course of her first year. The focal student interview highlights the fact that increased symptoms of anxiety are characteristic of the first-generation experience, echoing survey results. When considering how to work with families similar to the focal family in therapy, a variety of clinical implications come to mind—specifically, utilizing contextual family therapy techniques as the main intervention.

Clinical Implications

Considering the contrast in perspectives between the focal student and focal parent illustrated above, it would be important in a clinical setting for the therapist to address these

differences by fostering productive conversation among family members exploring felt pressures, expectations, and ultimately guilt. According to contextual family therapy, it is the responsibility of the therapist to appear interested, curious, and engaged within the therapy room to encourage honest, open communication (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). Through these means, the therapist can help family members begin to consider other perspectives within the family. As mentioned, the contextual framework delineates change as being achieved through trustworthiness and fairness. The therapist approaches change and understanding by encouraging family members to share their perceptions of equity and what it means to provide the care that one another is entitled to. In the case of the focal student, it would be important for her to know that her mother does not expect her to take care of the family, contrary to what she believes to be true. Similarly, it would be important for the focal parent to understand that her daughter feels this pressure, and even based her college decisions off her felt need to be accessible to her parents while away at school. The therapist might achieve this understanding through the three identified tasks of contextual family therapy.

The first of these tasks is to extend acknowledgement. By acknowledging each family member's pain, the injustice enacted upon them, and the suffering they experience as a result, the therapist fosters trust and communication in the room. Modeling acknowledgement is a means of showing family members the benefit of extending each other the same courtesy. The therapist often achieves this through the second task, which is to possess multi-directed partiality (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). Multi-directed partiality is defined as the therapist taking sides with each family member in a sequential, well-considered manner. In doing this, the therapist is not neutral, but rather an advocate for all. The therapist endorses each family member and their own stories. Through this endorsement and exploration of entitlements, the therapist achieves the third task,

known as exoneration. In this task, it is the therapist's role to dispel shame, blame, and contempt that may be hanging over family members' heads after being inherited from previous generations. Exoneration involves letting go of grudges and examining past loyalties (Gurman and Kniskern, 1992). Each of these three tasks is necessary for ultimately fostering trustworthiness and fairness in the family as members set their own goals for what they hope for future transactions to look like among them.

Keeping these three therapeutic "tasks" in mind, a clinician might engage parents and children in therapy together to encourage them to acknowledge each other's perspective. Using the strong family relationship as an advantage in intervention, the therapist can attempt to exonerate FGCS of the guilt they feel related to needing to provide for their family and continue to fill previous roles even after leaving for school. If clinicians can reduce family achievement guilt in a therapeutic setting by enhancing acknowledgement and understanding among family members, then in theory, symptoms of depression and anxiety should also decrease. Those students with better mental health and less felt pressures and obligations to home should have an easier time persisting in academia and acquiring a college degree. With all of that said, this study does not provide enough evidence to say for sure that trust/justice and entitlement are linked to higher family achievement guilt for the overall FGCS population. Further research opportunities are discussed below.

Research Implications

While this study made headway in beginning the conversation surrounding variables related to family achievement guilt, as a cross-sectional study it did little to determine the directionality of the relationships among the variables. In other words, it is difficult to determine which came first—the family achievement guilt or the strong relational ethics? Future research

might include a longitudinal design to examine the same group of students several times over the course of their first year of college. This would help bring clarity to the development of family achievement guilt and lend insight into if/ how it changes over time.

Generally, further research should be conducted with a larger sample to study family achievement guilt scores in relation to demographic information, specifically race, to explore cultural expectations and contextual differences impacting guilt that are gleaned from one's position in society. In addition to racial differences, it would be interesting to explore differences among gender identities to garner how gender roles might impact the experience of guilt and felt obligation to the family unit. While the "facts" dimension revealed little statistical differences in this study, it is worth noting that a larger, more diverse sample might provide results of significance that would lead to more understanding for how the FGCS experience varies and cannot be generalized across different held identities.

Further, it would be of value to study FGCS more significantly in comparison with their continuing-generation peers, to perhaps challenge the notion that FGCS are "worse off" than their counterparts. Much of the rhetoric surrounding FGCS implies that FGCS are disadvantaged, less successful, and more likely to fail to persist to degree than continuing generation students. Results of this study revealed that FGCS are strong in their familial relationships, which establishes the foundation for a narrative of strengths and positive attributes. Building off this foundation would be helpful in dissolving the superior-inferior dichotomy when discussing FGCS success and ability in comparison with their continuing-generation peers.

Finally, future research should focus on the parent perspective in a more significant way to gain insight into how and why the parent perspective differs so starkly from the student perspective in relation to family achievement guilt, and more specifically, the obligations FGCS

feel to provide for their families after leaving home. Again, the qualitative portion of this study illustrated that the parent had a very different perspective on the decision-making process and transition to college than did the focal student. Further qualitative study of parent voices would provide greater insight into how parents perceive the experience, specifically parents of FGCS. Overall, this study provides a starting point for further research of within-group differences for FGCS to richen the narrative about the FGCS experience, as well as a foundation for exploring FGCS in a strengths-oriented way in comparison with continuing-generation students. Maybe most importantly, though, this study provides a catalyst for understanding the parent perspective more, which is vastly understudied in the literature.

Limitations of Current Study

When interpreting the results of this study, limitations must be considered. First, at 121 survey participants, the phase one sample size was smaller than intended or hoped for. With data collection occurring over the summer, the researcher had trouble recruiting participants and ultimately, the final sample contained duplicates and incomplete responses warranting removal prior to analysis. Difficulty recruiting participants could be because students check their email less frequently over the summer and are less attentive in general to university matters. Being that the researcher was interested in the first-year transition specifically, data collection was timed to take place throughout the second semester of the first year. IRB-approval delays and revisions pushed collection back further than originally intended, and this was reflected in the final sample numbers.

In addition to lower participant numbers, many who did participate in the project failed to answer questions in the survey, leaving some responses partially incomplete. As mentioned above, the researcher eliminated all survey responses that were completed in less than five

minutes. Those cases that remained in the sample with missing data prevented the researcher from conducting bootstrapping, and further, from generalizing study results to the overall population. The inability to generalize these findings, paired with the small sample size in this study, warrants significant further study to test the relationship between relational ethics, family achievement guilt, and mental health symptoms.

While almost all the measures used for data collection showed good reliability, the loyalty domain of relational ethics did not. This made it difficult to analyze the relationship between loyalty and family achievement guilt with any certainty. Additionally, the analysis overall was simple, and the model was very straightforward. More detailed analysis would need to be conducted to examine the confounding relationship between socioeconomic status and first-generation status, the mediation effects of family achievement guilt on the relationship between relational ethics and mental health, and finally, the residual variance of family achievement guilt and mental health symptoms not accounted for in their relationship with relational ethics in the accepted model. As mentioned above, the confounding effects generate curiosity regarding whether or not family achievement guilt is truly related to first-generation status or is rather related to household income, and therefore, it is difficult to say with much certainty whether or not first-generation status is related to family achievement guilt, or if it is related to household income. While this study is a good starting point, the limitations posed in data collection prevent a variety of further analyses and ultimately, generalizations from being made.

Another limitation to consider is the lack of diversity in race across the sample. At the outset, the researcher was interested in adding greater depth to the first-generation college student label by looking at within-group differences, most specifically regarding race. While preliminary analysis was conducted, results showed statistically significant differences only for

attachment anxiety, and are not generalizable or particularly reliable. Further research should be more intentional about collecting not only a larger quantity of data but more diversity in race, as well as more of a balance between first-generation and continuing-generation participants. Overall, this study is a good starting point and illustrates potential relationships that warrant further study, but this sample was not substantial enough to draw any generalizable conclusions with much certainty.

