MAKING SENSE OF THE PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND INVOLVEMENT OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

A thesis presented

by

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Abstract

Over the past ten years, colleges have experienced an influx of parental involvement. Institutions inherit a population of students that have never functioned without the input of their parents and once enrolled, welcome the same level of involvement. Though faculty and administrators perceive the level of parental involvement as encumbering, empirical evidence capturing the perspective of first-year college students is missing. This study employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the influence parental involvement has on first-year of college students’ social and academic integration. Guided by the following research question: How do first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life? Through qualitative inquiry, this study employed semi-structured interview questions to uncover how first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life. The three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of narratives including 1) Involvement in Everything, 2) Importance of Involvement and 3) Young Adult. The findings in this study offer another perspective towards the phenomena of parental involvement, demonstrate that parental involvement is multidimensional and uncover both the positive and negative outcomes to parental involvement.

**Keywords:** first-year college students, parental involvement, parental influence, Millennial generation, academic integration, social integration
Dedication

This doctoral research study is dedicated to my departed Nanny, Ruby Lee Gary. More than an Aunt, she was the heart of our family and showed me unconditional love. She taught me that through hard work and a sincere relationship with God, anything is possible. Her beautiful spirit will always be remembered.
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Chapter 1 – Research Problem

The cultural shift in parental involvement has drastically changed the landscape of higher education (Taub, 2008). The new normal is an environment where parents deem their excessive intervention in their student’s collegiate lives as acceptable behavior. Extreme parental involvement or the term helicopter parents, has been used to describe the excessive hovering behavior of overly involved parents (Taub, 2008). Once coined as a term to describe a small portion of the parent population, over the span of time, has come to represent most, if not all parents of college students (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

Parental involvement is a distinguishing characteristic of the Millennial generation. Howe and Strauss (2000) define Millennials as the birth cohort that was born during or after 1982. Millennial students share seven core traits: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In relation to parental involvement and higher education, the most salient characteristic is the notion of being sheltered.

The literature suggests that Millennials have a closer relationship with their parents because they have been more sheltered and consequently have become more reliant on their parents (DeBard, 2004). Based on Howe and Strauss’s (2003) assessment, Millennials welcome parental involvement in all aspects of their life including their collegiate experience. The closeness extends beyond academic oriented topics to issues of sex, drugs and alcohol (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Howe and Strauss (2000) predict that parental involvement and expectations will continue to grow. Despite the current literature on the amount of communication between college students and their parents, there is limited knowledge on how the level of parental influence shapes student persistence.

Statement of the Problem
This study intends to investigate the influence parental involvement has on students’ social and academic integration in their first year of college. It is evident that parents play a significant role in the decision making process regarding which college to attend. Howe and Strauss (2003) note that the college selection process is perceived as a co-purchased decision between the student and the parent (p. 69). Based on the 2012 Noel-Levitz E-Expectations Research Report, nearly 60 percent of prospective college students indicated they included their parents in their search process and 61 percent of parents reported that they were included in the final decision. Despite the evidence, empirical data examining the level of influence that parents play while their student is enrolled, however, is lacking. Therefore, the objective is to understand this phenomenon.

In contrast, the level of parental involvement among many faculty and administrators is often perceived as encumbering. Many students are failing to manage their college experience and graduating without the critical thinking and problem solving skills necessary to enter into the workforce (Sommers, 2010). Instead of a healthy involvement where parents and students are engaged in a dialogue and the student is empowered to act, helicopter parents are actively involved in a significant portion of their student’s lives (Sommers, 2010). The outcomes contradict traditional student development theories. Therefore, the challenge in this examination is to fully understand this phenomenon through a framework that acknowledges the salience of parental input, while recognizing the process of student independence.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

The intellectual goal for this project to is to gain deeper insight into the influence of parental behavior on the academic and social integration of first-year students. As a new
phenomenon, the scholarship on parental involvement at the postsecondary level continues to expand, but much of the existing research is grounded on attachment, communication and student development. Because there is little research on the influence, there is an opportunity to investigate parental behavior and students’ integration in their academic and social life.

There is also a noticeable gap in research on student persistence within the context of parental involvement, and therefore an obvious need to expand the current literature. Much of the existing scholarship places a considerable emphasis on personal or institutional sources that contribute to retention. Earlier research on student departure uncovered the importance of successfully integrating students through educational purposeful activities. Tinto’s assessment extends the notion that there is no one single prevailing reason that causes a student to leave an institution (1996). Despite incorporating a range of factors, parental influence and involvement has yet to be evaluated as a contributor.

Locally, the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB), has had substantial challenges in first-year student retention rates. USCB’s average first-year retention rate remains at 48 percent. As a relatively new four-year institution within the University of South Carolina system, USCB struggles to be perceived as a reputable four-year university. Despite the University’s efforts to strengthen the first-year student experience, a recent internal survey of first semester freshmen revealed that 70 percent of local area students enrolled with the intention of leaving the University after one year. The 2011 Beginning College Survey on Student Engagement (BCSSE) results uncovered that nearly 48 percent of new freshmen either didn’t plan to or were unsure if they were going to graduate from USCB.
Administrators are burdened with involved parents and anecdotally see a connection between the parent’s perception of the university and first-year student retention. The university has attempted to address the issue of parent behavior by adopting a strong stance and provides limited communication to parents. As University officials continue to diagnose the first-year student experience, there is a need for a clear understanding of the relationship between parental involvement and students’ social and academic integration during their first year of college. By evaluating parental influence, USCB will have stronger insight into the University’s first-year student experience. Moreover, as the information expands the extant literature, administrators may be encouraged to employ a different approach to partnering with parents.

**Research Question**

This research attempts to gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement and the ability for students to integrate into the academic and social life of college during their first year. This study incorporates a qualitative design in order to fully understand how, if in any way, parental involvement influences student’s integration in their first year of college. This research is guided by the following question:

How do first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life?

**Summary of Paper Contents and Organization**

The purpose of this study is to uncover and evaluate how students perceive parental involvement and how it influences their academic and social integration during their first year of college. Since there is limited empirical data on the level of influence that parents play during the social and academic integration of first-year students, to accomplish this objective, it is
necessary to (a) utilize student retention literature to explore the theories that guide the relationship between parental involvement and retention; (b) interview first-year college students; and (c) analyze the results of the interviews to study the phenomenon of parental involvement on students’ social and academic integration. The theoretical frameworks employed are based on Tinto’s Student Integration Theory and Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory. This first section provides an overview of the problem of practice and introduces the issue of parental involvement and the academic and social integration of first-year students. The second section provides an extensive review of the two theories that will provide a framework for this study.

Chapter 2-Theoretical Frameworks & Review of Literature

There is an extensive amount of literature on college student retention; however Tinto’s Student Integration model is most commonly researched and employed framework. The premise of Tinto’s model is a sociological perspective that concentrates on persistence and departure. Detailed within this section is the background of the Student Integration Theory, examples of relevant application, strengths, and limitations.

Tinto’s Student Integration Model

The foundation of Tinto’s theoretical framework originated from Émile Durkheim's theory of suicide. Durkheim’s theory posits that suicide is more likely to occur when an individual lacks moral integration and collective affiliation (Tinto, 1975). Within the context of postsecondary education, similar social systems exist. Tinto’s framework isolates the insufficient interaction with others in the college environment as a determining variable to an institution’s ability to retain a student. Tinto argued that parallels exists between the act of suicide as it is the
outcome of an individual’s withdrawal from society, and therefore similar to student departure. Additionally, comparable to Durkheim’s theory, Tinto identified both formal and informal systems of social and academic integration as a catalyst to persistence.

Tinto (1990) argued that much like suicide; students are more likely to persist when the institution incorporates them into the new environment through meaningful activity. Tinto identified three salient groups, faculty, staff, and peers to have a significant effect on retention and student persistence (1990, p. 5). Furthermore, Tinto also recognized that both the first-year and the first-semester are critical timeframes within the integration process (1988).

The model measures the longitudinal progression of interactions between the student and the academic and social systems of an institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto’s theory, presented in Figure 1, precollege attributes and background characteristics are variables that influence an individual’s aspirations and institutional commitment (1975). The model includes attributes such as race, gender, academic ability, socioeconomic status, parental support and background that significantly affect integration and persistence (1975).

Tinto contends that the student’s experience in each system is measured by their ability to be assimilated in each system (1975). Integration in this context refers to the “extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and information structural requirements for membership in that community” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.52). Therefore, the experience within each system has the potential to contribute to adjustments in educational attainment or institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975).
**Academic & Social Systems.** The academic system represents the formal structure and processes of an institution. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006) further note that successful integration within the academic system represents both satisfactory fulfillment of established norms and academic values of the institution. In contrast, the social system symbolizes the informal structure. Successful integration is more likely to occur when the student perceives the social environment to be agreeable with his or her preferences, which are shaped by the student’s values, characteristic and personal aspirations (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 11). Academic integration is measured through academic progression and the selection of a major and social integration, conversely, is reflected through peer and faculty interaction (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

Tinto argued that retention was contingent upon the individual’s background, academic goals and institutional commitments, and integration into institutional systems (1975). Tinto maintained that persistence is directly related to the student’s ability to be integrated into both the academic and social systems of an institution. Tinto argued that students enter an institution with an initial set of goals and commitments. However, the experience with an institution may transform the initial goals and either strengthen or weaken institutional commitment.

Based on the theory, unbalanced integration in either the academic or social system is more likely to cause an upset in the other system. Furthermore, an individual’s integration into one system may still lead to withdrawal. Poor academic grades and the assimilation into the social environment or strong grades and a lack of social integration may still produce the same outcome of voluntary withdrawal (Tinto, 1975). Conversely, inclusion into both systems can also leads to stronger levels of institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975). The model explains the
need for social integration with faculty, but clarifies that rather than increasing the student’s level of social integration, it attributes to stronger levels of academic integration.

**Figure 1. Tinto’s Student Integration Theory 1975**

![Diagram of Tinto's Student Integration Theory](image)

Separation, Transition, & Incorporation

Essential to Tinto’s framework includes three stages, separation, transition and incorporation (1993). The first stage begins when the student is separated from the primary group which they were formerly associated, such as family members and peers (1993). Once separation occurs, the student undergoes a period of transition during which the student actively interacts with members of the new group and adopts the values and the behavioral patterns of the environment (1993). The student moves into the final stage of incorporation by adopting new normative values and behaviors of the new group, or college (1993). Based on Tinto’s assessment, higher levels of integration with the new environment, including both academic and nonacademic, increase the level of institutional commitment which contributes to retention and
persistence (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Tinto assessed that students that leave an institution fail to effectively separate or distance themselves from their primary environment and adopt the new values of the institution (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

**Integration and Persistence**

Salient to this model is the student’s degree aspirations and commitment to the institution. Within the context of the model, academic integration contributes to individual aspirations while social integration directly influences institutional commitment. Commitment and educational aspirations were transformed through interaction between the systems of the institution. Therefore, Tinto concludes, “Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (1975, p.96).

Tinto’s model was later expanded to include commitments outside of the institution and intentions to remain enrolled (1993). The original model received a considerable amount of criticism for largely focusing on the conditions of the institution that encumber or support retention. Many critics argue that Tinto’s original model excluded external factors that shape perceptions, commitments, and institutional preferences (Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora & Hengstler, 1992). The revised model reconsiders voluntary departure through the inclusion of the external community. The adjusted framework incorporates variables outside of the institution such as parental support, ability to pay, work that may either positively or negatively influence persistence.

**Strengthens**
Tinto’s model is the most commonly employed framework used to diagnosis student departure. His model was the first to differentiate between the various types of withdrawal. Tinto introduced the concept of student departure as voluntary or involuntary action. Furthermore, his model was an initial theory that identified reasons for withdrawal, including voluntary departure, transferring, permanent and temporary dropout and academic failure (Tinto, 1975). Subsequently, Tinto’s model was the first to explain different causal variables that might plausibly lead to the retention of students (1975).

Tinto’s model attempts to explain the phenomena of voluntary student departure within a given college or university and “is not a systems model of departure” (1993, p. 112). Significantly relevant to his model are thirteen testable propositions (Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997). Tinto (1975) developed the following propositions:

1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
2. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
3. Student entry characteristics directly affect the student’s likelihood of persistence in college.
4. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration.
5. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration.
6. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration.
7. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration.
8. The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.

9. The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.

10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitment.

11. The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.

12. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

Though each proposition is substantial, the longevity of Tinto’s theory is contingent upon strong empirical evidence supporting propositions 8 and 9 (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Braxton and Lee’s (2000) assessment concluded that scholars have consistently found a link between social integration, institutional commitment, and subsequent student persistence in residential colleges and universities. In their review of retention literature, Braxton and Lee support propositions 8 and 9 in sixteen of the nineteen studies (2000). Tinto’s theory was also employed in Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) and Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan’s (2000) study and both revealed a direct and indirect relationship between the social and academic systems and persistence.

**Limitations**
The Student Integration Model has served as the conceptual framework for numerous studies attempting to understand the phenomena of student departure. However, researchers have only supported certain elements of Tinto’s (1993) theory. Much of the significant empirical evidence has been through multi-institutional studies. The relationship between academic integration and persistence has been supported in eight of eleven multi-institutional studies (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Single-institution studies examining the relationship between academic integration and persistence are less clear. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) found that nineteen of forty studies did not provide empirical evidence to prove a relationship between persistence and academic integration. Furthermore, there is a larger amount of evidence supporting the premise that social integration, rather than academic integration leads to greater institutional commitment (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007).