Conclusions

In essence, the results of this study indicate that the first-generation experience in academia is far more complex than it is often made out to be. There is much left to be discovered as it relates to within-group differences and the parent-child relationship for this population. That said, this study opened the door to challenge the lack-mindset often adopted when considering the FGCS experience. This was accomplished largely through the discovery of strong relational ethics for this population.

Utilizing a contextual lens allowed the researcher to examine the experience of family achievement guilt from multiple angles. The field of human development and family science adopts a systemic paradigm, considering different levels of context and their interactions, and how they impact the human experience. As a "systems thinker" and a contextual therapist, the researcher was pleased to see that theoretical framework chosen for the dissertation ultimately succeeded in punctuating the importance of the parent-child relationship during the academic experience. These findings provide justification for contextual theory's use in a clinical setting when working with the FGCS population. If clinicians can utilize trust, equity, and care in the therapy room to facilitate open and honest conversations about guilt and felt obligations, FGCS should feel more confident persisting in school, and further, symptoms of depression and anxiety

should decrease. Findings of this study will hopefully inform clinical and intervention work for professionals working with first-generation college students, as well as future research examining the diversity and complexity of experience within the first-generation population and in comparison, to their continuing-generation peers.

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Appendix A

Family Achievement Guilt Scale

Family Achievement Guilt Scale

Instructions: College is a time when students experience a lot of ups and downs. The following statements highlight some challenging emotions students might feel as they compare their experiences in college with their experiences back home. Students might feel these emotions despite the support they receive from close others back home (e.g., parents, legal guardians, siblings).

Carefully read each statement below and rate the extent to which you agree with these statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Response Options: (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Somewhat Disagree (4) Somewhat Agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly Agree

1. g1- I feel pressured to do well so as to not disappoint my family
2. g2- I feel bad if my family thinks that I am not doing well in college (e.g., academically, socially, mentally)
3. g3- I worry that I won't be able to meet the expectations of my family
4. g4- I worry that I won't be able to repay my family for their investment in me (e.g., working long hours, educational support)
5. g5- I worry that I won’t be able to succeed in college for my family
6. g7- I feel bad for focusing on school when there are problems at home
7. g8- I worry I am neglecting family or responsibilities back home when I am away at school
8. g10- I feel uncomfortable talking about my academic goals in front of my family
9. g11- I worry that my family sees me differently now that I am in college
10. g12- I worry that my family thinks I am too good for them or smarter than them
11. g13- I feel frustrated when my family thinks I'm "all that" now that I'm in college
12. g14- I feel sad that family cannot experience the opportunities I have in college
13. g16- I feel conflicted that I have more freedom in college than family members have back home
14. g17- I feel bad that my family didn't have the opportunity to go to college
15. g18- I feel sad that I have more opportunities (e.g., learning new material, attending social events) in college than family members have back home
16. g19- I feel bad that I have benefits in college (e.g., freedom, privacy) that my family does not
17. g20- I feel bad that I have it pretty good in college while family members struggle
18. g21- I feel sad when I hear about struggles back home while I'm away at college
19. g22- I feel angry that my family doesn't have access to the same kind of opportunities that I do
20. g23- I feel sad when I can't help with challenges back home
21. g24- I worry about my family back home since I am not there anymore
22. g25- I feel bad that I am not there when my family needs me
23. g26- It bothers me when school keeps me from participating in activities back home
24. g27- I feel bad for leaving home to pursue my interests in college
25. g28- I feel frustrated when I am not in the loop about challenges back home
26. g29- I feel bothered when I can't help my family because of school
27. g31- I feel bad when my school responsibilities prevent me from helping out at home
28. g32- I feel bad for not being able to fulfill my responsibilities back home
29. g35- I feel bad because going to college means many sacrifices from my family

30. g36- I feel sad when my family doesn't seem to understand my college experiences
31. g37- I worry if my family thinks that I'm changing in college
32. g39- I feel bad when my family thinks that college is changing me
33. g40- I feel bad when I disagree with the opinions of my family, even if I keep it to myself
34. g41- I feel sad that my family is not exposed to the things I'm learning in college

Appendix B

Relational Ethics Scale

Relational Ethics Scale

Directions: This scale is designed to measure some of the emotions that:
-existed in the family in which you were raised.
-currently exist in one of your other relationships.

Please rate the following statements on a sale of 1 to 5:
1. I could trust my family to seek my best interests.
2. Individuals in my family were blamed for problems that were not their fault.
3. Pleasing one of my parents often meant displeasing the other.
4. I received the love and affection from my family I deserved.
5. No matter what happened, I always stood by my family.
6. At times, it seemed one or both of my parents disliked me.
7. Love and warmth were given equally to all family members.
8. At times, I was used by my family unfairly.
9. I felt my life was dominated by my parents' desires.
10. Individuals in my family were willing to give of themselves to benefit the family.
11. I continue to seek closer relationships with my family.
12. I often felt deserted by my family.

5 = STRONGLY AGREE with the statement.
4 = AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT.
3 = NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE with the statement.
2 = DISAGREE with the statement.
1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement.

Appendix C

Experiences in Close Relationships Scale

ECR-RS

This questionnaire is designed to assess the way in which you mentally represent important people in your life. You'll be asked to answer questions about your parents, your romantic partners, and your friends. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement by circling a number for each item.

Please answer the following questions considering your parent relationships
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1. It helps to turn to this person in times of need.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

2. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this person.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

3. I talk things over with this person.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

4. I find it easy to depend on this person.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

5. I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

6. I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

7. I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

8. I'm afraid that this person may abandon me.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

9. I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about him or her.
strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly agree

Appendix D

Family Distance Regulation Scales

Family Distance Regulation Items

Healthy Separation in the Family (revised from Healthy Separation from the SITA)

Scale: 1= strongly agree
2= generally agree
3= slightly agree
4= generally disagree
5= strongly disagree

Adolescent Version

1. Even though I'm very close to my mother/father, I feel I can be myself.
2. I feel so comfortable with my mother/father that I can tell him/her anything.
3. My mother/father and I have some common interests and some differences.
4. I am comfortable with some degree of conflict with my mother/father.
5. Although I'm like my mother/father in some ways we're also different from each other in other ways.
6. While I like to get along with my mother/father, if I disagree with something he/she is doing, I usually feel free to say so.

Connectedness within the Family (Revised from The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised: Lee, Draper & Lee, 2001)

Adolescent Version

Scale: 1 2 3 4 5 6
Agree Disagree

1. I feel distant from my mother/father.
2. I don't feel related to my mother/father most of the time.
3. I feel like an outsider with my mother/father.
4. I feel close to my mother/father.
5. Even around my mother/father, I don't feel that I really belong.
6. I am able to relate to my mother/father.
7. I feel understood by my mother/father.
8. I see my mother/father as friendly and approachable.
9. I have little sense of togetherness with my mother/father.

Appendix E

Mental Health Scales

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

	Not at all	Several Days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things. (1)	○	○	○	○
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless. (2)	○	○	○	○
3. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge. (3)	○	○	○	○
4. Not being able to control or stop worrying. (4)	○	○	○	○

Appendix F

Interview Transcripts

Student Interview Transcript

Bryant: So, I'm Ali, I'm a doc student here at [This university] and I am in my last semester. My PhD is going to be in Human Development and Family Science. I am a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. That's what I do full time, primarily. But, before that, I was a college administrator. So I worked primarily with first-generation, first-year college students and their parents during that first year of college. And I'm really interested in how our parent relationships and the stuff that happened in our house growing up impacts how we adjust to college and what college is like for us.

And so today, I'm going to talk to you a little bit just about your own experiences growing up as a first-generation college student. Everything we talk about today is de-identified. So that means like, anything you say, your name isn't attached to it. Your mom has no knowledge of what you and I talk about. If it's published in the dissertation, and she does read it, then she'll be able to kind of put two and two together like, oh, [student name] probably said that [laughs.] But that's just something to keep in mind, is that this stays as confidential as it possibly can. So does that all sound okay, something that you're still willing to participate in today?