Despite the model’s ability to explain why students withdraw; researchers criticize it for only considering traditional college students. Noted by several scholars was the failure to consider the experience of non-traditional college students. This extends to students attending two- and four-year institutions, students of color, students from a lower socioeconomic status, women, and students of a different sexual orientation (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993). Likewise, Tinto fully understood and recognized the limitations to his theory. Based on Tinto’s account, “Much of the early work was drawn from quantitative studies of largely residential universities and students of majority backgrounds” (2006, p.3). Bean and Metzner (1985) and Cabrera, Stampen, and Hansen (1990) have suggested that Tinto’s model is missing key variables needed to fully understand student departure.
Outside of the traditional, first-time, full-time freshmen attending a residential four-year institution, Tinto’s model lacks confidence. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson’s (1997) review, concluded that Tinto’s theory either lacks validation or needs stronger support in the liberal arts college setting, two-year and commuter colleges. Tinto’s (1993) theory also has been criticized by several scholars regarding its relevance to minority students. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) concluded that none of the thirteen original propositions were tested using different ethnic minority groups.

Tinto argued that the initial separation stage was an essential element to retention. Tinto’s theory maintains the necessity for the student to separate themselves from their former communities, including the family or parent in order to be fully integrated the college environment. Tierney (1992) contended that the notion of separation is not applicable to minority students as cultural backgrounds of minority students differ from non-minorities. The challenge for many students of color is found in the origin of Tinto’s model, as it is based on the notion that the student must disassociate themselves from family support, cultural values and beliefs in order to successfully assimilate into the new culture.

Furthermore, recent studies revealed that support networks for many students of color are external, outside of the institution. Brantly’s (1996) study challenged the separation phase of Tinto’s (1993) theory by unearthing that families played a critical role in African American students’ success by providing emotional, academic, and financial support. Bantly’s (1996) study revealed that African American student’s cultural influences are vital predictors of persistence. Statistical evidence also uncovered that African American students deem the role of
the father, parental or family support, and spirituality as important factors that contribute to their degree achievement and educational attainment (Brantly, 1996).

Finally, Tinto’s original model omitted the role of finances in the student’s decision to persist (1982). Tinto’s original framework was based on the assumption that students from a higher socioeconomic status were more likely to persist than a student from a lower socioeconomic status (1975). Even with the revision, the ability to pay variable still lacks strong support. Cabrera’s (1990) study incorporated Tinto’s framework using the socioeconomic indicator but found no evidence to support the presumed effects of finances on academic integration and social integration.

Despite Tinto’s acknowledgment of the limitations to the model, he cautioned scholars on the theory’s ability to explain everything. Tinto’s revised model includes the external community as an essential element towards understanding departure. Family background, parental support, ability to pay, part-time or full-time employment are variables that are considered but lack strong validation. Much of the current research including family as a factor, include family background characteristics such as education or socioeconomic status. Most studies based on Tinto’s model are quantitative and factor parental background characteristics rather than parental involvement while the student is enrolled. Other studies have incorporated the quality of relationship within the family by qualifying the level of parental support. Tinto’s theory still lacks validation against parental involvement and influence.

Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory

To offset substantial limitations in Tinto’s model with underrepresented students, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory is intermingled within this research. Yosso’s model is a
critical race theoretical framework with the objective of advancing social justice by emphasizing the power of minority communities (Yosso, 2005). The model isolates communities as an influence to persistence and social mobility (Yosso, 2005). Rather than viewing communities of color as deficient populations, the framework focuses on culturally validating strengths. The framework concentrates on various cultural knowledge’s and abilities cultivated by underrepresented families and communities that influence persistence and social mobility (Burciaga, & Erbstein, 2010).

Yosso identified six components that exist within diverse communities that are culturally supporting strengths: 1) aspirational capital, aspirations and hope despite challenges, 2) familial capital, cultural and/or family knowledge and history, 3) social capital, networks and community resources, 4) linguistic capital communications in different languages or styles, 5) resistant capital, challenge inequity and subordination and 6) navigational capital, maneuvering social institutions (2005). Rather than being static, the six forms of capital are fluid. Yosso's community cultural wealth theory is significant to this study because of the salience of family capital.

**Familial Capital**

Familial capital refers to the cultural practices and knowledge that depend on extended familial relationships. According to Yosso, because of the presence of cultural wealth, there is a strong sense of commitment to community wellbeing and sustaining healthy family ties (2005). Furthermore, the maintenance of the relationships enables the development and preservation of culturally accepted beliefs. With minority groups, the collective understanding is fomented through the family or other culturally relevant activities. Family capital acknowledges the
contribution of the family and the impact of parents’ values and emphasis on education as major influence on student’s educational attainment. More importantly, within this framework, students of color persist in higher education as a result of their parents’ influence, not in spite of their parents’ lack of cultural capital (Gofen, 2009). Unlike prevailing views of parents and families in relation to persistence, the community cultural wealth theory recognizes the significance that families play in the success of students of color.

Together, both theories provide an optimal structure to investigate the influence of parental involvement within the context of the student’s ability to become integrated into an institution’s academic and social systems. Tinto’s theory introduces the importance of the successful inclusion into the formal and informal systems of an institution. By diagnosing student departure as a failure to become integrated, researchers begin to uncover variables that affect a student’s decision to remain enroll at an institution. Although Tinto’s theory has been tested, outside of the quantitative evidence, the theory alone does not explain how first-year students comprehend their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life. Furthermore, Tinto’s claim that separation must occur in order for integration to commence has been criticized as students of color continue to maintain ties with their external environment. Yosso’s community cultural wealth theory recognizes that, for students of color, family involvement nurturers support which contributes to integration and ultimately persistence. Therefore, this study employs both frameworks in order to comprehensively investigate the student’s perception of their parents’ involvement and how it if any, it shaped their ability to become integrated into the college setting. Taken together, both theories provide a reasonable approach to analyzing this phenomenon with a homogenous but ethnically diverse group of first-year students.
Review of Literature

In order to fully understand the impact of parental involvement on first-year student retention, it is critical to consider literature that captures the relationship between parents and their traditional-age college students as well as the parent-student-institution relationship. Furthermore, it is important to consider whether and how the changing relationship potentially influences the student’s connection to an institution. Therefore, this review is an in-depth analysis of the behavior of parents of first-year college students. Additionally, literature related to college student retention will be explored in order to grasp how parental involvement can influence student persistence.

This chapter reviews the literature on several topics related to the question being addressed in this study. This review is divided into five major sections. The following questions guide the review: What is parental involvement? What factors contribute to parental involvement? How are parents involved? What are the effects of the parent-student relationship on the student? What is the institution’s role in the relationship and how it has shifted over time? How can parental involvement shape retention?

Parental Involvement

Much of the current literature supports the notion that the parent-student interaction represents a source of influence during college. Wartman and Savage (2008) define parental involvement as a the phenomenon of “parents showing interest in the lives of their students in college, gaining more information about college, knowing when and how to appropriately provide encouragement and guidance to their student, connecting them with the institution, and potentially retaining that institutional connection beyond the college years” (2008, p. 5). Wolf,
Sax & Harper (2009) expanded Wartman and Savage’s (2008) definition to include a multidimensional construct that involves engagement at several levels in the college environment (p. 328). Therefore, parental involvement encompasses the entire collegiate experience, extending beyond the college selection process, including major selection, support, and negotiating relationships with faculty and administrators (Daniel, Evans, & Scott, 2001).

Outside the complex definition, a growing number of today’s parents have been characterized as involved, overprotective, and child-absorbed (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Initially coined by Charles Fay and Foster Cline in the early nineties, a helicopter parent is a person who pays extremely close attention to his or her child or children, typically rushing in to prevent harm or failure from occurring in their children’s lives (Somers & Settle, 2010). Although the concept of a helicopter parent is widespread, over the past few years, administrators have seen a notable increase in aggressive parents.

Terms such as the Black Hawk parent, a helicopter parent whose behavior is both excessive and at times unethical (Wartman & Savage, 2008) have entered the lexicon. Lawnmower parents mow down anything in their path and submarine parents hid below the surface and appear to attack when there is an issue (2008). Stealth-fighter parents, attempt to prevent discomfort of their children and remain quiet but eliminate obstacles in their path (2008). The shift in parenting occurred after the mid-1980s. During the timeframe, unstructured activities rapidly declined and parents began closely watching their children (Howe & Strauss, 2008, p. 8).

**Millennial Parents**

Parental involvement is a common characteristic of the Millennial generation. Millennial parents include two generations, Baby Boomers and Generation X. Millennials born in the
1980s have Boomer parents and Generation X parent Millennials that were born in the 1990s (Howe & Strauss, 2008). The helicopter parent phenomenon began with Baby Boomer generation.

The Baby Boomer Generation (born 1943-60) grew up in a progressive era of civic engagement (Howe & Strauss, 2008). Marked by the Vietnam War, radical protests, inner city riots and the Kent State University shooting, many Boomers sought to transform pressing societal issues. Education played a considerable role in shaping the Boomer cohort. Despite a mixed experience, the earlier cohort had a positive educational experience and the second half experienced education during social unrest and poor achievement outcomes (Howe & Strauss, 2008). Consequently, Boomers have a positive perception of education. Boomer parents believe in the mission of an institution and view college as a logical transition for their student.

On the contrary, Generation X (born 1961-81) experienced a drastically different upbringing. Characterized as latchkey children, Generation X’ers were exposed to high divorce rates, the AIDS epidemic and perceived as the slacker generation (Howe & Strauss, 2008). Because of their negative experiences, Generation X’ers are more skeptical and less tolerant of institutions.

Though Boomers and Generation X parent the same cohort, there are notable differences that impact parental involvement (Howe & Strauss, 2008). Generation X’ers, or stealth-fighter parents, represents the new wave of intense and assertive parents. Rather than the hovering behavior of Boomer parents, Generation X parents are more tactical, intrusive, and often rude about how they pursue their child’s interests (Howe & Strauss, 2008, p. 90). Generation X
parents are primarily interested in opportunities that benefit their child, different from Boomer parents that encouraged participation in civic engagement and team oriented activity (2008).

Additionally, Generation X’ers perceive higher education as an industry that should be customer-oriented. Based on Howe & Strauss’s account, Generation X’ers want to insure the value is worth the cost of an institution and comparison shop during all stages of the college selection process (2008). “Gen X’ers believe their children’s education should be fair and an open transaction with complete and accurate information and unconstrained consumer choice. They will evaluate the transaction on the basis of the value and appear to offer, and if it doesn’t offer the right value, they will take their business elsewhere” (Howe & Strauss, 2008, p. 94).

Boomers advocate for change if dissatisfied with an institution (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Generation X’ers, by contrast, are more likely to encourage their student to find another institution that will meet their educational aspirations (Wartman & Savage, 2008). There is a need to investigate if the difference of behavior between Boomer and Generation X’er parents impacts college student persistence differently.

**Parenting Style**

Both Boomers and Generation X’er parents have adopted a parenting style that intermingle the three styles of parenting. Baumrind (1973) defined parenting style as a consistent pattern between the interaction of a parent and their children along two dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. Responsiveness refers to a supportive parent that intentionally cultivates individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion (Baumrind, 1991). Alternately, demandingness refers to parental efforts that emphasize supervision and discipline (Baumrind, 1991). Taken together, the degree of responsiveness and demandingness employed
by parents can be classified as one of three parenting styles; authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Schwartz & Scott, 2003).

**Authoritarian Parenting.** Baumrind (1967) described the authoritarian style as one in which the parent attempts to control, shape and appraise the behavior and attitudes of the child according to their absolute standard. This parenting style assumes a one-sided interaction between the parent and child, where the parent is seen as the mastermind who fully influences the child’s attitudes and behaviors yet remains unaffected by any influence by the child. Value is placed on obedience and vigorous measures are taken to restrict independence. Harsh punishments follow deviant behavior. Authoritarian parents are less responsive and accepting but maintain high expectations which may or may not be attainable. Children perform moderately well in school yet they are more likely to have weaker social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993).

**Authoritative Parenting.** Authoritative parenting is a more rational approach and an ideal balance between responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1967). Authoritative parents are supportive and conscious of the child’s individuality and foster inclusion in decision-making. Children are nurtured through a warm, respectful environment with a two-way stream of communication, shared control, appropriate power, and practical expectations. Additionally, authoritative parents allow their children to learn from their mistakes, they provide appropriate encouraging support when needed, but back away when children are successful on their own.

**Permissive Parenting.** Permissive or laissez-faire parenting is non-punitive, nonrestrictive, imposes few demands on children and is highly characterized as being responsive. Rather than seen an authority figure, there are no boundaries, expectations or controls
established. Permissive parents either indulge or neglect their children's needs (Strage & Brandt, 1999). Children underperform in school have stronger social skills, higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Strage & Brandt, 1999).

Parenting Style and Student Integration. The literature on parenting styles suggests that a relationship exists between parenting and academic achievement (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009). Prior research has shown a connection between parenting style and adjustment to college. All parenting styles, either encouraging or unsupportive, impact college student integration through academic performance and achievement, social adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000).

Academic System. There is a growing amount of literature that has evaluated the impact of parental involvement and support on academics. Much of the extant literature indicates varied results. In many cases, parental support cultivates confidence which encourages the student to challenge themselves academically (Strage & Brandt, 1999). Among some first-generation students, parental involvement positively impacted educational aspirations and academic performance (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, and Russell (1994) found that students that discussed their interests and concerns with their parent performed stronger academically. The study revealed a positive correlation between parental support and GPA. Parental support predicted GPA across a diverse group of students (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Asslouline, 1994). Turner, Chandler, Heffer’s (2009) study of parenting styles uncovered that authoritative parenting considerably influenced academic performance.

Despite the existing research indicating a positive correlation, recent studies have challenged parental involvement and its impact on academic outcomes. Harper, Sax & Wolf,
(2012) study revealed that academic gains yielded the least significant association by measuring parental input. Outside of the assessment with first generation students, Wintre and Yaffe (2000) found no direct connection to parental involvement and academic adjustment to college. More importantly, the study indicated negative effects of some parental behaviors on female students’ academic performance (2000).

**Social Adjustment.** Outside of the formal system, current literature has evaluated the influence of the parent–student relationship within the social system. Healthy or unhealthy attachment to parents, support, or parents’ expressed interest can drastically impact the student’s ability to become integrated into the informal system of an institution (Harper, Sax & Wolf, 2012). Empirical evidence has uncovered mixed support.

Kenny and Donaldson’s study of 226 first-year college students revealed that women had a higher rate of emotional closeness to their parents then men and consequently experienced higher levels of social competency and psychological wellbeing (1991, p. 484). Harper, Sax and Wolf’s (2012) results were also consistent with the current literature on the impact of the quality of the parent–student relationship. Based on the study, a healthy parental connection nurtures a sense of assurance and encourages the exploration into new social activities and goals. In a cross-sectional study, Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos (1995) found first-year students with higher levels of perceived parental support were better adjusted and experienced lower levels of stress. Mattanah, Hancock and Brand’s study of 404 student’s results supported the growing body of evidence suggesting that a solid relationship to parents and a healthy level of separation are predictive of positive academic and social adjustment to college (p. 222).
Alternately, parental involvement of first-generation students has invalidated it as predictor of success. Though results support the notion that parental involvement is a viable predictor of degree attainment, the lack of experience of parents of first-generation students limit their range of support (Hicks, 2003). Hsiao (1992) concluded that for first-generation students and minority students, having parents with no college experience produced an inadequate support system. Students also perceive parental support as emotional support but lacked both financial or academic assistance (Hicks, 2003). Much of the challenge can be attributed to inadequate parental financial contributions, weaker academic and social preparation and different expectations.

Despite several studies centered on the outcome of parental involvement, scholarly literature lacks a consistent position on the consequences of involvement. Outside of the existing evidence that indicates support, the level of support varies by family background, level of parental education, socioeconomic status and academic expectations. Additionally as much of the current research is quantitative, in relation to the problem of practice, many critics argue that the outcome is the student’s inability to adjust both academically and socially (Taub, 2008).

Furthermore, this parenting style has also been associated with the growing trend of emerging adults, students who move back home after college because they are reluctant to make the transition into adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

**Contributing Factors to Parental Involvement**

Outside of the general trend of parents showing an interest in their students’ lives, the level of involvement can vary based on the type of student. From a broad range of differences including mental health issues or learning disabilities to students of color, many parents
intervene because they have a history of actively advocating on behalf of their student. Furthermore, the surge of on-campus violence heightened involvement and caused safety concerns to be at the forefront (Carney-Hall, 2008). Despite the differing levels of involvement, Wartman’s (2008) review uncovered four primary factors that contribute to the phenomenon of parental involvement: Millennial generation, changes in parenting, cost of college and use of technology.

**Generation**

The shift in parental involvement can be attributed to the Millennial generation’s background. The Millennial generation encompasses traditional-aged college students who first enrolled in 2000. Howe and Strauss (2003) describe the Millennial generation as the most racially and ethnically diverse, well educated, team-oriented and technologically proficient generation in history (p. 14). As such, the Millennial generation has drastically transformed the landscape of higher education.

As the largest generation, Millennials entered college in 2000 and transformed the demographic makeup of higher education. At the time of the generation’s first cohort of college students, institutions enrolled more women and minorities. Enrollment of white students decreased from 81.53 to 69 percent, women increased from 51 to 56 percent (DeBard, 2004). Alongside of the generation’s size, Howe and Strauss (2003) characterize the Millennials as the most studious and best-prepared students entering college. Since birth, Millennials have been highly protected by their parents and as a result Millennials see their parent’s role as a protector (Wartman, 2008). As an outcome of parental perfectionism, Millennials perceive and expect high grades as a way of validating their achievement (DeBard, 2004). Different than any other
generation, Millennials rely on their parents for assistance and share their parents’ attitudes and values.

**Changes in Parenting**

Considerable changes in parenting attributed to an increase in parental involvement. Also coined as the postmodern parenthood movement, the term represents the change in parenting among upper and middle class parents. Millennials were parented during an era of the wanted child. During the 1980s, as divorce, drug abuse and violent crime continued to rise, the wellbeing of children became a national agenda item. As such, parents became more involved and increased intentional time spent with their children. From 1981 to 1997, parents reported an increase in time spent with their children by 25 percent (Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001). Most children grew accustomed to daily structured and organized activities that were managed by their parents.

Low-income parents, by contrast, perceive their role to be vastly different and set clear boundaries between their children. Financial constraints limit their ability to provide the same level of activities as upper or middle class parents; therefore students of low-income family’s process of development are noticeably different. Rather than limited free time, children have less structured time and more control over their time (Wartman, 2008).

**Cost of College**

Understandably, parental involvement further intensified alongside the consistent increase in cost of attending college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), from 2000 to 2011 the cost of attendance at public institutions rose 42 percent and 31 percent at a private not-for-profit institution. Moreover, Sax, Astin, Korn, and Mahoney (1997)
reported that 76 percent of all first-year college students receive parental financial assistance. Furthermore, family income and tax information is required for most traditional age college students, as most institutions require students to submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Consequently, the financial and emotional investment further intensified parent’s hands-on approach.

Therefore, because parental involvement is an extension of their financial commitment, based on the concept of consumer entitlement, many parents have become aggressive advocates (Carney-Hall, 2008). As consumers, parents are partners in the financing of higher education and conversely have a high set of expectations. According to Carney-Hall’s assessment, “Because parents are paying more, they expect better service and higher quality programs and facilities. As higher education’s high-paying customer, they will not hesitate to pursue the solution they want for any issue, no matter how minor (2008, p.4). As such, parents seek tangible returns on their investment and expect suitable accommodations including modern housing, attention to their student, technology, and a viable path to a career (Wartman & Savage, 2008).

**Technology**

Technological advances have changed the method and frequency of communication between college students and their parents. Advances in technology have made it easier for students and parents to remain connected with each other. Contact between college students and their family is frequent. Based on Tinto’s model, part of the ritual of going to college in the past was a separation from former relationships, including friends and parents. However, new technology “is making it harder for Millennials to ‘let go’ of their old high school worlds, to replace old friends with new ones” (Howe and Strauss, 2003, p. 93).
Prior research indicates that students use technology to remain connected and are more likely to initiate communication. A survey by the College Parents of America (2006) found that 74 percent of parents communicate with their college student at least two to three times a week; ninety percent report using a cell phone to stay in touch with their student. Junco and Mastrodicasa’s (2007) study indicated that college students reported speaking with their parents an average of 1.5 times per day, and 57.6 percent report the student initiated the calls. Trice’s qualitative study of forty-eight first-year students revealed that students initiated emails to parents primarily for academic, social, or financial issues. Students averaged six emails to their parents per week (Trice, 2002). During periods of academic stress such as exam time, contacts with parents increased (Trice, 2002).

In contrast, because of limited resources, underrepresented students have limited access to technology and maintain a different experience. Despite the widespread use of technology, students enter an institution with vastly different technological skills. According to Sax, Ceja and Teranishi’s study in 2001, while controlling for income, Latinos and African Americans communicated via e-mail less than whites and Asian Americans. Wolf, Sax & Harper, (2009) research results revealed that upper-middle-class students report significantly higher levels of parental engagement than students from less affluent backgrounds. However, with regard to students of color, the results were mixed. Mexican American, Latino/Other Spanish, Japanese/Japanese American indicated above average support and communication than other ethnic minority populations (Wolf, Sax & Harper, 2009)

Although parental involvement is not a new phenomenon, the level of involvement and expectations has intensified. Higher expectations resulted from a combination of factors, soaring
cost of attendance, a change in higher education’s role, and belief of parents that their student is children rather than an adult (Scott & Daniel, 2001). There is considerable literature that supports the premise that parental involvement impacts college students both academically and socially. Within the frame of this problem of practice there is a need to fully understand if a connection exists between the student–parent relationship and student retention and how the relationship impacts the student. The final three sections evaluate current literature on the parent-student relationship, the institution’s role in the parent-student-institution relationship and its impact on retention.

**Effects of the Parent-Student Relationship on the Student**

In spite of the widespread perception of helicopter or stealth fighter parents actively managing their student’s college career, much of the current research indicates that contact between the parent and the student is student-initiated. Pizzolato and Hicklen’s (2011) research reaffirmed prior findings and results revealed that, many participants only involved their parent’s for consultation rather than decision making. Research suggests that when college students face new situations they revert to comfortable reasoning patterns. With regard to evaluating parental involvement, much of the current literature has focused on the behavior of parents and measured the relationship based on the students’ perception. The prevailing evidence has evaluated the impact of the parent-student relationship through three lenses: adjustment to college, identity development, and psychological well-being.

**Adjustment to College**

Studies have found that family support is an important component during the transition to college life. Donovan and McKelfresh’s review of literature suggests an influence on student
access, persistence, and achievement (2008). Hiester, Nordstrom, and Swenson’s (2009) study of 271 first-semester freshmen supported previous research indicating positive outcomes were associated with stronger parental attachment. Mattanah, Hancock, and Brand’s (2004) found that secure attachment with parents and separation-individuation was associated with positive college adjustment for both men and women.

Outside of the evidence that implies parental attachment as important for a healthy adjustment to college, Schwartz and Bubolze’s (2004) study indicated a negative effect on independence. Their study utilized the attachment theory to investigate the relationship between attachment and separation between college students and their parents. In using the theory, college student adjustment and both the positive and negative effects of separation and attachment were examined. They concluded that students that experience highs level of separation are less likely to explore new roles like independence.

**Identity Development**

Empirical evidence also suggests that parental involvement impacts college student identity development. Identity development entails the active exploration and confirmation of individual specific morals, viewpoints, and aspirations in life (Erikson, 1968). Because the family is considered as a source for social and cultural identity, this outlet serves a key role in forming an individual’s identity. Samuolis, Layburn, and Schiaffino (2001) revealed that rather than separation, attachment to parents positively influenced the development of an identity. Lapsley, Rice and Fitzgerald (1990) found that parental attachment predicted personal social identity for both men and women.
Family connection is an important component in the formation of identities for students of color. As parents or the family unit maintain the cultural heritage, for most students, attachment is critical to nurture the development of the student’s ethnic identity (Torres, 2004). Torres’s (2004) research on the familial influences on the identity development of Latino first-year students suggest that unless Latino and Anglo cultures are intermingled within the institution, connection is essential to ethnic identity.

**Psychological Well-Being**

The 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that students who seek advice from their parents are more satisfied with their undergraduate experience and more engaged with their academic work (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007, pp. 24–25). College students also identify parents as the most influential people in their lives and seek their continuous input (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Most students indicate a positive relationship with their parents. Students reported frequently turning to their parents for support and maintain an evolving relationship (Kolkhorst, Yazedjian & Toews, 2010). MacCoby and Martin’s study also suggest that a closer parental relationship cultivates greater independence and self-confidence (1983).

While some data exists suggesting parental involvement delays the developmental process, much of the current scholarship implies a positive impact on the student. Moreover, students value encouragement from their parents. Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, and Toews (2010) analysis of 58 upperclassmen’s perception of parental involvement revealed most students reported a positive relationship with their parents and frequently rely on their parents for support.
Parental contact was both positively and negatively related to students’ social satisfaction. Some studies that isolate gender indicate, for women, parental involvement negatively affected academic gains but positively impacted satisfaction with the social experience (Harper, Sax & Wolfe, 2012). Parents were also reported to either detract or encourage their student when social interests and goals were shared (Harper, Sax & Wolfe, 2012).

The evolution in the student-parent relationship forced many administrators to evaluate their current stance towards communication with parents and information that is shared. Parallel to the shift were notable changes to the institution’s role. Several court rulings forced institutions to transform the role and responsibility that it plays, further contributing to the intricacy in the parent-student-institution relationship.

**Institution’s Role in the Parent-Student-Institution Relationship**

Much of the research on student development, parental involvement, separation and attachment began with shift in the doctrine of *in loco parentis*. *In loco parentis* represents the relationship between the student, parent, and institution (Lee, 2011). Prior to 1960s, institutions reserved the right to regulate the personal lives of college students (Lee, 2011). The shift occurred from several court ruling in the 60's which yielded constitutional rights for college student’s (Lee, 2011). Consequently, as the student-institution relationship shifted, parents exuded more involvement, creating a direct relationship with the university (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Prior to the shift in the parent-student-institution relationship, most student development research and theorist did not perceive parents to play a significant role in the development process (Sax & Wartman, 2010).
From the mid-1800s to the 1960s, colleges assumed responsibility over their students’ lives and limited most of their constitutional rights (Lee, 2011). Institutions assumed the responsibility of the parental university and extended control to include conduct and behavior both on and off campus. Bickel and Lake stated, “In its heyday, in loco parentis located power in the university—not in courts of law, or in the students. In loco parentis promoted the image of the parental university and insured that most problems were handled within the university, by the university, and often quietly” (Lee, 2011, p. 17).

Several notable cases judicially validated the doctrine. People v. Wheaton (1866) was one of the first legal applications of the principle. The Illinois Supreme Court found that institutions maintain discretionary power to regulate the discipline of their college. As the ruling stated, “A discretionary power has been given, … [and] we have no more authority to interfere than we have to control the domestic discipline of a father in his family” (People ex rel. Pratt v. Wheaton College, 40 Ill. 186). The precedent setting ruling firmly established the principle of in loco parentis.