Student: Yeah.

Bryant: Cool. All right. So, I want to know a little bit about you to start. What year are you?

Student: I'm a second year currently here.

Bryant: Okay. Awesome. What are you majoring in?

Student: I'm psych on the pre-med track.

Bryant: Oh, very cool. Okay. And you're first-generation. Is that correct?

Student: Yes.

Bryant: Cool. So talk to me a little bit, to start, about your household growing up. Who lived in your house growing up?

Student: Um, mom and dad, brother and sister and I. My brother is six years older than I am. So he moved out of the house to go to college in 2015.

Bryant: And how old is your sister?

Student: My sister is two years younger than me. So she is a current freshman in college.

Bryant: Okay, so you're in the middle.

Student: Yeah.

Bryant: And so talk to me a little bit about your relationships with your family members growing up. Your parents, your siblings.

Student: Um, me and my sister, we've always gotten along. We're like best friends. Um, it was kind of a little hard with my brother. Not that we didn't get along. It was just kind of, you know, six years older is a big age gap. And so he was kind of out of the house when I like, you know, was fully aware of my surroundings and what was going on. But we became closer as I've, you know, started attending college. So that bond is being really connected right now.

Yeah, so I would say I definitely have, you know, a good healthy relationship with my siblings. My parents. Um, I mean, my dad and I kind of butt heads because we're kind of stubborn. But me and my mom, we get along really well. I still do get along well with my dad. Sometimes we just butt heads. But yeah, overall, the family dynamic was really good. There really weren't any issues with us. We're a pretty good family and we get along really well and enjoy each other.

Bryant: That's awesome. Um, so you all got along pretty well. You enjoy each other, and so where did you grow up? Where's home for you?

Student: Um, home has always been the [Midwestern suburb] for me. I mean, that was the first house my mom and dad ever bought, and the only one they will keep. So I went to go to [Midwestern Suburb's school district] for only like a second that I can remember. And then I went to [Other suburb] up until sixth grade, and then in sixth grade I moved to [Highly rated school district] and then I finished out my schooling career at [Highly rated school district.] And then so I've kind of, I've kind of moved a little bit, but I've always had the [Midwestern suburb] and that's always been like *home* home to me.

Bryant: Okay, yeah. Yeah. So talk to me a little bit about that. You moved from [Midwestern suburb] then went to [Another suburb.] Then you went to [Highly rated school district.] And your whole family moved there, and you all went to school there?

Student: It was me and my sister. So, we all moved to [Another suburb,] and my brother was a senior. And I was in sixth grade, and my sister was in fifth grade. Me and my sister went to [Highly rated school district,] my parents bought a house and we moved to [Highly rated school district.] My brother went to [Midwestern suburb] school since we had a house there. So yeah, but we did move as a family. He just kind of aged out before we did. Yeah, yeah.

Bryant: How did you like [Highly rated school-district?]

Student: Um, socially, it wasn't great. It wasn't great, but I'm very thankful that I did go to [Highly rated school district.]

Bryant: Sure.

Student: I don't know if you've ever heard of [Highly rated school district.] and the stereotypes that come with it—

Bryant: Yes.

Student: So you understand. So, I am very like, like, the experience was good. I, you know, at least I had, you know, I had this wonderful opportunity to go to [Highly rated school district,] get, you know, that education, and do pretty well, and graduate from there. But socially, it was a little hard since I did move in sixth grade. And like, all of these kids have known each other for years, their parents have known each other for years. It's a very generational community. Everyone comes back when they have kids. So, it was kind of, I went in and out of friends, but I met my best friend and I'm still friends with for four years now, my sophomore year in high school. So yeah, that's probably the best social aspect was meeting her.

Bryant: So you got one really good friend out of the deal. And yeah, you got a good education.

Student: Right. Yeah.

Bryant: So it had its pros and cons is what I'm hearing.

Student: Yeah. But, overall, I was, you know, truly fortunate and blessed to be able to attend [Highly rated school district,] and, you know, that definitely opened up a lot of doors for me in Higher Education.

Bryant: Sure. Absolutely. Yeah. Okay, so high school, or most middle school and high school were spent in [Highly rated school district.] And then you, you lived there with your parents and your sister, and your brother had kind of aged out at that point.

Talk to me about throughout the high school years and the end of those middle school years. How would you describe your level of closeness with your parents? I know you mentioned you're pretty close with your mom, maybe a little closer than your dad, but what was your relationship like with them across those high school years?

Student: Um, it was definitely it was a little rough. I was like, you know, being a teenager. I was a teenager. Definitely made some mistakes. So things were kind of, there was tension between us for a little while. But overall, like, Junior, Senior, freshman year (of college), now, we've kind of like bonded much more and the bond is, you know, there's no more tension. So, yeah. We moved on from the tension, and we've gotten a lot closer. From junior year on.

Bryant: Sure. Yeah. What do you think changed in junior year? That kind of eased some of that tension a little bit?

Student: I think I just, I just grew up mentally.

Bryant: Yeah. Yeah, a little bit of that teenage brain started to subside a little bit.

Student: Yeah, I definitely had to grow up a little quicker than, you know, most kids.

Bryant: Yeah. So I'm hearing you say that you didn't really have a choice. You kind of just decided okay, like, I need to get it together. I need to just grow up a little bit. I don't have an option.

Student: Yeah, definitely. It was a learning curve in all aspects of my life. But yeah.

Bryant: yeah. So you've definitely gotten closer with your parents since coming to college, you'd say like, some of that distance, maybe has helped a little bit and growing your bond?

Student: I think, at least with my dad, my dad just came out of remission, like, the summer going into my freshman year of college. So basically, a good amount of senior year he had cancer. So, it was kind of this "is my dad gonna live or die" situation, and like, we've just gotten closer, the whole family has gotten closer just, you know, bonding over this horrible situation. And then, you know, being able to see the other side has definitely, you know, strengthened our bond to realize, you know, life can be taken away. In a matter of seconds.

Bryant: Absolutely. Yeah. So your dad being super sick, and just realizing like, there's so many things in life, that just aren't worth being upset over, right, and that forced you to grow up pretty quick and realize that life can be over in a second. Your family kind of came together.

Parent: Yeah, definitely. Not that my mom completely, like, pulled out of the world, but she kind of disassociated a little bit. You know, obviously, being married for almost 30 years, seeing your partner go through that. And maybe, you know, that realization came a little early, maybe. So I definitely had to, you know, step up and take care of the house, take care of my sister, make sure everything that I could be taken care of was taken care of for her. And just overall, basically, you know, helping with my dad, and it was during COVID. And I was going to school. So you know, you know, keeping the house clean, everything sanitized, making sure I'm not, you know, within six feet of him. Wearing masks, double masking. So yeah.

Bryant: That's so much.

Student: It was a lot. And I was also, you know, junior year, I kind of grew up a little bit because, you know, my GPA wasn't great. And basically the bottom line growing up was, like, you kids are going to college. So I really just like had to buckle down and get my stuff together. And you know, start thinking about college and how to apply and all these different things. And I spent junior year and senior year working my butt off.

Bryant: So you're working to get your GPA up, you're taking care of your dad and your family and doing the things around the house that maybe your mom couldn't at that point. And yeah, you're also just trying to navigate a pandemic and all of it at all at one time. And so
I heard you say like, it was kind of the expectation that you would go to college. So that was something that you were like, okay, I've got to buckle down and figure this out.

Student: Right.

Bryant: So what did you know about college growing up?

Student: I literally just thought it was a basically a resort away from your parents where you party all the time. It was an option to go to class. It was just, it was like how college is portrayed in the movies. It's all it's all fun and games, you know. And, you know, my brother, he, he went to college, but I just wasn't aware of, you know, his experience at the time. Because I was so young. So it was just kind of an always expectation to go to college. Since you know, my parents didn't. And they realize, you know, how much a college education is valuable now.