In Gott v. Berea College (1913), the Kentucky Supreme Court upheld a rule forbidding students from entering a restaurant in Berea, KY that was not controlled by the College. In Stetson University v. Hunt, (1924) the Florida Supreme Court upheld Stetson University’s suspension of a student for “offensive habits that interfered with the comforts of others” (Stetson University v. Hunt, 1924, p. 516). Despite the doctrines widespread use, Dixon v. Alabama (1961), ruling was the defining moment for public institutions. Alabama State College expelled a group of African American students for participating in a civil rights demonstration. The sanction was executed without a hearing or an appeal. The students sued claiming a violation of
due process. The Fifth Circuit Court in Dixon held “that due process requires notice and some opportunity for hearing before a student at a tax-supported college is expelled for misconduct” (*Dixon v. Alabama*, 1961, p. 158). In the ruling, the court created four stipulations; the student must be given notice of charges, the student must be given information pertaining to the witnesses against them, the student should be given the opportunity for a hearing or an opportunity to be heard, and if the hearing is not before the Board of Education directly, then findings of the hearing should be presented in a report open to the students’ inspection. (*Dixon v. Alabama*, 1961, p. 158-59)

*Dixon v. Alabama* (1961) set precedent as it challenged the legitimacy towards the belief that institutions had the authority to restrict constitutional rights of students. Along the same timeframe, during the peak of the Civil rights era, college students took an active role in protesting racism and social inequalities, and more importantly campaigned for greater student rights (*Rhoads, 1998*). Legal cases continue to set precedent and redefine the parent-student-institution relationship for public institutions.

*Knight v. State Board of Education* (1961), the Tennessee federal trial court found that suspending students for participating in the Mississippi freedom rides was a violation of their due process rights. In *Hammond v. South Carolina State College* (1967) South Carolina federal trial court invalidated the college’s rule forbidding campus demonstrations without prior approval of college authorities. Private institutions, on the other hand continued to limit constitutional freedoms of their students. As in *Carr v. St. John’s University*, 1962, The New York Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court’s holding that the student’s enrollment into a private institution implied an agreement to comply with its rules and constitutional rights did not apply.
By the 1970s, *in loco parentis* at universities was an artifact of the past (Kaplin & Lee, 2007, p. 91). Coupled with the 26th amendment, *in loco parentis* was abandoned, resulting to a hands-off approach to students’ conduct (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The 1974 federal law, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), legally formalized the hands-off approach, FERPA, also known as the Buckley amendment, placed limitations on information that universities could share with parents (Wartman & Savage, 2008). The law grants three primary rights to students: (1) the right to inspect and review or the right to access their education records; (2) the right to challenge the content of their education records; and (3) the right to consent to the disclosure of their education records (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g [1974]). The law requires institutions to obtain written permission from the student to release any information from his or her educational record to any party. Certain people such as school officials with “legitimate educational interest” qualify as an exception to this rule (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g [1974]). Despite their financial contribution, parents do not qualify and are not exempt from the restrictions (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g [1974]).

**Emerging Adults**

The change in the parent-student-institution relationship also raises questions about whether college students are children or adults (Arnett, 2000). Students may feel they are adults once they enter college, however many parents view their children simply as older adolescents (Pennington, 2005). Arnett coined, emerging adults as the stage that college students occupy between being a child and an adult (Arnett, 2000). According Arnett’s study in 2000, “Individuals in their early 20s do not identify themselves as adults because they did not believe
they could be characterized as taking responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent” (p. 474).

Arnett suggest that these individuals are neither teenagers nor adults, and struggle with how they communicate, respond, and deal with everyday occurrences. Within the context of parental involvement, Arnett concluded that students who maintain the closest geographic ties to parents and who have the most frequent contact with them have the poorest emotional and psychological adjustment. Therefore, ties that are too close can hamper the development of a young person’s maturity. Emerging adults lack the critical components of adulthood, the ability to accept responsibility for consequences, make independent decisions and become financially independent. Therefore, the in-between time, is an extension of childhood and students continue to rely on their parents.

The irony of the parental involvement of Millennial parents, many of whom are Boomers, are members of the generation that helped usher in the end of *in loco parentis* and advocated for FERPA (Shapiro, 2002). Because of FERPA, institutions have adopted a strong stance towards parents, further intensifying the struggle between the institution and parents. Cutright (2008) states, “It is no wonder then, that parents assert rights that they may or may not have when laws are conflicting and basic circumstances so different from those of the parents’ college days.” Despite the strong stance that colleges have enforced many parents continue to be involved and advocate on behalf of their student.

Beyond the extensive amount of literature that explains parental involvement, little is known about the impact their behavior has had on student integration and retention. As most research isolated parent interaction as an external factor, there are a nominal number of studies
that have investigated the impact of parental behavior as an internal component of the first-year college student transition. The final section evaluates current literature on college student retention and how parental involvement impacts the student’s decision to depart or remain enrolled at an institution.

**Parental Involvement and Retention**

Nearly one-third of all first-year students do not return for a second year (Habley & Bloom, 2012). As institutions attempt to understand conditions that impact retention, research on parental involvement within the external and internal environment is absent. Student satisfaction and integration are critical components to retention and persistence. However, current literature on parental involvement and satisfaction contradicts longstanding theoretical frameworks on retention and persistence.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2007) study on parent contact and engagement revealed that students whose parents intervened reported higher levels of campus engagement, involvement in more complex and meaningful learning activities, making larger gains toward desired college goals, and greater satisfaction with their college experience. Much of the current literature on student integration suggests the necessity to effectively separate and renegotiate the relationship between the home community, parents and family (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, in order to successfully transition, students must break dependence on family members and become fully integrated into the new college community.

There is limited empirical evidence that investigates the impact of parental involvement on student persistence. Much of the extant literature on parental influence measured the impact of parental characteristics such as education and income rather than contact with students and
interaction within the institution. Prior research indicates that peers, faculty and parents are the three most common influencers that may affect students’ decisions to leave an institution (Bank, Slavings & Biddle, 1990). Bank, Slavings, and Biddle’s (1990) study was one of the first to provide evidence on the effect of peer, faculty, and parental influences on persistence. The longitudinal study of first-year students revealed that parents and peers have stronger influences than faculty (1990). Based on the results, parents served as positive role models for their student and their influence had significant effects primarily during the first semester.

There is stronger evidence that indicates parental social support as a better predictor for students of color. Data suggest that parental support is important for social identity, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and educational goal commitment (Lapsley, Rice, & Fitzgerald, 1990). The literature suggests that social support contributes to improved academic performance and further increases retention. Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, and Willson (1999) found that for African American students, family support was essential for decisions related to academic persistence. Similarly, Gloria (1997) reported that for Latino students, social support from family and friends indirectly effected persistence decisions. Based on London’s assessment, first-generation students straddle between two conflicting cultures; their family and the new colligate environment. Consequently, first-generation students experience college by severing important relationships while attempting to navigate the new environment. The literature suggest positive outcomes associated with parental involvement, however Chrispeels and Rivero emphasize the importance of balanced approach to offset negative barriers such as socioeconomic status (2001).

Summary
The intent of this literature review was to provide an overview of knowledge on parental involvement. The extensive amount of literature reviewed revealed a gap on the effect of parental involvement and college student retention. More importantly, as much of the research is evaluated quantitatively, the perspective of college students’ is absent.

This research intends to employ a phenomenological method and incorporate Tinto’s Student Integration Model and Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory to evaluate how parental involvement influences the students’ academic and social integration in their first year of college. Creswell (1998) suggests that in order to understand what is real and the natural attitude of an experience, the researcher must suspend any assumptions, which is the goal of a phenomenological study. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to investigate how parental involvement influences social and academic integration of their children in their first year of college.

**Chapter 3- Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how parental involvement influences social and academic integration of their children in their first year of college. Through qualitative inquiry, the goal of this study is to fully understand how first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life.

**Research Design**

Creswell describes the research design outside of the methods of data collection and analysis to include the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing the narrative (1998). To uncover the lived experiences of first-year college students, this study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research design based on semi-structured face-to-face
interviews. This design was driven by the research question, the problem of practice and the sample studied. According to Creswell (2007) the research should connect to the research question and the question informs the choice of method. Therefore, this approach was selected based on the elements that constitute data, the meaning inferred from it, and the analysis sought after.

A qualitative method is the fundamental components of this research design. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that qualitative research is the “best strategy for discovery, exploring a new area, and developing hypothesis” (p. 10). Therefore, the goal of qualitative research is to explore problems using an inductive approach and understand meaning through emerging themes (Creswell, 1998). Rather than causal explanations or interpretive generalizations, qualitative research is centered on sense-making and developing meaning and subjective experiences.

Qualitative methods involve interaction between the researchers and participants as the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information (Lichtman, 2006). Qualitative research creates an holistic picture as it analyzes a phenomena in its natural environment and attempts to make sense of or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, employing a qualitative design is an ideal approach towards developing a deeper understanding into the student’s perception of their parent’s involvement. More importantly, rather than measuring a predefined definition of parental involvement, a qualitative design permits participants to develop their own meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Research Tradition
To answer the research question, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) design will be employed using semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of first-year college students. IPA is an approach to qualitative research concerned with exploring and understanding the lived experience of a specified phenomenon (Smith, 2004). IPA involves the detailed examination of participants’ experiences of a particular phenomenon, how they have made sense of these experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Smith, 2004).

IPA is grounded on the core principles of phenomenology and in particular, to the person’s direct experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The phenomenon is fully understood by listening to the participant’s account of their own story in their own words (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), explain that through IPA, the researcher has the capacity to reveal the participants’ experiences of their personal learning journeys. Therefore, the approach is largely dependent upon how people describe their experiences in order to determine the essential characteristics of these experiences (Maggs-Rapport, 2000).

IPA researchers articulate phenomenological concepts through their interpretation of the experience. Therefore, findings are connected to personal and professional experience and extant literature (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Within this problem of practice, the findings from this study will offer a fine grained understanding that can be used to strengthen existing quantitative research about parental involvement. More importantly, the results will provide desirable qualitative data about the student’s perspective.

Site
This research will be conducted at the University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB), a small, residential institution located in Bluffton, S.C. The University of South Carolina Beaufort serves a diverse population of 1874 students. USCB is one of four senior campuses in the University of South Carolina system (Mission of USCB, n.d.). USCB has an institutional mission of servicing the Lowcountry of South Carolina through scholarship, teaching, research and public service (Mission of USCB, n.d.). The University prides itself on drawing upon strengthens, responding to regional needs, and graduating students that are responsible citizens within the Lowcountry and beyond (Mission of USCB, n.d.). USCB’s student population consists of traditional freshmen, transfer, military, and continuing undergraduate students (Statistical Summary, n.d.). USCB services a diverse population of students. In Fall 2011, just over 68% were degree seeking, 74% were traditional age, full-time students and 27% were minority students (Statistical Summary, n.d.). The Fall 2012 first-time, first-year class consisted of 64% female, 36% male and 32% were minority. With a relatively open admissions policy, 47% of new freshmen indicate they are first-generation students.

Participants

The larger target population for this study is traditional age, (17-20 years of age) first-time, full-time residential freshman attending a four-year institution. From the larger sample, this sample is comprised of five first-year, full-time students attending the University of South Carolina Beaufort. Though the sample will be comprised of students that meet the criteria of this study, the sample will be an ethnically diverse group of participants. The study will closely resemble the make-up of the University’s first year, full-time incoming class.

Participant Selection Criteria
The following criteria will be employed to select the participants in the study:

- Registered as a full-time, first-time, first-year student at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. Full-time enrolled is defined as enrolled in 12 or more credit hours.
- Live in the University housing facility.
- The selection included 4 females, 1 male, 2 Caucasian and 3 minority students. The sample attempted to reflect the demographic make-up of the fall 2012 first-time, first-year incoming students.

Because of the nature of this research, participants were selected through purposive homogenous sampling methods. Purposive sampling is effective in quickly reaching a targeted population and also powerful for selecting information for an in-depth evaluation related to the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007). For a phenomenological study, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recommend studying between four and ten participants. By incorporating five participants, this study will have a sizable amount of data to identify salient similarities (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The most notable limitation of this study can be attributed to the nature of the sample. As this study employed a homogenous sample, it will not provide for generalizations, rather the findings will produce emerging themes.

**Recruitment and Access**

Recruitment of participants targeted first-year, full-time freshmen previously or currently enrolled in the USCB’s University 101 course. Students enrolled were sent an email invitation (see Appendix A) encouraging participation. For students currently taking the course, information about the study was announced in the University 101 classes by the instructor. Sign-up timeframes extended for three weeks. The researcher’s contact information was listed on the
invitation. Interested individuals were instructed to contact the researcher either email or telephone to participate in a pre-screening interview (see Appendix B). During the pre-screening interview, participants were given more detailed information about the nature of the study. If the interested participant met the criteria and was selected, the participant was given an interview confirmation including the interview date, time and location. Interviews took place at the University of South Carolina Beaufort campus.

Once the targeted number of participants was selected, they were given consent forms (see Appendix C), which described the location, times, and duration of the interview. Participants selected for the study received a $25 gift card to iTunes, Barnes and Noble, Starbucks or a gas card. As an administrator at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, the researcher had adequate access to the participants. The researcher worked as an administrator in the Office of Admissions, and because the participants were currently enrolled, there was little to no relationship with the participants that could have influenced the outcome.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Participation in this study does not present any indirect or direct risks to the participants. The purpose of this research was to interview first-time, first-year students and determine how they felt about the involvement of their parents in their academic and social life of college. Participation in this project was completely voluntary and participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview process. The identity of each participant is unknown. Each interview was numbered and each participant was issued a pseudonym. There was no direct benefit to any participant for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to improve services and information to college
students and their parents. It is desired, that the data that emerges from this study will contribute to the current body of knowledge on the experiences of first-year college students.

Data Collection

Interviews began after participants signed the informed consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Data was collected through open-ended semi-structured interviews. According to Creswell, open-ended questions provide an ideal setting for themes to emerge (1998). Furthermore, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that an IPA investigator’s goal is to develop data collection strategies that extract detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this study, open-ended questions provide valuable insight into the experiences of first-year students as it generates deeper understanding of the human experience. Furthermore, semi-structured, individual interviews are desirable as they allow rapport to develop, accommodate in-depth, personal discussions, and create a flexible yet comfortable environment for participants to process information, rediscover their situation and describe it in their own words. Additionally, the adaptable format provides the researcher with an optimal opportunity for follow-up questions or to adjust the research questions based on the conversation.

This study followed an in-depth phenomenological interview methodology (Creswell, 1998). Interview protocols were followed that allow a deeper understanding of the experiences of first-year college students that might offer insight into the student’s perception of their parents’ involvement. Data was collected from first-year students at the beginning of their spring semester through semi-structured interviews. The process allowed first-year students at the
beginning of their second semester to reflect on the involvement of their parents during their first semester in college.

A semi-structured interview guide was employed to help direct and manage the interview process (see Appendix D). The interview schedule contained the sequence of the questions and as the interviews attempted to answer the research question from different angles (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Furthermore, the guide helped to provide structure to the interview process by arranging the questions in a logical order most appropriate for the participants. Data consisted of individual narratives by first-year students who have experienced the phenomenon of parental involvement. Participants were asked a series of questions led by the researcher. Interview sessions were recorded and later transcribed to create interview transcripts. Each interview was numbered and each participant was issued a pseudonym.

**Data Analysis**

The analytical focus of this project was to evaluate the participant’s ability to make sense of their parents’ involvement during their first year of college (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest the analysis phase include three steps, reading and rereading interview transcripts, initial data interpretation and the development of emergent themes. Phase one begins with an in-depth evaluation of the interview transcripts. During this phase, the researcher records personal remarks on the interview experience or observations about the transcript (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest that during this stage, the researcher can “begin the process of entering the participant’s world, it is important to enter a phase of active engagement with the data,” (2009, p. 82).
Phase two includes initial noting and data interpretation. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe three levels of interpretation that will be included in this research: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. The descriptive level is largely dependent upon narrative details and less on interpretation. Secondly, linguistic level is focused on the literal terms of the interview transcripts. The final level, conceptual analysis; captures the interpretative process.

The final phase includes the analysis of transcript codes and the development of emerging themes. Saldana states that qualitative inquiry coding is defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute” (2009, p. 3). The objective of the process of coding is to identify categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondents’ view of the phenomena (Basit, 2003). Basit clarified the importance of coding in qualitative data as it “…triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data. This scheme helps the researcher to ask questions, to compare across data, to change or drop categories and to make a hierarchical order of them” (2003, p. 144). Codes represent the conceptual framework of this research and are labels that have been assigned to units of significance derived from the data collection phase (Basit, 2003). Selected codes further signify salient phrases or paraphrase that emerged during the interview process and provide a logical way of organization. From the transcript codes, emergent themes will be identified that illustrate interconnected relationships or patterns about the student’s perception of their parents’ involvement (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 91).

Validity and Credibility

Qualitative research largely relies on trustworthiness, dependability, credibility and peer review to establish reliability and validity (Creswell, 2009). Creswell defines validity as “how
accurately the account represents participants realities of the social phenomena and is credible to
them” (2000, p.125). Validity also represents the precision of interpretations of data from both
the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2009). Within this study, dependability of data is
signified by the use of common research strategies and the traditional methods embedded within
the data collection and analysis.

Credibility is the most salient criteria to evaluating qualitative data (Lewis, 2009). Credibility
symbolizes the plausibility of the research findings. During the analysis process, credibility is
further enriched through the empirical evidence by the confirmation of research conclusions. Miles
and Huberman identified three critical action items required to ensure credibility of qualitative
data; data reduction or simplifying intricate data through coding, data display, and drawing
conclusions to exam the validity of findings (1994, pp. 11–12). Lewis further explained that
maximum confidence in the credibility of the research findings comes from member checking by the
research participants’, analysis of several sources of data, interpretation from others, and
predicted outcomes based on relevant theoretical frameworks (2009).

This study was guided by the assumption that in-depth interviews, discussions and
participant observations are effective in gathering information about the experiences of first-year
college students. Moreover, the phenomenological research model appropriately addressed the
research question of this study. As phenomenology offers limited structure but the most
opportunity for analysis, the model has a higher potential for unbalanced study between the
research focus and excessive researcher influence because the researcher is constrained by time.

**Personal Basis**
The most notable validity risk is my professional experience and my perspective towards this problem of practice. At the time of the research, I served as the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management and Director of Admissions, and I experienced parental involvement early on during the enrollment process. Because of my profession, I view extreme parental involvement as negative and feel it can produce students that are unable to think and function for themselves without the assistance of their parents. Part of the challenge for most administrators is to develop a genuine understanding about why college students need their parents to intervene at the level of their current involvement.

I personally believe that colleges and universities play an important role in transforming young adults into mature, independent, civically engaged citizens. From my professional experience, for most students, because of their parent’s involvement, this change is not occurring at the same level as it did in the past. As a higher education administrator, I struggle professionally with accepting this as the new normal.

Because of my personal bias, ensuring validity and credibility were considered throughout every facet of this study, but in particular during the design of the study and data analysis protocols. As an initial precaution, I have been mindful to avoid using bias language in the wording of the interview questions and the sequence of the questions. I have attempted to use language that uncovers the student’s description in their own words about the involvement of their parents.

The analysis protocol includes a series of coding to ensure that data is interpreted accurately. This study heavily relies on Smith, Flowers and Larkin’s (2009) work to guide the analysis process. The process of bracketing will be used in analysis of the data. Bracketing
within IPA, however, is different than bracketing in transcendental phenomenology in which the researcher sets aside his or her own experiences. In IPA, it is described as a process in which the researcher attempts to bring into awareness his or her own subjectivity, assumptions, and vested interests in undertaking the research and also to consider how these may impact the interviews with participants. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain that with bracketing, in this sense, the researcher is more likely to isolate pre-existing concerns although this is “something which can only be partially achieved” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 25). Furthermore, interview questions and analysis protocol will be read and critiqued by external readers, unrelated to this research to ensure unbiased language.

**Study Limitations**

Although this research achieved both the intellectual and practical goals, there are notable limitations to this study. While the study captured a relatively diverse sample of first-year students attending USCB, this study’s focus was to gain insight into the experience of first-year college students. Therefore, the lens of this study did not include the input of the parents, faculty and staff. A pool with a variety of constituents could have yielded additional insight into the problem of practice.

Though the findings from this study maybe transferable to a similar institution, the scope of this study is limited. This research is bounded to research at a residential, small, public institution located in the lower portion of South Carolina. The findings of this study may not reflect the same findings if the study were to be replicated in a different institution with a dissimilar population of students, in a different geographical area.
Finally, this IPA study evaluated integration through a reflective process as first-year students considered how they experienced parental involvement. Though the study yielded considerable findings, the short timeframe to evaluate retention limited the researcher’s ability to fully understand the influence of parental involvement on first-year student integration. As the process of integration occurs over an extended period of time, an ideal study of integration would be more comprehensive and encompass the entire year.

Conclusion

As involved parents continue to enroll in college with their students, administrators will struggle with the increasing population of students that lack skills and are unwilling or unable to solve their own problems. Though prior research has attributed to the current body of knowledge, there is a gap among the current literature related to the student’s perspective about their parents’ involvement. Furthermore most of the existing research on student integration is based on quantitative data.

This research aimed to understand parental involvement by examining the perspective of first-year college students. In order to fully understand how, if any, parental involvement shaped first-year college students, this study incorporated a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). This research is guided by the following question: How do first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life? The goal to incorporating IPA is to uncover what it means for first-year students to go through college with the involvement of their parents and how if any their involvement influenced the student’s integration in the academic and social life of the university. Through semi-structured interviews, the objective was to uncover if a link existed between parental involvement and student
integration based on Tinto’s Student Integration Theory and Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory. Rather than continuing to wrestle with parental involvement, additional information on this phenomenon would assist institutions in further understanding the student’s perspective towards the new role their parents play into their college experience.

Chapter 4- Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how first-year students make sense of the involvement of their parents during their first semester in college. The participants in this study each provided detailed accounts of their experiences with parental involvement and the significance they derived from their parents’ involvement. From the analysis of the transcripts, three superordinate themes and six subthemes emerged. These themes captured what parental involvement means to five first-year college students. The superordinate and subthemes are 1) Involvement in Everything, including a) a closer relationship, b) frequent contact with their parents; 2) Importance of Involvement, including a) support, b) advocacy; 3) Being a Young Adult, including a) inferior to faculty and administrators, b) fear of ineffectively communicating with faculty and administrators.

In reflecting on the initial definition, outside of parental involvement in every aspect of the participant’s college experience, students also described a closer relationship while in enrolled and frequent contact with their parent(s). Parental involvement was important as it symbolized support for the student during their college career and advocacy in times of conflict. Furthermore, participants justified parental involvement because they categorized themselves as a young adult. Despite the perception of having a greater level of maturity and having an initial expectation of adulthood prior to enrollment, there was still a need for involvement as students
articulated feeling inferior to faculty and administrators and a fear of ineffectively communicating with them. This chapter will discuss each superordinate theme with its subthemes, in turn. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings.

**Involvement in Everything**

In processing the term parental involvement and what it represented, five first-year students articulated the sentiment that parental involvement signified a comprehensive association of their parent(s) involvement in both their academic and social life. The definition evolved through a positive reflection on their experiences with parental involvement during their first semester in college. Beyond the surface level definition, within the theme, two subcategories emerged including the development of a closer relationship and frequent contact with their parent(s). Both subthemes represent a byproduct of a change in the relationship and increased level of maturity. For the students in this study, the shift in becoming a college student increased their level of maturity which cultivated a closer relationship with their parent(s). Because the relationship experienced a positive change, students were open to sharing more with their parent, therefore increasing the level of communication. The subthemes add a deeper layer to the definition of parental involvement and offer further insight into the meaning that first-year students place on it.

There was a general consensus among all five participants when asked to define the term parental involvement. They defined parental involvement as a phrase that represented their parent(s) being involved in every aspect of their life. Participants openly described the term as a normal function of their college career and upon reflecting on its meaning, each of the participants expressed positive feelings. All but one student described involvement as a feature in
their academic and social life, and only one of the participants mentioned financial support.

Students used the term “support” and “involvement” interchangeably. Rather than representing a single type of involvement, students described parental involvement with words such as attached, support, and everything. Khadija used the word attached the most, and associated feelings of emotional attachment to her mother’s involvement. In both high school and college, her mother’s involvement signified her responding to Khadija’s needs in both her academic and social life.

Upon reflecting on the involvement, Khadija stated:

When I was in high school, if I was in a play, she made sure she was there. She even attended events that my friends were in. If my teacher called her, she would come to the school and embarrass me. I thank her for that, because that made me the young woman that I am today.

Early in the interview, Khadija revealed that she was raised in a single parent household and had a strained relationship with her father. Khadija’s attachment intensified as her mother continued to be involved in her life.

Cindy described parental involvement broadly by identifying varying levels of support including academic, religious and moral support. Of the five participants, Cindy was considered to be the most emotionally distant from her mother. She stated that she was not as close to her mom and later revealed it was because of family issues. When asked what parental involvement meant to her, Cindy stated “support from your parents and them being there for everything. From school related things to spiritual and moral support.” In spite of the challenges within her family, she still defined parental involvement with the term support and indicated that her mother was
supportive of her college career.

When asked if their parent(s) was supportive of their college career, all five participants affirmed encouragement, pride, and support from their parents. Madison stated that her parents were very supportive and proud. During her first semester she made the Chancellor’s and Dean’s List. Madison, the only out-of-state student included in this study, explained that because she is more than 500 miles away from her parents, she has more freedom then the traditional first-year student. She also clarified that because her father failed out of college during his first year in school, her parents reward her with more freedom when her grades are strong. When asked about the nature of her relationship, Madison explained:

No, it’s still good. My dad went to college so he asks light questions about what I did over the weekend. He flunked out his first semester in college because of partying too much, so as long as I make good grades, he is fine with it.

Khadija reflected upon how her mother’s encouragement positively impacted her decision to return to college.

I was so close to giving up on school but my mom pushed and encouraged me. I almost didn't come back the second semester. I had to have surgery and my doctor told me I would be out for two weeks right when the second semester started. I pushed myself to come back to school because my mother told me that you have to work for what you want. My mom told me she didn't care if I had to crawl to class. I couldn’t walk for four days and it was hard but I made it.

Beyond the common definition among students within this study, prior to their college enrollment, participants experienced varying levels of parental involvement during high school.
In reflecting on previous occurrences with parental involvement during the pre-screening interview, two students revealed little parental involvement and three described significant involvement. Based on Mary’s account, she welcomed and enjoyed her mother’s involvement during high school. When asked to describe parental involvement, Mary answered, “My parent being involved in everything. My mom is pretty involved; she works and is a Nurse. She works everyday but always finds a way to be there at everything.” In describing how she felt about the involvement, Mary reflected on positive memoires during high school. “I loved it. I was really happy to have her there for me. The little stuff that I did in high school, she really was there for everything. I don’t know how she did it, but she found a way to always be there.” She also affirmed that the involvement left a profound impact on her and without the level of parental involvement she would have felt mentally and emotionally unsupported.

With regard to the type of involvement, all but one student reflected solely on academic related involvement. Only one student mentioned involvement in both the academic and social arena. Although the level of involvement varied for participants while in high school, the student’s in this study conveyed either a moderate to strong level of parental involvement during their first semester in college.

**A Closer Relationship**

When asked, how, if their relationship had changed, four students indicated that outside of the physical separation, going off to college brought them closer to their parent(s). Several participants described a stronger level of maturity which fostered a closer relationship. Madison described the closer relationship with her mom. “It’s just the fact that I’m out of high school and in college and college is more grown up. I think she feels that she can relate to me. And a couple
times she has come to me and I’ve helped her through things.” The notion of a maturing relationship can be credited to an acknowledgement that a level of change took place from the student being a minor in high school, to a first-year college student. Though students did not describe themselves as an adult, the physical separation, coupled with the increased responsibility equated to what student’s described as a small level of independence that contributed to feeling more mature.