Bryant: Sure.

Student: Yeah. So, yeah.

Bryant: Yeah. So, from their perspective, it sounds like it was really valuable to them that you would go to college. Like that was what you would do once you graduated from high school. So how did they talk to you about college growing up?

Student: Not a lot. Honestly. I was in my college counselor's office at the high school pretty much every day.

Bryant: Oh, wow.

Student: I didn't know anything about anything. So I was, you know, like, where, like, where do I have a chance like, how do you do all of this, like, how do you do all these essays, plus your main college essay, like the supplemental ones, and the main one. How do you put in all your information and how do you do the FASFA? How do you do it? How do you figure out room and board? And just all the questions you could possibly think of were me asking her, because I didn't know. My brother was able to help a little bit with FASFA. But overall, it was me figuring it out from asking someone else and telling my parents.

Bryant: Oh, wow. So you kind of leaned really hard into that college counselor. Like you, you asked them pretty much all the questions, everything that you didn't know, and then you would bring that information back to your parents once you learned what you needed to do.

Student: Yeah, and basically, you know, I just told my parents like, hey, they would ask like, like, "How are the essays going?" But not too much, because I don't think they really understood. So, it was definitely leaning into her. And she was like, my rock for like, a year and a half, figuring it out, because like, I didn't even know you had to send a grade release to the college for your last semester of high school. Making sure that was right and it was like that with like literally every single form. I signed by myself. I was 18. So like, I had to do it. So every single form I did, I made probably drove her crazy, making sure it was correct and making sure everything's just perfect. Absolutely perfect. Yeah. So yeah.

Bryant: Yeah. So you were concerned with everything being perfect. Making sure you weren't missing anything, making sure like you did everything right, that you were supposed to be doing.

Student: Right, because I didn't want to screw up any chance that I had of getting into college. Yeah.

Bryant: And so you mentioned that your parents expected that you would go? How do they feel about college overall?

Student: Um, I don't really think they have any negative attitudes towards it. Besides how they nickel and dime you for stuff, and the housing stuff is so expensive. But they just kind of, you know, at the end of the day, realize like, that's an investment that's needed for my child. So that's how it's gonna go. So, there's really no negative attitudes towards it. It's more like, you know, just making sure we're on top of everything and that our grades are good. Because my, my brother, you know, was focusing too much on partying than going to class. So, yeah, definitely my dad. My mom doesn't really ask anything about college besides, like, "Are you okay?" But my dad's definitely, you know, on us, you know, just making sure we're studying, making sure we're, you know, right in that headspace of, you know, getting a degree and not messing around.

Bryant: So your dad is a little bit more attentive to how you're doing in school, you would say? A little more strict maybe when it comes to checking in.

Student: I would say just attentive, I wouldn't say strict because, you know, I was treated like an adult in the house since I was 18. So, it's just like, you know, reminding me, not trying to be a micromanager. You know what I mean? And I wouldn't, I wouldn't say my mom, like, doesn't care. I just don't think she understands all of it. You know? Yeah, she cares. But like, this stuff doesn't make sense to her.

Bryant: Right. Right. Yeah. So you mentioned neither of them went to college. Is that correct?

Student: They got married right out of high school.

Bryant: Married right out of high school, and then what are both of them doing for a living?

Student: currently, um, my dad is a realtor and a property manager and my mom's also a property manager.

Bryant: And is that what they've done forever?

Student: Um, my mom was a stay-at-home mom for up until probably fifth or sixth grade for me. So I would say in 2015, she really got a job as a property manager and did that from then on, but she was a stay-at-home mom for a long time. My dad worked at Best Buy up until my brother was born. And then he became a realtor. So they've been doing, you know, working in the housing area for 20 plus years.

Bryant: Okay. Yeah. So for them, they were able to figure out a career without having attended college. For you, it was the expectation that you would go, and it was a good financial investment for you to get a degree. And so you mentioned the counselor at school. Is there

anyone else you spoke to about attending college or anyone else that kind of gave you some insight into what it would be like?

Student: I mean, I like, did some group talks with, like, current students that the school would host. I would just watch videos since I couldn't tour the schools, but like, you know, I would hear about all these clubs that they have, and, you know, the different buildings they have, all this like, stat stuff, I would constantly look up.

Bryant: Yeah. So it was different applying during the pandemic, right, because you couldn't go and see anything?

Student: No, I swear, spring break happened. And I didn't come back until after winter break of senior year. And it was still, you know, we were doing a hybrid schedule up until the spring break. So I was probably in high school fully for like, less than two months.

Bryant: Wow.

Student: Yeah. So everything was online.

Bryant: Right. And you were kind of navigating it on your own. And your parents only knew what they knew. So you were using resources that you could find? That sounds like that was pretty much up to you to figure out what you were doing and how to apply?

Student: Oh, yeah. It was definitely up to me. Yeah.

Bryant: So how did you decide what college to go to?

Student: Um, I, you know, I applied to, I think, eight different schools. I always wanted to do out of state, just like, you know, being away from your parents, being that typical teenager, and being away from your parents and whatever. So, it was between [This University] and [Another University]. And my dad, you know, got cancer around the time it was, you know, coming to the deadline of making a decision on where you're gonna go. So I was, you know, heavily leaning towards [Another University], and then I, you know, decided to stay and choose [This University]. And then I got, I got rejected, and I submitted an appeal. And I won the appeal, and I was able to attend [This University].

Bryant: Oh, wow.

Student: Yeah.

Bryant: So, location was a big part of it.

Student: It was just location, because, you know, I didn't know what was going to happen. And I didn't want to get be a phone call away and a plane ride away, if something happened. So it was definitely like, location and just making sure like, I could take care of things or like, not me myself, but I could be able to be help, if need be.

Bryant: I wonder, did your parents ever explicitly ask you for help? Or was this something you kind of just felt like you needed to do on your own?

Student: No one. You know, there's always been an expectation of like doing chores? We've always done chores. I think, you know, I kind of took it upon myself, because when my mom like—m my dad had surgery to remove the tumor, and my mom was the only one allowed to visit. And she came home around like 10 o'clock at night, and I've never seen my mom like the way she was when she walked in that door. And I just kind of realized, like, I definitely need to step up. And like, you know, make sure my stuff is together, make sure you know, [sister's name] is taken care of. And I'm just doing things to take stuff off her plate. So, you know, it was never, I was never really asked, I just kind of took it upon myself.

Bryant: And so when you first decided to attend [This University] you were rejected? And what was that appeal process like for you? What did you have to do in that process?

Student: I probably went through, I probably called [This university] maybe like, 200 times. Not kidding. I went through so many different people. Basically, when I got the correct information for how to submit an appeal, I, you know, had to, I had a recommendation letter from the college counselor that was close with one of the appeal committee members. She wrote a letter for me, and I wrote an essay on why I believed I should be here. And why I deserved to be there. And I had all this documentation of, you know, that counseling was a big part for me. So I, you know, needed that, and there were resources here that, you know, would really benefit me. And so, I had all my mental health documentation, I had the copies of the essay, and the letter that my college counselor sent. And, yeah, I submitted it to a man who sent it out over email. And he was like, we should have a decision in like, three to five days, and I was like, All right. This is, this is it. And I, you know, I told my college counselor and she literally helped me gather a whole folder to, you know, make sure everything was sent over that they needed. And I had a copy of it. She edited everything, like my both of my essays. So, yeah, and then I you know, I woke up at 12:30am. And I had an email that was from two minutes ago that they accepted my appeal, and I got in.

Bryant: Wow.

Student: Yeah.

Bryant: How did you feel once you got that decision?

Student: I like, I like, when I tell you, it didn't sink in for me, I was just like, I was, I was speechless. Like, it just didn't sink in for me at all until I got here. I was definitely like, excited to like, go. It was like, okay, I'm going to college. But it wasn't like, oh, I'm going to [This University.] Like, it was just kind of like, okay, that's done and over with.

Bryant: Yeah. And so what was that like for you? The transition to college once you got here. Talk to me a little bit about your first year.

Student: Oh my God, my first semester, I finished with a 2.75 GPA. It was definitely—I just went through a lot of personal stuff. So it was hard to—it was hard to focus. I didn't really know how to study because I didn't really have to in high school. So, it was definitely a learning curve of everything. Of time management, organizing, studying, you know, asking for help when you needed it.

Bryant: Right.

Student: And it like just, you know, figuring out like, you know, school comes first instead of like going out on the weekend and not doing your homework on Sunday. Like, definitely it was a learning curve of you know, how I should function to be successful at college. And so my next semester I finished with a, I believe, hold on, I can check–spring semester I finished with a 3.70.

Bryant: My gosh! Wow.

Student: So yeah, I just kind of had, I had to get myself together. I was like, I worked so hard to get here and I convinced these people that I deserve here, and I can, you know, be a good student here and belong here. And I was like, I have to get it together. So I, you know, I just felt like I was letting people down that believed in me. So it was definitely like, I need to get it together, and I got it together. And then my summer GPA was a 3.85. And yeah, so it's currently a 3.4 now.

Bryant: Wow. That's amazing.

Student: Thank you.

Bryant: What's that look like to get it together? Like, what did you have to do to get it together for that second semester?

Student: I, I honestly don't know. Like, I was going through a restraining order process. And I, you know, I like, I felt like I wanted people to feel that they could believe in me. And my ability. And like, I wanted to prove people wrong. I wanted like, because I felt like, they doubt me now that I like, you know, finished this horribly. That to me, that was horrible. That was like, absolutely devastating. I was so, just, that was awful for me. And I was like, I, you know, like, I want these, I want to prove them wrong. I want to prove everyone wrong. I want to do this because like, in high school, like, you know, I was like, I'm doing the same thing. I was in high school, like, you know, not doing that great. And I don't want to be picking myself up out of the mud starting junior year.

So it was, you know, making sure homework was done before I went out and had fun. It was it was learning how to study correctly. Like I would watch videos from my course that I took that put videos on how to study on Carmen. And it was making sure I was filling out my planner, and all the homework was done to the best of my ability. Like say I had unlimited attempts, and I like just kept trying it until I got full points. It was making sure I always got full points on stuff. It was asking questions all the time. If I didn't understand something, it was reaching out for help.

Like, in any aspect. And a lot of it was like taking meds and going to therapy too. So I really had to hunker down on myself mentally, to, you know, function academically.

Bryant: Interesting. Yeah. So I heard you say like, you're going through a restraining order process. You were feeling as though with your grades, you were letting people down? And you were wanting to prove people wrong? And so whose face came into your mind when you were like, I gotta prove them wrong? Or I want these people to believe in me, like, who were you thinking about most?

Student: It's basically this idea that I don't want to be a statistic. I won't go into detail. I'm sure you can figure it out. But I didn't want to be a statistic. And it was just like, this imaginary group of people that like, you know, are wanting me to fail and waiting for me to fail. And I wanted to just prove this imaginary group of people that are looming over me. You know, waiting for my downfall. I wanted to prove them wrong. Yeah.

Bryant: Yeah. So you were like, alright, I'm gonna get my grades in order. I'm gonna get my mental health in order, and I'm gonna prove these people wrong. And I'm going to do better. And yeah, like leaps and bounds better. And so, I want to know, like, how did you decide what to major in? Psych and pre-med? That's hard! So where did the motivation come from to do that?

Student: Um, when I was about 15 and a half or 16. After I did, like, pretty much, almost two years of therapy, my therapist was like, you know, I think we should try meds. And I was so hesitant, like I didn't want to be on meds. But I just, my parents were like, hey, this isn't really doing anything for you. You know, they said, you need to take that extra step to make you feel yourself and feel better. So you know, I gave it a chance. And that woman--her name is [Therapist Name,] she honestly saved my life. Like, I wouldn't be here without her. And I've always wanted to help other people, I just didn't know what profession I could do. I didn't know what I liked. And that was the progression of I found that I wanted to do. Like I wanted to help other people the way that she helped me. Because like, like mental illness my mom has it. She struggles with it a lot. And she's been struggling for a long time. My sister struggles with it, too. I struggle with it. So it's definitely like important to me that people who struggle get help, and I hate watching people struggle. Yeah. So it’s a way that I can help and is also interesting for me.

Bryant: Yeah, yeah. That's awesome. So kind of some personal experiences led you to what you wanted to major in. And it sounds like kind of seeing stuff happen in your family growing up and also experiencing it on your own. And I heard you say, like, you don't like to see other people hurting. I’m kind of picking up on that as we talk here. Like, it's almost as you want to help people in any way that you can, right? Or like, you take that on yourself, too.

Student: I will bend myself backwards and sideways. And like, I will take any time out of my day, even if I don't have it, to help someone else. Like, I've been known to stretch myself very thin and not take care of myself to help other people.

Bryant: Yeah. Where do you think that comes from?

Student: I, I honestly don't know. And like my mom definitely shows traits of that. So I probably just, you know, got it from her. But I've just kind of always been like that. Yeah, yeah.

Bryant: Helping other people is kind of your prerogative. Your mission.

And so, you know, the first year was definitely an adjustment for you. It sounds like the first semester was starkly different than second semester academically. Mental health wise, all of that. And so, how do you feel now personally, now that you're in your second year? What's the overall vibe of this year so far?

Student: God, this year is so much better!

Bryant: Is it?!

Student: Yeah, I feel like settled in. I'm not like stressed out any more about like—well, of course, I get stressed out about classes, but that's normal. But it's not like this, like, doom. So it's definitely like a much better vibe. Like, I have friends, and like, I've, you know, learned how to study. And I know where to get help, and I know how to get help. And it like, just overall like, I feel like I know what I'm doing. And like, I'm the type of person, like, I'm a planner. So if I feel like if I'm out of place, or something's out of place, like I can't function. So it feels like, you know, I'm in a good place. And I'm set. So I'm able to like function better?

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. Sounds like you have resources now. And like, you know, where to find things. Right? Which is helpful.

Student: Yeah. And, like, I'm in a scholar program, for first-gen students. And I work at the Student Wellness Center. So I've definitely, like been able to access so many resources. And like, if there's a resource that I can't find, someone I know, knows it. Like, like student advocacy. I never heard of them until, you know, spring semester, and that was also a huge resource for how I was able to pull myself together. Because there was a math course I was taking, and I was struggling a little bit. I had like a C in the class and I, you know, anything below a b minus is horrible enemy. Right? And I was like, I want a good grade in this class, I need to get it up as much as I can. So, you know, I talked to student advocacy, they, you know, really helped me explain to the teacher and get what I needed out of that class. And I took a two week, I forget what it's called. It's like when you have like, a month or so after the semester technically finishes.

Bryant: An incomplete?

Student: Yes, I took an incomplete in that course. And, you know, I was able to, you know, get my grade up to I think, the B or B plus. So yeah, yeah.

Bryant: So once you had those resources, you figured out how to use them to your advantage. And it sounds like it's been helpful for you since to know where to go for things. Or if you don't know the answer to have someone you can ask for where to get the help you need.

Student: Yeah, I'm, you know, I'm a shy person at first. And it's just like, I don't want to waste my time and money to like, you know, not get the frickin' answers to what I need. Like these people get paid to have answers for me. So I'm like, don't be afraid. Just ask them. Yeah, like, it's stupid to have all these resources and not use them if you need them. And I'm like, just, you know what, a million people have asked the same question you're asking. Just frickin' ask [Laughs.]