Participants described a stronger level of maturity which enabled a stronger relationship. Upon reflecting over her first semester, Mary realized that she was not as mature as an adult, but had a different level of maturity now that she is in college. As she described the nature of her relationship with her mother and the support that she has received, Mary referred to her mother as her best friend. When asked about the change in relationship, Mary stated, “Yes, I feel like we have gotten much closer. She’s my best friend. I feel like I’m growing towards the adult level that she is on.”

As a byproduct of a maturing relationship, first-year college students in this study also reported the ability to share more with their parent(s). Though not as extensive as an adult relationship, because their bond experienced a level of change, participants are more open than they were when they were in high school. During Khadija’s interview, she reflected on her ability to share more with her mother and why, now that she is away from home, it is important for their relationship to be transparent.

When I was in high school I used to hold things in and I never really told her anything. Now I tell her a lot. Now, I tell her what's bothering me because I have a lot going on. I've gotten more outspoken since I came to college. If I keep holding things in and don't
tell her, then I could end up harming myself.

During her first-semester, Khadija experienced challenges in both her academic and social life. The major she originally selected was not the right fit, which caused her to be placed in classes that she was not successful in. She suffered a major personal lost during the middle of the fall semester, her grandfather passed away. Because of the timing of the funeral she missed her mid-term and was not allowed to retake it. She ended up failing the course. Finally she had roommate conflicts and during her interview stated that she was “unhappy with her home away from home.” The challenges that she experienced, during her first-semester, strengthened her relationship with her mother, but also reinforced the necessity for an open relationship. Upon reflecting on her recent experience, Khadija attributed both her success and her ability to cope with challenges to her mother’s support, involvement and encouragement.

Cindy was the only student that described an increase in distance, both physically and emotionally. Since she enrolled in college she decreased the time she physically goes home and indicated that she only talked to her mother when it was related to things that had to get done.

We got a little more distant. I feel like it is because I’m growing up. My mom and I still talk but usually when we talk it’s about things we have to do. I just did my taxes so she had to call me. She is really busy and so am I. She works a lot and I’m really busy with school. We mostly talk over the weekend.

Although she justified the change in relationship by being busy, Cindy later revealed family challenges that placed a strain on their relationship.

**Frequent Contact**

The high level of parental involvement reported by students in this study was reinforced
by frequent contact with their parent(s). Though students conveyed varying levels of contact, four students described communicating with their parent on a frequent basis. Frequent contact was defined as communication that occurred at least five to seven times per week. One student reported moderate communication or having contact at least two to four times per week. Students listed the phone as the primary method of communication. Only one student, Madison, mentioned that she used email with her dad for non-emergencies and Facetime with her mom. Mary also indicated that she and her mother use Skype and text.

Four students reported talking to their parent(s) multiple times a day. Both Khadija and Mary talk to their parent every day, at least four to five times a day. Based on Mary’s account, “We talk all the time. We talk seven days a week at least four or five times a day. I call her, text her and we Skype.” When asked who initiates the communication, both Mary and Khadija, the two described as the most attached, disclosed the majority of the time, they initiate contact. Khadija stated that she and her mother talk, “four to five times and day, and I call her eighty percent of the time.” Mike appeared to have the most balanced relationship with his mother and still described frequent communication. When asked about their relationship and how often they communicate, Mike responded, “I would say we have a good relationship, we talk on the phone, four to five times a week or a little more; maybe once or twice a day.” When asked who initiates contact, Mike indicated fifty, fifty. Cindy, the only student that described moderate communication, stated, “My mom usually calls me. Sometimes I don’t talk to her at all during the week; maybe once or twice a week and mainly on the weekend.”

Two students used the contact with their parent(s) to help them cope with transitional issues associated with homesickness. Both Mary and Khadija disclosed feeling homesick during
their first semester. Because they communicated with their parent at least four to five times per day, the contact both fueled and defused their feelings of homesickness. Khadija revealed she went home every weekend because she missed having family time. She mentioned repeatedly that her mother was all she had, she missed being home, but more importantly she missed her mother. Mary experienced homesickness soon after she moved into her residence hall. When asked when her homesickness started, Mary responded, “Real quick. Move in day, and as soon as my family left, it was horrible, I started crying and I called them and told them to turnaround and come back and take me home.” The continuous communication helped both Mary and Khadija stay connected to their families.

**Importance of Involvement**

Parent(s) of first-year students continued to stay connected and involved with their student’s college career because the students felt parental involvement was important. In reflecting on their first semester, student’s expressed a positive association between their first semester as a college student and the involvement from their parents. Parental involvement encompassed all aspects, including both their social and academic lives. Based on the theme, parental involvement gained a stronger level of significance because it symbolized support and advocacy during conflicts. The two subthemes, compliment the importance, as participants described varying levels of support and advocacy. Because support was demonstrated through financial assistance, concern for their college career, assistance with coursework and for some, an eagerness to intervene, students appreciated and valued the active role that their parents played in their college career. Closely connected to the subtheme of support, the advocacy role also attributed to the level of significance that parental involvement played. When faced with a
conflict, because of their level of maturity and inexperience, all of the participants indicated the preference to commission either their parent(s) or a trusted adult to advocate on their behalf. Beyond the initial definition, this analysis unearthed the magnitude of trust and the ability to establish a relationship with a faculty member or university administrator.

For students in this study, parental involvement continued to be an important component of their life. Four of the five participants, expressed parental involvement as a normal activity. As clearly conveyed in how they define parental involvement, the phrase was positively seen as a form of support. Because of the positive association towards involvement, student’s also appeared to be appreciative of the level of involvement. When asked to describe how she felt about her mother’s involvement, Mary revealed that she would be disoriented without her mother’s support. Despite the accessibility of her professors, she trusts her mother’s feedback. “I feel like I would be lost if I didn’t have her help. You could go to a teacher and everything, but I have a closer relationship with my mom because I have known her my whole life.”

First-year students welcomed, justified and enabled their parent’s involvement. They were active participants in facilitating the involvement and permitted the action because they considered it to be vital. Many students reported involvement in both their academic and social life, and also revealed that they had given their parent access to their student account. Of the students that participated in this study, three uncovered that they had given their parent full access to their account. Mary stated that she gave her mother access to her account during the middle of the first semester.

In high school she checked my grades every week, but I know it was because she wanted me to succeed. I gave her access in October and that is also when I was doing bad in
Biology. So she is always checking my grades but because I gave her access to my account, she helped me pass Biology. My mom keeps me on my feet. I would probably be failing classes. I am glad I gave her my code. She makes sure I’m on top of my grades. By giving their parent(s) access to their student account, the students sought to enable and maintain a high level of parental involvement. When asked how she would feel if her parent(s) had access to her student account, Madison stated that she didn’t mind if her parents were permitted to view her information and felt it would inspire her to work harder. “I wouldn’t mind and I feel like it would make me want to work harder because I would want to make them proud of me.” Through frequent communication and a stronger level of maturity, students empowered their parents to stay involved in their college career. To the students within this study, parental involvement was important because it symbolized support during high moments and advocacy in times of conflict.

Support

All five participants expressed feeling emotional support from their parent(s). Though the level of support varied, students felt support from their parent primarily in their academic lives. Support was demonstrated through financial contributions, interest in their college career, assistance with coursework and willingness to intervene. Participants reported receiving financial support from their parent(s). When asked which area their parent(s) was the most involved, Madison explained mostly in her academic life because of their financial support. “My parents are mainly concerned with my academics because my dad pays for everything.” Students understood that because their parent(s) financially contributed to their education, interest in their academic lives was inevitable.
Accordingly, students reported the highest level of parental involvement related to their academics. Support was demonstrated through frequent conversations about their academic performance and progress, and for one student, help with coursework. Mike, a first-generation college student, explained that his mother was more involved with his academics because, “she wants to be on top of me. She needs to make sure I’m doing what I am supposed to do, so I tell her about every test that I take and what I made on it.” According to Mike, he shared more detailed academic information with his mom to reassure her because she places a priority on academics. “I’m the first one to go off to college, so I talk to her more about academics to comfort her because it’s the most important to her.”

Outside of the financial support, both Madison and Cindy mentioned their parent(s) illustrated support by taking an interest in their academic performance and progress. With regard to her academic advancement, Madison stated that her father monitors her progress to stay connected to her.

He asks about my grades and my progress. I usually complain about being behind on schoolwork or procrastinating on Facebook. He has it set-up where he gets email alerts every time I post an update. A couple of times he has called me like two minutes after and asked why I wasn’t doing my homework. It’s just his way of feeling close to me and staying connected.

Though Cindy conveyed the lowest level of parental involvement, her mother’s primarily interest was related to academics because as Cindy stated, “It was the reason I came to college.”

Past the financial and moral support, Mary was the only student that divulged receiving help with her coursework. Rather than using the academic resources provided through the
University, Mary preferred for her mother to help her with her schoolwork. During her first-semester, Mary’s mother helped her successfully pass Biology class and provided feedback on all of her papers. When asked about the type of involvement, Mary responded, “Yes, she helps me with my classes. I’m not really good with writing papers and she always helps me write my papers.” Mary indicated that her mother helped her every time she had a paper. She explained, “I read her my paper or I emailed her my papers. She gives me her feedback on what I should do to improve it. She doesn’t do the whole paper for me and she does it in a way so that I will learn.”

Mary also struggled with Biology. Initially she did not inform her mother about the issue; however, because her mother had access to her student account, while checking on her progress she noticed Mary struggling with the subject and offered to help her through the course.

She really helped me with Biology. I would read the definition and I would get it but I would not get it. She explained it to me so I understand what the word was and taught me so that I would remember. She helped me with the words I didn’t understand and when I would go home on the weekend she would print papers and help me with systems to see if I was getting it.

In both cases her mother’s involvement resulted in positive outcomes. Mary passed Biology with a B and received A’s on every paper. When asked why she sought her mother’s assistance rather than a faculty or staff member, Mary response uncovered the importance of having trust and an established relationship. “Her feedback, I know she is telling me because she wants me to succeed. I know a teacher does too, but I just feel like her feedback is better. I’m more likely to go to my mom because she is always right.”
When experiencing issues in their academic and social life, all five participants indicated that they would initially begin by soliciting advice from their parent. When considering how she would respond to a conflict, Mary articulated the importance of obtaining feedback from her mother. “I would call my mom and talk to her to see what I should do about it. I would probably just take her advice.” Mike specified that he would inform his mother but when faced with a challenge he felt it would be appropriate to try to handle the situation himself. He explained that he would tell his mom but only for her advice and not as a request for her involvement.

The participants in this study clearly conveyed the importance of having their parent(s) play an active role within their college career. Because academic success directly correlates with obtaining a college degree, for the five students within this study, having their parent show some level of involvement was critical. Students also expressed positive emotions when describing in detail how their parent(s) stayed connected to their college life. Though the level of involvement varied, all students reported being satisfied with the level of parental involvement.

**Advocacy During Conflict**

Closely connected to the support that students received, parental involvement was also essential to the participants as it represented advocacy in times of conflict. All five students indicated the need to seek help from their parent(s) or as Cindy described a “higher authority” when faced with a conflict. Rather than exhibit a pattern of self-advocacy and independence, four of the participants expressed the preference for their parent to serve in that role. Though each situation varied by participants, to some degree students either requested help or desired that their parent(s) intervene in both their academic and social lives. Based on the student’s account, their preference can be attributed to trust, positive outcomes from their parent’s previous
involvement and their parent’s persistent nature.

One student associated seeking her parent’s involvement with a lack of trust with administrators and faculty. Khadija used the term trust when reflecting on why she wanted her mom to become involved. “My professor last semester would not let me take my midterm over because it was the day of my grandfather's funeral. I went to his boss but nobody cared and I failed the class.” When asked if she told her mother about the issue, she stated, “Yes, and she told me to go tell someone else. When I have problems I've sometimes talk to my advisor or my advisor's wife but that's it. Somebody that I know I can trust that's going to help me through my problems.” Khadija was very clear that although her mother did not get involved when she went through a significant challenge, she wanted her to. “I really wanted her to go talk with the Dean. They wouldn’t have listened to me because I'm a student. They will listen to my mom because she is not going to put up with it.” When asked why, she responded, “Because she's an adult. When I speak people don't believe me. I feel they'll believe my mom before me, even if I’m the person that’s having the problem. I think they are more willing to work with an adult.”

In reflecting on their new student orientation experience, Khadija, Mary and Madison, reported that they preferred for their parent to be involved during the advisement process as they lacked trust with their advisor at the time of advisement. In clarifying her preference for her mother to be present during advisement, Mary stated, “Yes, I trust her a lot. She knows what classes I need to take.” In addition to trust, both Madison and Khadija both described wanting to get their parent(s) feedback on their proposed schedule during advisement. Mike did the most work researching the classes he needed to take before orientation and of the students in this study, he was the most prepared. He indicated that if he wasn’t as prepared, he would have
struggled trusting his advisor. “If I didn’t have that information, how would I have known if my advisor was going to do the right thing or not? I was iffy about everybody.”

Mary was the only student that reported being placed in a class incorrectly. She stated that if her mother was involved during advisement, she would have prevented the mistake from occurring. Based on Mary’s account, “My advisor put me in a class I didn’t even need. I ended up dropping it. If my mom was with me she would have told them not to put me in that class.”

The lack of trust can be attributed to the timing of advisement and orientation and the student’s inability to establish a relationship with their advisor. When asked, rather than being separated if would she preferred to stay with her mother, Mary responded, “Not the whole day because I wanted to meet people but advising was important.” Given the level of significance of advisement, without their parents involved, three of the students in this study were apprehensive during the process.

Because of their persistent nature, four of the participants in this study also believed that, in times of a conflict, their parent(s) intervening would yield a stronger outcome. In both the academic and social life, parental involvement was perceived to be an opportunity to achieve stronger results. In reflecting on dealing with a roommate issue Madison felt that she was not being taken seriously until her father became involved.