Bryant: [Laughs.] Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. So you have these resources, you have your academics, you're part of the Scholars program work at the Wellness Center. So you're busy. What other kinds of obligations do you balance since being in college?

Student: Um, I just joined a sorority like yesterday.

Bryant: Wow, that's exciting!

Student: Yeah. So that will be another one. I would definitely have to. I don't think that should be hard. Yeah. But sorry. What was question?

Bryant: What else do you balance? Do you have other like clubs and things you're a part of? Or is a mostly focusing on academics? And then Wellness Center? What else?

Student: So, it's like, and I really pushed, like, last year, and hopefully, for the rest of my career to like, you know, put myself first sometimes. So it's been a lot of focusing on me and getting myself in the right headspace. Going to therapy, taking my meds, and then that's been able to trickle into academics and you know, getting stuff all set there. And then work. It's a wonder, like, the student wellness center is a wonderful place. I'm so glad I applied here. I'm a receptionist. And basically, I just, you know, help out with little office things and my work schedule is based off my class schedule. So I work when I have free time. And I'm able to do homework. So it's just a wonderful place to work.

Bryant: That's awesome. So it really fits in with your needs. And with your schedule.

Student: Yeah, as a student, for sure. And they're, you know, very understanding of like, hey, you've got an exam when you're supposed to work. Just, you know, ask someone to cover, you know, it's not a big deal.

Bryant: Yeah, that's great. Yeah, so it sounds like this year is leaps and bounds better than last year. How do you keep in touch with your family now that you're away at school?

Student: Um, we have a group chat. We've always had a group chat since we all got iPhone. So we text in it pretty much every day. Yeah, random memes and stuff. We send pictures all the time. So we made that, and then sometimes my parents will call you know, when they're, you know, close to campus. They'll ask me out to lunch or I'll say, hey, let's get lunch or something. And I see my dad every Saturday when it's a home game, because he does ushering for fun at the [Football Stadium Name.] And then we have family dinner the second Sunday of every month. So yeah.

Bryant: That's great. So family dinner second Sunday of every month, and you have a group chat. You'll kind of see your parents like impromptu if they're around. What was it like for you to not live in the same house as them anymore?

Student: The moment when I realized like, I wasn't going home, was moving day after I moved in all my stuff. We were, you know, they were starting to leave because I was all moved in and I was like, oh my god, like this is so surreal. And I got in the elevator, and I started bawling for like 15 minutes and then I came home after my first day of classes and I was like, Where's my dog? Like, like, this, like, I don't live at home like anymore. Like this, [Residence Hall Name] is my home right now. And then so, yeah, it was just kind of like, wow, I'm actually in college. I'm, you know, being an adult.

Bryant: Yeah. Yeah, a little shocking at first it sounds like.

Student: Yeah, 'cause I was like, oh, I'm so excited to go home to see my dog. And I was like, oh, my dog is not here. It's just these 202 random girls and one girl I only know a little bit, but like, it was different than seeing the same faces you've seen every day for 19 years at that point.

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And so I think like, my last question for you is just how—you know, you had a lot of obligations at home, you felt like you kind of had to take care of a lot of stuff while you were there. And so since moving away to college, have you still felt that pull to take care of things at home? Has that subsided a little bit? What's that like? How do you feel now that you're away?

Student: Well with my parents like, being away in Europe right now, I like, you know, I want to go home, and you know, help. You know, make sure the dog is taken care of and it's, you know, you know, no one's at home besides the dog to take care of. So it's like, yeah, I'm taking on only the obligations that I took on, like going to class and, you know, making sure I'm showing up every day for things and yeah, so it's like, less of like, you know, doing house chores and taking care of, you know, whatever needs to be taken care of at home. Yeah. This is like, you know, I I would say I've got like less-ish obligations. Or like, maybe a little more, but definitely, like, on a different side of things. Yeah.

Bryant: Yeah. That makes sense. It's different kinds of obligations.

Student: Yeah. Yeah.

Bryant: Well, I think that was all the questions I have for you. I wonder if there's anything that I didn't ask you about that is important for me to know. You think about like your relationship with your parents your experience moving away to school?

Student: I really don't think so. Thank you for asking me to be in or your interviewee. I really enjoyed it. I hope your dissertation goes well.

Bryant: Thank you so much. I really appreciate that. I will send you an email with your gift card and I will let you know when it's finished. I'll send you a copy so that you can kind of look and see what came from this. Thank you so much. Best of luck with this year and I'll be in touch, okay?

Student: All right. Thank you so much.

Parent Interview Transcript

Bryant: So I'm [Student name], I'm a PhD student at [This university].

I'm getting ready to defend my dissertation in December, and then I'll graduate. I teach classes within the Human Development and Family Science Department. And what I research are parent child relationships and how they impact the transition to college for first-generation college students. So students where neither parent or guardian has gotten a four-year degree. So, I'm a first-generation college student. And that's why this is a population of interest for me. I got to interview [Student name], and she's incredible. She's like, really, really great, super, super intelligent, super eloquent. She's excellent.

Parent: Thank you!

Bryant: Yeah! And I look forward to hearing your perspective today. So basically, what happens is I interview you, and then everything is de-identified. So your name doesn't show up anywhere, nothing tying to you personally. And then I transcribe the interviews, and then I kind of look for themes and just kind of look for things that might show up for multiple first-generation college students, so we can kind of understand the experience a little bit more.

So, I asked [Student Name] questions from her perspective. And I'll ask you questions from your perspective today. So just to start, um, how would you describe your relation—the relationship between you and your daughter as she was growing up?

Parent: Um, you know, she's always been a sensitive kid. She was—she's kind of shy, but once you get her going, she is right there in it.
She kind of takes things personally, sometimes. She's a lot like me, I guess. You know, I see a lot of her. And, you know, me in her. So she's—whenever she's feeling something, I felt that same thing too. So, um, but she's a hard worker, she she's always been a hard worker. Things don't come easy to her. But she, you know, she always works hard at it.

Bryant: Yeah, Awesome. And so, [Student Name] …and then do you have you have other children as well?

Parent: Yes. I have a daughter and a son.

Bryant: And so what were the relationships like among them as siblings as they were growing up?

Parent: Um, our, our two daughters are super close. You know? They never fight. They've never fought. So that's kind of weird. Yeah, but, but they are. It, it was hard when [Student name] left for college for [Another daughter's name]. And, you know, we just went up to the test that she, she goes to Bowling Green. And [Student name] went up with us this weekend. And you know, I'm trying to hold it together as we leave [Other daughter's name] and I look over and [Student name's] just like oh, [Mimics crying] like, you know. So. Yeah, they they're super close. And [Student name] has a brother and they're six years apart. [Other daughter's name] and [Student

name] are only two years apart. So [Student name]'s kind of the one, that kind of, I look to [Student name] in the future as the one that kind of keeps the family together, you know, to keep the siblings together, you know, not that they're not going to be together, but she's going to be that person.

Bryant: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. So she's kind of like the glue. She bridges the two of them. And especially with the age difference, too, I'm sure.

Parent: She is not super, she's not super stubborn. The other two are stubborn. So she can kind of make everybody work, I guess.

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. That's kind of like a middle child trait. I feel like they kind of just, you know, go with the flow and keep the peace in a way.

Parent: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Bryant: So it sounds like all of your children went to college or go to college, is that correct?

Parent: Yeah.

Bryant: Okay. So, from your perspective, what did you know, personally about college growing up? Was it something that you ever considered?

Parent: You know, um I struggled a lot in school, you know. So, you know, I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself that I could even go to college. So it was just never really a thought. I guess. I, I, I wanted to be certain things, but I guess I just never have had the confidence in myself that I could do it.

Bryant: Yeah. And how did your family talk about college? Was it something your parents spoke about? You have other siblings that went?