I recently had a lot of roommate trouble and I wanted to move out. The housing lady did not realize how serious I was so I ended up getting my dad to email her. He explained to her that I had been complaining about the issue since August and that kind of convinced her to let me move out but then I ended up fixing things.

When asked about dealing with conflicts related to either their academic or social life,
students reported mixed results when reflecting on which area their parent would be more likely intervene. Mary stated that despite having major issues with her roommates, her mother did not get involved but would have if it was an issue related to her academic life. Mike was the only student adamantly opposed to getting his mother involved in challenges within his social life. In reflecting on his first semester, Mike disclosed that he had several issues with his roommates, but was mostly related to miscommunication. He revealed that he didn’t think it would be “cool” to let his mother handle any issue in his social life. He also stated that a female would be more likely to include their parent(s) in a conflict with their roommate. According to Mike, “girls are more vulnerable to open up to their mom. They are more willing to talk about those things with their parents.”

Conversely, because academics played a stronger significance, if faced with a challenge, Mike stated that he would have attempted to handle the situation himself; however he would have gotten his mother involved if he was forced to go beyond the professor or administrator.

I would have been emailing my professors and if that didn’t work I would have gone to the next step, and then if I could not have gotten anything resolved then I would go to the Dean. When I had to get the Dean involved then I would have definitely have gotten my mother involved.

In explaining the difference between his ability to communicate and his mother’s, Mike stated that his mother’s persistence would have required a solution. “My mom is a strong willed person and if they would have been unwilling to help, she would go higher, she would go as high as she could go. If that meant me withdrawing from that class then I would have had to do it.”
When asked why they preferred for their parent to get involved, Mary reflected on her high school experience and her mother’s former pattern of involvement and advocacy. “I don’t know, she has always gotten involved. If I have a problem I wouldn’t do anything about it. My mom is the peacekeeper. My 12th grade year I had a problem with my French teacher and my mom called the school, set-up a meeting and it all got fixed.” Mary’s preference for involvement stemmed from the trust that she has in her mother and her mother’s history of involvement.

Madison mentioned that she would try to solve the issue but would involve her parent(s) if she was unsuccessful. “I would want to work it out, I would want to be independent and do it on my own, but if it didn’t work out then yes, I would want to get my dad involved. He is the most stern.” When asked if she thought being stern with an administrator or a faculty member would change the outcome, Madison affirmed yes. “Yes, but not really by being stern. He has a military background and not in a bad way but people listen to him. He just kind of knows what to say, what to do and how long to push something before he gets results.” For the students within this study that indicated they would involve their parent(s), all four confirmed the notion that their parent’s persistent behavior of knowing how long to push an issue resulted in a positive outcome.

Instead of getting her mother involved, Cindy stated that she would reach out to either her coach or her advisor. When faced with challenges within her academic life, Cindy stated that because of the strained relationship, she would only inform her mother about the situation but not involve her. “Last semester I had problems with my Biology professor. I told my mom about the issue but I was just venting to her. She was still a good professor, we just a difference of opinion.” Instead she would enlist the assistance of a coach or her athletic academic advisor.
Rather than involving her mother who has limited interaction with the university, Cindy deemed it was more practical to have a trusted university administrator advocate on her behalf. She explained, “My coach and my advisors are people that back me up when I have a problem.” The first-year students in this study had a general consensus that dealing with a professor or an administrator is problematic. In explaining why she felt she needed to have someone to advocate for her, Cindy explained, “As a student, it is hard to get involved with a professor. We are not as high ranked because we don’t have the same level of education and because we are still in school.”

Without the presence of an advocate, Mary had the tendency to avoid addressing the conflict. Mary explained that she had several issues with her roommates last semester but her mother would not get involved so she preferred to elude handling the problem.

All of my roommates were upperclassmen and I didn’t want to deal with the issue. I locked myself in my room. I would call my mom and cry about the situation. She would tell me to calm down and that we all really needed to sit down and have a meeting. We eventually did but for most of last semester I tried to avoid it.

Mary’s reaction to avoid conflicts speaks to her level of dependency on her mother and illustrates the struggle that many first-year students experience while transitioning into adulthood, while at the same time feeling like they lack the maturity of an adult.

Most students struggled with the idea of the institution automatically giving their parent(s) access to their student account, but wanted their parent(s) to have the information to use for advocacy. Two students specified that having access to their student account would better equip their parent(s) with the information needed to successfully intervene and have the ability to
contact a professor or administrator. Both Mary and Khadija explained the importance of providing their parent with the adequate information needed in order to effectively manage conflicts within their academic lives. Mary agreed with the current model but preferred having the ability to decide if she wanted her parent to have access to her account. “No, I agree with it. Now that I have a choice, I wouldn’t want the college to give out my information. If I want her to have it then I will give it to her.” When asked about how she would feel if her mother experienced frustration when she attempted to contact a faculty or administrator but was prohibited from getting any information, Mary clarified that because she preferred for her mother to be involved, she wanted her to have full access to her account as it would be the most helpful to her. Mary explained, “In that case, I would want her to have full access. The most beneficial to the student would be to give parents full access to the student’s information.” Mary further clarified that because she is a first-year college student it’s in her best interest to have her mother’s support.

Because of challenges she experienced during her first semester, Khadija was very clear about her rational for wanting her mother to have access to her information. Though she overcame the obstacles that she faced during her first semester, Khadija stated that if her mother was willing to get involved then having accurate information would be critical. “When she comes to the school to ask questions, I want the school to be able to be truthful to her and tell her what is going on. They should be able to share information because I don’t have anything to hide.”

For first-generation students, their parents were least likely to initially intervene because their inexperience created a difficulty when they tried to help their student navigate through the
system. Khadija attributed her mother’s inaction to the fact that she was a first-generation college student. During her interview she mentioned that she was the first of thirty-two grandchildren to go off to college and though it was an important event for both her immediate and extended family, she and her mother struggled to get her through the enrollment process. “Whenever I have a problem I tell my mom but she just listens. I’m the first child to go to college so my mom really doesn’t know what to do or how to help me. Setting me up for school was hard. I do know that she didn't know everything that she needed to know.” Because of her mother’s inexperience, Khadija felt that she was at a disadvantage and unequipped to handle the challenges within her academic life that she experienced. Rather than taking on the role of an advocate, Khadija’s mother continued to provide support and encouragement.

In contrast, Khadija’s mother was going to intervene when she underwent a major roommate issue and potentially faced an alcohol sanction. Khadija explained,

My mom thought I was going to get in trouble for alcohol but my roommates told the truth. She was upset and she thought I was going in trouble for alcohol. She didn't want that to be on my record so she was going to drive here and talk to someone about it. She will fight over things like that but not my grades.

Khadija explained that her mother did not get involved with her academic life despite the fact that she experienced a major issue with that professor and her midterm. However, when she encountered a problem in her social life her mother was willing to intervene. Outside of being a first-generation student, Khadija attributed her mother’s reaction to her need to protect her. “She just doesn't like it when people try to take advantage of her child. I'll do anything for anyone. But the minute people try to run over me, my mother does not like it and she will get involved. She
does not like people taking advantage of me.” The distinct separation that Khadija makes when describing her mother’s willingness to intervene, illustrates the challenge that first-generation students experience. Because Khadija’s mother was inexperienced with the college setting, she was least likely to feel confident about interceding with challenges related to academics. In contrast, her mother was more involved in her social life. As a first-generation student, issues within the social setting did not present the same obstacles, and could be addressed by her mother, regardless if she had a college degree.

**Young Adult**

First-year students described themselves as a young adult. Rather than being a fully independent, mature adult, participants perceived themselves in a transitional phase. Young adulthood was described as intermediary stage of growth distinctly marked by high levels of dependency upon their parent and an increased maturity from being a minor. Although students clearly saw themselves within a transitional stage, participants described a conflict between their dependant state and the institution’s expectation of adulthood. Because of the distinction between the stages of young adulthood and an adult, the students in this study expressed feeling inferior to faculty and if forced to address an issue, a fear of ineffectively communicating with them. As a result of the lack of confidence and an inadequacy complex, students were more likely to invite their parent(s) or a trusted adult, to intervene on their behalf. This action was warranted because participants believed that because they were just students, they would not be taken seriously by an adult.

First-year college students did not consider themselves an adult and therefore, warranted parental involvement. Rather than being an independent adult, the students within this study
categorized themselves as a young adult. All five students either specifically used the term young
adult or a similar descriptor that illustrated a distinct difference between stages of a first-year
college student and adulthood. In describing the difference between an adult and a young adult,
the level of independence and an increased maturity were underlying factors to young adulthood.

Despite the presence of a significant level of parental involvement during their first
semester in college, participants revealed that prior to their enrollment, there was an expectation
of adulthood and the perception that the relationship with their parent(s) would change
considerably. Mary explained that prior to enrolling in college she anticipated becoming more of
an adult.

I was expecting to be an adult. My mom has always been supportive, but I was ready to
be an adult. We were not that close when I was in high school, but we have gotten closer
now that I’m in college. When I was in high school I was so ready to leave and go off to
college and now that I’m in college, I want to go home every weekend. I call my house
every single day. All the time, it’s so weird.

Based on the response from the students in this study, there was a universal perception
that both physical and emotional distance would occur during their first semester in college
which would create freedom. Students anticipated that the freedom from going off to college
would naturally increase adulthood and independence. With an increased level of autonomy,
students also assumed support, involvement and communication with their parents would
decrease. Based on Khadija’s account, “I thought that when I came to college I would not talk to
my mom, because college students go away to college to have freedom.”
Mike was the only student that indicated that he started to gain more independence during his senior year in high school. During his interview Mike described a maturing relationship with his mother as he pointed out that she treated him like an adult. “She trusts me more now that I’m in college. She treats me like an adult.” Despite the initial expectation of adulthood, for the majority of the participants, the reality after enrolling in college has been contrary. Though all five students confirmed the expectation of adulthood, all five agreed that after being enrolled, they now consider themselves to be a young adult.

The concept of young adulthood was defined as a process, denoted by physical separation from their parent(s) while maintaining a significant level of dependence upon their parent(s). Students characterized a young adult as a stage between an adult and a minor. Khadija explained the emergence of more freedom as a notable characteristic of a young adult.

As a young adult, you’re limited to certain stuff. But when you're an adult you can do whatever you want. When you’re minor, your parents are very overprotective but when you're a young adult they break from some of that and they let go of some of it. My mom actually had to accept the fact that I'm getting older and I can take care of myself. Mike defined an adult based on the level of responsibility that accompanies the stage. When asked to define an adult, Mike stated, “Someone that takes responsibility for their actions and pays their own bills. There’s a lot that comes behind all of that, a lot of wisdom.” Mary described an adult as “Someone that has their own house, car and pays their own bills. Completely independent and a young adult still rely on a parent for support. I have a job and I pay certain things but my mom pays my car payment and my cell phone bill.” Because all five students defined an adult based on the level of independence, freedom and responsibility, the more likely
they are to continue see themselves less as an adult and more as a young adult.

The concept of a young adult was defined as a process of transition into adulthood. Young adulthood is signified through growth and development. The initial phase begins with physical separation from their parent which produced an increase level of responsibility. Mike, Madison and Mary characterized this as a process that young adults go through to gain more independence. Mike depicted this process as “trying to learn the way of being an actual mature adult.” Madison explained that growing up and developing independence was a process. “I think it’s the whole growing up and independency thing and you learn it as you go through life.” Mary stated that she was in the process of moving towards adulthood but she did not want to grow up too fast.

Khadija also expressed young adulthood as a transitional period extending from being a minor towards becoming an adult. Khadija explained that because she no longer lived with her parent, as a college student she had more responsibility. “I don’t think I’m grown, I think that I just have more responsibilities than what I had when I was at home, but I’m not adult. My mom cannot clean up after me.” To the students in this study, increased responsibility required a stronger level of maturity. Rather than becoming fully independent, first-year students rely and appreciate maintaining a level of dependence on their parent(s).

Despite experiencing apparent levels of increased maturity, students overwhelmingly conveyed the sentiment of being a young adult. Mike referred to himself as an adult and a young adult while reflecting on the increased responsibility and level of maturity. Mike stated, “I consider myself an adult but not in the full extent of being a grown adult. I would go with the term young adult, because a young adult has dependency on their parents.” His conflicting
statement indicated the awareness of a change in the relationship between himself and his parent, increased maturity, and the acknowledgment of the commencement of a transitional period of growth.

Outside of the change in their relationship based on physical separation, students described dependency as a determining factor of young adulthood. Participants experienced varying levels of dependence on their parent. Four students conveyed having an extensive level of dependency that included financial, emotional and moral support. Cindy was the only student that solely defined dependence based on financial support. For the students in this study, high levels of attachment were closely connected to stronger levels of dependency. Both Mary and Khadija, the students that experienced the highest level of attachment to their parent, also described being more financially and emotionally dependant on their parent. Mary explained her rational for classifying herself as a young adult by her level of dependence. “I’m still dependant on my mom, I’m not fully independent. I would not consider myself as an adult until I am fully independent and don’t need my mom; like financially or emotionally. Even then I think it will still need her support emotionally.”

All five students confirmed the contradictory nature between their feelings of independence, but as they are still dependent on their parent(s), they are often treated like a minor. Khadija stated several times that her mother frequently reminded her that she was not “grown yet” and that she was still a youngster. Madison stated that although she lives several hundred miles away from her parents, she felt an increased level of independence, but because she is largely dependent upon her parents for financial and emotional support, she related to being a young adult. In reflecting upon a conflict she had with her parents, she described how
her parents continue to exhibit a similar level of control over her as if she was still a minor.

Over fall break I wanted to plan a surprise visit home and I mentioned it to my dad. He told me no, but I ended up doing it anyway. I hit North Carolina and my mom called me. She said where you are, I said lying in bed and she said no you are not. I said I’m driving, and she said where? She said your father is not happy; he is going to call you. As soon as she hung up he called and told me to turn around. He threatened to take my car away. I ended up turning back around and coming back to campus. I was so upset, I just wanted to spend time with my family.