Parent: I, I have a sister and she didn't go to college. You know, we just didn't talk about college in our family. My dad didn't go, my mom went for a little bit. And it just wasn't for her. And that's really about all.

Bryant: So your parents never really expected you to go or had any, like, expectation that you would pursue a degree. Right? What was their goal for you? Like, what did they tell you they expected of you growing up?

Parent: They always expected me to try my hardest. Um, they, you know, it was like, you know, I know the grades you get, but as long as I see that you're trying, we're happy with that.

Bryant: Yeah. So kind of just try your best and be what you want to be. But there's no pressure or expectation that you're something specific. It's just do your best.

Parent: Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Bryant: So how do you feel about your kids going to college?

Parent: You know, I, I couldn't be prouder, happier. I couldn't be. I just know that, especially the girls, that they're going to be okay. If they have this college education, they—maybe it doesn't turn out like they want—but that they have that in their pocket. And you can't take that away. You know, so like, I, I don't know that life is gonna be okay. But I know that they have some tools, I guess, you know?

Bryant: Yeah. Yeah. So they have this degree that can't be taken from them. And they're gonna learn something from it regardless, maybe if, even if it doesn't work out the way they want it to, they will still have learned something.

Parent: Right. And it gives, and I see confidence in them. And you know, that that's more than I ever had. So just that they're going for what they want, that makes me very happy too.

Bryant: What were your expectations for them regarding college? How did you talk to them about college when they were growing up?

Parent: Um, you know, we just always, we always kind of hit home that education is so important that, you know, it's just one of the most important things, you know, and you know, we, we, we moved our kids just so they could have a better education because of where we live. The schools aren't good. So we moved so our kids could go to a better one of the top schools in [The state]. They went to [Highly rated school district in the state.] Our girls, you know, and we kind of had a connection because my dad went to [Highly rated school], and we knew what it was about. And we wanted that for them. I mean, our son was different with the age difference. He, he kind of went on a different path with basketball. But our, our girls, we were just like, you know, education is so important. We will do anything for you to have that.

Bryant: So you moved, and to you, education was like, the most important thing. And them getting a quality education. And so they attended [Highly rated school district in the state.] And I'm sure that prepared them pretty well to apply for college, I would say.

Parent: Yeah, I mean, from, for two people that, that didn't go to college, having that support of the school that knew how to fill out an application or just even where to start, you know, you know, they had great counselors going, “you need to apply to seven colleges, because, you know, maybe you're not going to get the one you want. So, you need to have options.” You know, and there were workshops on how to fill out an application, you know, just everything that, you know, somebody, well, things change, you know, in the time span. So, you know, they had it all right there for them.

Bryant: Yeah. So it sounds like school was a big support for them as they were preparing to apply with the resources that they had available. Which is great. Because, yeah, it's pretty confusing the whole process. And especially if you haven't been through it yourself.

Parent: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Bryant: So, to you, education was the most important thing, and that was your expectation for them—was just get a good education. Was there anything you worried about with them going away to college?

Parent: Um if they would change, you know? The world is different now. And, you know, maybe—I know, you have to be your own person, but you know, maybe that they would lose some of the maybe values we have taught them that are important. Or, you know, maybe they would just become a different person. I haven't seen that. In either of them or all of them. Sure. You know, they're growing, but they're not changing in that way. I guess. Yeah. They're still good people, I guess.

Bryant: Yeah. So maybe there was a fear that if they left home, they would become different, That there'll be other people influencing them. Right. It wouldn't just be the two of you.

Parent: Right, yeah. Yeah.

Bryant: And from what you say, though, they're still the same. Right? They are, they are who they left as, and I think that's great. Yeah. Yeah. So you mentioned that school was a really important resource for them in applying. What kind of supports did you provide as they were applying for college?

Parent: You know, I guess one thing when they were born is we—I'm sure you know, it's called the college Advantage plan. Yeah. Now we didn't know what they were going to do, but we wanted to have that in place for them, you know, just to help them get started. Um, you know, we did that, we went to we went to every school function, basketball game, cheerleading and lacrosse game, you know, I volunteered at school you know, not that we had to, but we, we wanted to, we, we wanted to show, show them. We were always there for them, you know?

Bryant: Yeah. That's awesome. So they could count on your support throughout school and then during the application and even before that when they were born. You were thinking about them and just setting them up for success. Yeah. And so how much of a role did you play in them deciding where to go?

Parent: Probably too much guidance [Laughs.] You know, we are all about [This university], you know, yeah. With [Student name], [Student name] was always "I'm going to go far away from here. I'm going to go to this school in New England." And, yeah, that was her thing. And we were like, "Oh, my gosh," and then it was like, $60,000. You know, and that was a thing for a while. She was always like, "it's, you know, it's good school, and, you know, blah, blah, blah," you know?

Bryant: Sure.

Parent: But then, I don't know if [Student name] has talked to you about this at all. But, you know, she started having some mental health issues. And things got harder, and she needed us more, and, and then when it came time for college, you know, we're just like, you know, "Maybe

it wouldn't be a bad idea if you were just close to home, you know, you have your resources here. And if you need something, we're right here." You know, not that we were trying to pressure her, but we're just like, you know, you've got a great school right here. You've got us. You've got your family. Yeah, it wouldn't be such a bad idea. And I think she, if any of our kids was like, Yeah, you know, it might be that, you know, she actually thought about it and was like, maybe that isn't such a bad idea.

Bryant: Sure. Yeah. So location was a big part of it.

Parent: Right.

Bryant: So aside from just being [This University] all the way, it was having proximity to home, being able to see you when she needed to, having your support as she needed it along the way?

Parent: Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Bryant: And so she decided on [This University], and what was the transition like to college for you as a parent, when she left home?

Parent: Um, it's kind of one step closer to it's gonna be the two of us, you know, like, oh, no, now [Another daughter's name] is all alone without her sister. And, you know, it was different walking by that room, and she's not there. And yeah, I don't know what she needs, you know? Yeah. Yeah. Just kind of a little bit of everything.

Bryant: Yeah, sure. I remember when I went to school, and I was my mom's last kid to go away. And I remember her leaving. And she's like, trying so hard not to cry as she's leaving my dorm room.

Parent: Right.

Bryant: But she, you can tell it was just so emotional for her. And it is like, like you said, every child that leaves is one step closer to being just the two of you.

Parent: Right? And that's probably one good thing about when you drop them off at school. I know with [This University] you've got like, a half an hour to like, put all their stuff in their room and then get out and that was probably a good idea. Because if I had like lingered there that wouldn't have been good for anybody [laughs].

Bryant: [Laughs] Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, so just not having her at home was different. It just it was just a change.

Parent: Yeah, yeah.

Bryant: And so how do you keep in touch with her now that she's away at school?

Parent: You know, the five of us we have our little family chat, and you know, we'll probably talk on the phone like once a week, but we, you know, we always have that little family chat going and that helps just knowing she's texting and, yeah, that helps a lot. You know, not just that I'm speaking with her. But just to know, she's still kind of involved in the family, you know?

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's awesome that you have that group message, then everyone can just keep up with what's going on with each other.

Parent: Right? Even if it's just like my husband sent a silly dad joke last night, and everybody's like, “Oh, please,” you know, just, you know, knowing that. Yeah, you know, sometimes I just, you know, text her separately, just to, you know, let her know, I'm thinking about her, you know, that sort of thing.

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. How often would you say she comes home?

Parent: Um, she probably comes home, like, maybe twice a month? Yeah. Like the weekend? Yeah.

Bryant: That's nice to have her close enough that she can do that pretty frequently.

Parent: Yeah.

Bryant: How about [Another daughter’s name]? She's a little further, right?

Parent: yeah, that—well, in our family, we have like the second, second Sunday of every month, everybody comes for dinner. So, we make that time every month, you know, and it is a little harder for [Other daughter’s name,] you know, two and a half hours away. So, right. And like this past month, things are crazy. So we just went up and saw her on Saturday. So, yeah.

Bryant: So just trying to kind of work with their schedules, but it's nice to have that in place. So that second Sunday of every month, you know, if you can make it, you come for dinner. I think that's great.

Parent: Basically, you have to be dying. Like you better be there. I need a good excuse. [Laughs.]

Bryant: [Laughs.] Absolutely. So, [Student name] is interested in doing what with her career? What's her hope for the future?

Parent: I, I think, you know, I think at first it started out as a psychiatrist, and it kind of went to maybe a nurse practitioner. Yeah. You know, she's never really said anything about being a counselor. Yeah, so I'm not exactly sure.

Bryant: Yeah, I was trying to remember. I knew it was something in that vein, like mental health, medical type of type of thing. And what do you think about that? Like, when your kids went off to school, were there certain careers you had in mind that you were hopeful that they might consider?

Parent: not really. Yeah, because for like, the longest time, [Student name] was going to be a Spanish interpreter.

Bryant: Oh, wow. Okay.

Parent: That was, that was why she wanted to go far away to college, because they had Spanish program. And, yeah, that's what we thought she was going to do. And then we were always just like, “well, what are you going to do with it?” Then she’s like “I don't know.” I'm like, “there's lots of things you could do with that. You could work at a hospital, you could for the government, there's lots.” And then then she, you know, she kind of started suffering with the mental illness and then, you know, that just kind of got her interested.

Bryant: Yeah. Yeah. I think that makes sense. Personal experience can make it feel more, more interesting or more applicable.

Parent: Yeah. Right.

Bryant: Okay. So how do you think she feels about being away at school?

Parent: I think she thinks it's great. She doesn't complain. She’s never asked us, you know, like, “Oh, could you come and get me?” Nothing like that, you know. She—she enjoys it. She enjoys being in a dorm room with three other people, you know, but that's who she is. She, she needs people. She, she she likes that lifestyle, I guess, you know? Yeah. Which surprises me so much.

Bryant: What surprises you about it?

Parent: Um, that she was very shy, you know? So it surprises me that she kind of wants to be, she's okay with being surrounded by people constantly, you know?

Bryant: Yeah, absolutely. And so that might be a change you've noticed about her since going away to school, right? She's more confident, more outgoing. Is there anything else you've noticed about her since she's left?

Parent: Um, maybe that she's happier.

Bryant: Hmm.

Parent: You know, [High school name] is a great school, but [High school name] also has its challenges with, you know, its hierarchy of people, you know? And every school has it, but um, I guess it's maybe just easier for her. She doesn't have to prove anything. You don't—when you go to college, you don't really have to prove anything to anybody. Everybody just kind of comes in as a clean slate, you know, and you go to class, you're not there to, you know, prove anything, that sort of thing.

Bryant: Yeah. You can just be who you are. You don't have to like fit within that hierarchy, which yes, [High school name] is very, it's like very much like that, right.

Parent: You know, [Student name] isn't a person that has a lot of friends. [Student name] is a person that has true friends. And that's kind of something we've talked to her about, you know, [Student name] is a faithful friend. And we tried to explain to her that, you know, you have friends, and you have people that you just are like, "Hi, how are you doing?" And it's okay to have friends like that. But I think sometimes she trusts and hopes that everybody is a true friend. And, and I, and we've talked her a lot about that, you know, it's like, that's just not how the world works. I mean, me and your dad have friends, and then we have *friends*. That's okay. You know, that's how it works.

Bryant: Sure. Yeah. Yeah. So it sounds like she kind of wants to see the best in everyone. And she's hopeful that they will—that everyone is true. Like you said, maybe a little quick to trust and yeah, that's a strength and it can be a difficulty sometimes, right?

Parent: Yeah. So one of her roommates was her roommate last year. So [Student name] is very—she doesn't like change. She, you know, has her good friends. So, yeah, yeah. And I can't, you know, I just know a couple of her friends because that's it. [Other daughter's name] has like, you know, 20 people. But that's just who she is. She's not attached.

Bryant: Yeah. So [Student name] attaches to people. She finds someone that she can be close to and she kind of latches on, right?

Parent: Yeah. Yeah.

Bryant: Yeah. So you notice that she's happier. Maybe she's kind of like, found a few people that she can get along with? And she loves being in college and in that environment. And so I think that's wonderful. And so your expectation is, she makes it home for that second Sunday, talks in your group chat, talks on the phone. Do you think your relationship with her has changed at all since she's gone away to school?

Parent: I don't really think so. 'Cause, you know, I always wonder if it does, but then, you know, she'll like, come home and she'll go, you know, "hey, Mama," you know, such and such, and it's like, okay, we're all good. You know, just certain things she says. It's like, it's all good. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's still the same [Student name.]

Bryant: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's awesome. So even if there's maybe that fear of that her being away will change things, whenever she comes home, you're reminded that it's not different. We're all good.

Parent: Right.

Bryant: Well, this is awesome. And I love hearing your perspective on her transition. And I loved hearing her perspective. I wonder if there's anything else about the transition to college or

kind of your own expectations for college growing up that you didn't get to share today that you think is important for me to know?

Parent: Yeah. I guess, like, for me, I guess I just wish I would have had more confidence in myself to get to college.

Bryant: Mm hmm. And I guess maybe I wish I was maybe more educated about what was out there to do in the world? I guess. Yeah. You know. And my husband, you know, he should have gone to college, he's, you know, that's where he belonged, you know, but, you know, we chose a different path. You know, I don't know if [Student name] told you, but, you know, I've known him since I was 12 years old. And our—we were kind of those people that were married as soon as we met. And, you know, the thing we wanted in life was to be married and have a family. And, you know, that's what we accomplished. And that's what we wanted, and I wouldn't change a thing. But then you're, you know, you kind of realize that, maybe you need something for yourself, too.

Bryant: Absolutely.

Parent: And I think that started to set in, maybe, once the kids didn't quite need us as much, like, you know, it's kind of like, oh, what am I gonna do now? You know, it's hard now going out and getting a job and not having, you know, skills, I guess, you know?

Bryant: Sure. Yeah, absolutely. And so, looking back, you know, you wish the younger you would have had more knowledge on like, what was possible and more confidence to pursue it. So, what did you end up doing? What do you do now?

Parent: Um, you know, I work from home. I'm a property manager for rental properties. So I do that. And for the past, like, six years, I've done that. So it was great. You know, it's still great job. You know, I can work from home. I could always do drop things and go do things for the kids or whatever when needed.

Bryant: Yeah. So you ended up finding something that gave you the flexibility you needed? And yeah, I think that you made you made it work. You figured it out.

Parent: Right.

Bryant: And I hear you saying it would have been cool back then to have a little more confidence, a little more knowledge about what I could have done.

Parent: Right, right.

Bryant: Yeah, I think that's fair. I think that for a lot of kids now, their parents kind of portrayed, similar to you and your husband, how important an education is, and how a degree can give you leverage, or get you places, whereas maybe for before us there was this just the expectation that you get a good job. You support your family. You have a family that was more aligned with that?

Parent: Yeah, like maybe find a trade.

Bryant: Yeah, a skill set, right?

Parent: Yeah, exactly.

Bryant: Yeah, sure. Absolutely. Well, it sounds like you set them all up for success. And you gave them all the support. And you, you got them to a place where they can now be confident and successful. And I think that's just wonderful. So I'm so glad to hear that you have a good relationship with all of them still, and they come home to you. And you're still maintaining those relationships. That's wonderful.

Parent: I appreciate it.

Bryant: Yeah. Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. This has been wonderful. And I will keep you updated how the project progresses and everything. But yeah, I hope you have a good holiday season and I wish you well. So thank you.

Parent: Thank you