However, with regard to her social life, Madison expressed the sense that her parents treated her as an adult and trusted her to make the right decisions. When asked about how her parents are involved in her social life, Madison responded, “They listen to me complain about my roommates. Since they are so far away they haven’t really met any of my friends. They just trust that I make smart decision.” The conflicting approach that their parent(s) used reinforced the intermediate the phase of young adulthood.

Though Cindy had the most distant relationship with her mother and described herself as independent, based on the level of financial support she receives for her college tuition, she still characterized herself as a young adult.

My mom doesn’t give me money, I have a job but I really don’t need much. So I really feel like I can survive on my own, but I am in school off the tuition that my mom helps me pay. In high school I was completely dependent. I didn’t get a car until I was a senior. I’m not at home but she is still supporting me.
Madison initially considered herself to be an adult but revisited the concept upon reflection. When asked if she considered herself and adult, she stated,

I would. It was hard because when I went off to college I was 17, I mean I still feel like a kid, but now that I’m 18 and I do everything on my own. I feel pretty grown up. But I am still dependant on my parents so that makes me feel like a kid. My parents even have GPS trackers on my phone, they can check on me anytime they want.

Despite her categorizing herself as both an adult and a young adult, ultimately, she felt more mature than she did in high school. Beyond the emerging definition, as young adults, first-year college students justified the involvement of their parent(s) as they expressed feeling inferior to faculty and administrators and an inability to ineffectively communicate with them.

**Inferior to Faculty and Administrators**

First-year students articulated feeling inferior to faculty and administrators. They did not feel confident in their ability to effectively communicate with faculty and administrators. The students in this study expressed the notion that because of their age and inexperience, they felt faculty and administrators did not view them as an equal which perpetuated an inferiority complex. All five participants in this study expressed a lack of confidence in having the ability to effectively communicate with a faculty or an administrator. Because students perceive an adult to be their superior, their feelings of inferiority with a higher caliber adult, such as a professor, was often exacerbated. When asked why they were hesitant to communicate with faculty and administrators, students overwhelming expressed a fear of not appearing intelligent, being manipulated and failing to ask the right questions.

Despite feeling more mature than the traditional first-year student, Mike expressed
concerns about appearing unintelligent and the need to include his mother if he was forced to take his issue to a higher authority. “I feel like I have a level of maturity being a young adult but I need an extra body beside me if I’m going to talk to a Dean or someone in a similar position because I don’t want to sound stupid.” Students also conveyed the perception that faculty and administrators did not view them as an equal because they do not possess the same level of education. Cindy explained her rational for involving a parent or another adult was based on the fact that she did not have the same level of education as her professors. When asked if Cindy thought her professors saw her as an equal she replied,

I think they see us to an extent. A lot of our professors are almost too smart for the subjects that they are teaching. It’s hard for them to come down to our level; they are just so educated and know their profession. I don’t think they see us below them but also not at their level. That’s the difference.

Cindy clarified that obtaining a degree was a process; however, because the student and professor had two distinct roles, it is impossible for the student to be seen as a peer. This quandary is further reinforced the disconnection that occurs when there is a need for the first-year student to approach a professor or administrator.

Because of her status as a first-year college student, Mary expressed a fear of being manipulated. When asked why she preferred her mother to be involved if she encountered a challenge with a professor or administrator, Mary justified her preference based on the idea that she is a young adult.

My mom would ask questions and understand better than I could. Because I’m still on a certain level and they are higher than me. I want someone on their level being with me. I
wouldn’t want someone to manipulate me. She has a degree, she knows how to communicate with people and she would not be easily manipulated.

Mary’s anxiety originated from her position as a young adult and feelings of inferiority. The phrase, “on their level” represents adulthood and as an adult, her mother’s ability to communicate with her professors. Coupled with the inability to establish trust and a relationship, students are more likely to see their parent’s involvement as essential because they believe they are least likely to be taken advantage of. As young adults, four of the participants, used their parent(s) to safeguard them against possible harms that they might encounter during their first semester.

**Fear of Ineffectively Communicating**

Because of their age and inexperience, participants in this study acknowledged the potential for a miscommunication. Connected to the notion of feeling inferior, when faced with communicating with a professor during a conflict, students expressed apprehension over not asking the right questions. The fear of ineffective communication was reinforced, as all five students attributed this to their age, immaturity and lack of experience. As young adults, there was a general agreement that they do not possess the capacity to successfully communicate with an adult. Therefore, because of their position, participants believed that it is in their best interest to identify and involve an adult that can advocate for them on their behalf. Logically, they turn to their parent or a trusted administrator.

In reflecting on their first semester in college, the need to communicate with a faculty or administrator typically arose during a conflict. Depending on the significance of the challenge, the thought of having to communicate with a faculty member exacerbated their anxiety level.
Two students revealed that during the beginning of the semester, when they were experiencing a challenge with a faculty member their initial response was to ignore the situation instead of talking to the professor. Cindy explained that she would deal with the situation for a long time and not address the issue with the professor. Mary also struggled with understanding her Biology professor because she was from another country. Rather than attempting to address the issue, she avoided contact with her professor. “I did not try to talk to her about it and I just figured that I had to deal with it and had to teach myself on my own. I had to read the chapters over and over and answer the questions in the back.”

Khadija was the only student that experienced a significant challenge with a professor during her first semester in college and addressed the situation herself. Her actions proved unsuccessful after she went to her professor and the department chair and requested to retake her midterm. She expressed feeling helpless and misjudged. She attributed their inaction and unwillingness to take her serious due to the fact that she was a student. In reflecting upon the experience, Khadija was regretful that her mother did not intervene, contact her professor and advocate for her during the challenge.

Alongside of the idea of effectively communicating with an adult, students expressed the belief that their parents possessed the ability to diagnosis a situation by asking the right question(s) in order to receive a favorable action. All five students attributed this to the experience of an adult and recognized that because of their youth, they were inexperienced. Mary, Khadija and Madison articulated the idea that adults are receptive to another adult rather than a young adult. Among the three students there was a general consensus that adults are least likely to take a student serious. When asked why she would involve her parents, Madison
explained, “Just to back me up, because sometimes adults really don’t like to listen to kids.”

**Summary of Findings**

The analysis uncovered three superordinate themes and six sub-themes that characterized what parental involvement means to the five first-year college students. There was a general consensus that by definition, parental involvement represented involvement in every aspect of the student’s college experience. The experiences during their first semester and their expectations prior to enrolling helped to shape their definition of parental involvement. Consequently the varying layers within the definition also offered insight into the importance of parental involvement.

Students valued their parent’s involvement. All five confirmed varying levels of involvement but agreed on the significance of having some form of involvement. In addition to the value, the participants articulated the expectation of adulthood prior to enrollment, the development of a closer relationship while in enrolled and repeated contact with their parent(s). For some, contact occurred frequently throughout day.

The reflection on their first semester uncovered an overwhelming positive association as parental involvement represented support and advocacy in times of conflict. The central argument for parental involvement was based on the notion that first-year students did not consider themselves as an adult and consequently, categorized themselves as a young adult. The students in this study acknowledged an increase level of maturity as they were physically separated from their parent(s) and inherited more responsibility. However, as a young adult, they recognized the need for their parent to intervene as they felt inferior to faculty and administrators and had a fear of ineffectively communicating with them.
Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the findings from five semi-structured interviews with first-year students. The purpose of this study was to investigate how first-year students described the involvement of their parents and the meaning they associated to it. This study provided first-year college students the opportunity to reflect on the involvement of their parents during their first semester in college.

The analysis revealed three superordinate themes and six sub-themes that depict how first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life. This investigation undoubtedly revealed that first-year college students placed a deeper meaning on the term parental involvement as it directly related to encouragement and advocacy. Students justified, valued and appreciated the involvement of their parent because they did not classify themselves as an adult but in an intermediate phase of young adulthood. This chapter summarized the narrative report of how five first-year college students experienced the phenomena of parental involvement. The following chapter will include a summary of the significance of these findings, the correlation to the two theoretical frameworks and extant literature, and implications for future practice.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of Research Findings

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate how parental involvement influences the social and academic integration of five first-year college students. Through a qualitative design, this research attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of parental involvement. This study sought to fully understand how first-year students make sense of the involvement of their parents, and how, if any, the involvement shaped
their academic and social integration. This research was guided by the following research question: How do first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life?

The three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of narratives including 1) Involvement in Everything, 2) Importance of Involvement and 3) Young Adult. This section details each theme and demonstrates how it connects to the two theoretical frameworks and extant literature, the significance and implications for practitioners in higher education.

**Involvement in Everything**

The findings in this study confirmed the existing literature on the definition of parental involvement. Participants described parental involvement as the continuous action of their parent(s) during the course of their first semester. Students reflected on their parent(s) involvement and defined it as a means of showing an interest in their college career. Rather than signifying a distinction, after simply hearing the expression parental involvement, student’s articulated the notion of extensive involvement in both the academic and social arena. This study confirmed Wolf, Sax & Harper’s (2009) definition of parental involvement as multidimensional, extending to numerous levels in the college environment (p. 328). The findings in this study also support Daniel, Evans and Scott’s (2001) assessment that parental involvement includes the entire experience and in particular, in the form of support and during salient development stages such as the selection of a major and the navigation of relationships with university officials.

The findings signify a positive association with parental involvement. Tightly embedded within the definition was the term support, as students reflected on positive experiences with
parental involvement in both high school and college. Although their description was shaped by their experiences in the postsecondary and higher education systems, upon reflecting on their first semester as a college student, their existing definition was reconstructed through a positive connection to their parent’s current role as an advocate.

This study affirmed Holmstrom’s (2002) qualitative investigation indicating that first-year students enter higher education expecting for their parent to treat them like an adult, consequently cultivating a positive, mature relationship. Participants reported a change in their relationship with their parent(s). The shift can be attributed to an increased level of maturity denoted by the transition as a college student. Because of the increased maturity, becoming a college student nurtured a closer relationship with their parent(s).

This research provided deeper insight into the transformation in the relationship between first-year students and their parent(s). The findings indicate the need for additional research, beyond the current literature that suggests that students within the Millennial generation have a closer relationship with their parent(s) as a consequence of being sheltered (DeBard, 2004). The participants in this study referenced a different, closer, more mature relationship. The nature of the relationship described by the participants strengthened Arnett’s (2004) argument on Emerging Adulthood.

What Arnett describes as a new transitional period, denoted by feeling in-between, can be conveyed as the development of a closer relationship between the college student and their parent(s). Arnett (2004) argued that the shift through the transition of entering college, fostered a new transparent relationship, closely tied with shared respect. As a byproduct of the new
relationship, both the parent(s) and the student see themselves and their relationship differently. Arnett explained,

Although emerging adults are more independent than they were as adolescents, in some ways they become closer to their parents. The hierarchy of parent as authority figure, child as dependent and subordinate, fades away. What remains, in most cases, is the mutual affection and attachment they have for one another on the basis of many years of shared experiences (2004, p. 70).

The idea of a closer relationship was supported by four of the participants in this study. Furthermore, many students described a change in their relationship and attributed to an increased maturity. All five participants reported talking to their parents over a variety of subjects and Mary referred to her mother as her best friend. Although Mary described having a strong relationship with her mother, she disclosed that during high school, their relationship was strained. Both Mary and Madison recognized that their relationship with their parent(s) was stronger because they were undergoing the transitional stage of an emerging adult. As supported through Arnett’s model, the ability to perceive each other as friends with mutual respect facilitated a closer relationship.

A great deal of the ability for students to develop a stronger relationship with their parent(s) can be attributed to the shift in their relationship and advances in technology. All five participates affirmed their reliance on technology to remain connected to their parent(s). The findings support prior studies that uncovered the notion that students are more likely to initiate communication. Junco and Mastrodicasa’s (2007) study indicated that college students reported speaking with their parents multiple times a day and over fifty percent was student initiated.
Based on Howe and Strauss’s research, the frequent contact between the student and the parent(s) through technology diminished their ability to secede from their former environment. Their capacity to remain attached complicates Tinto’s model. The nucleus of Tinto’s student integration model is centered on the argument that first-year students must undergo a separation stage. His theory maintains that successful integration into the college environment requires a detachment from the former community. Tinto argued that separation from family members and peers was an essential aspect of the integration phase (1993). This study’s findings suggest the concept of separation is distorted and, therefore recommends further investigation.

Beyond the separation, Tinto maintained that students enter the process of integration by interacting with members in the new environment (1993). In the final stage the student adopts the normative values and behaviors of the new setting (1993). Despite the fact that revisions to Tinto’s model include elements of the external environment, there is a scholarly opportunity to reexamine the applicability of this framework to students that categorize themselves as an emerging adult.

Additionally, this research supported Tierney’s argument of the irrelevance of Tinto’s model with minority students. Three participants were classified as students of color. Outside of indicating that they had a deep relationship with their parent(s), all three reflected on the importance of their family. The findings fully affirm Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth Theory as there was a connection to the weight of family capital to students of color. This study supports Burciaga and Erbstein’s assessment that based on Yosso’s framework, the ability to maintain close ties to the cultural knowledge and values of underrepresented families influence persistence and successful integration (2010). In describing their level of support that they
received, all three students mentioned members of their extended family. Moreover, this study recognized the challenges associated with Tinto’s model in requiring that minority students detach themselves from their family and salient cultural values, in order to become successfully integrated into a college community.

**Importance of Parental Involvement**

The first-year students in this study desired their parent’s involvement within both the academic and social systems because they considered their parent’s support to be essential. Students reflected positively on their parent’s involvement because it symbolized support and advocacy during conflicts.

The support and advocacy role continued to be reinforced by a closer parent-student relationship. The findings strengthen Kolkhorst, Yazedjian and Toews analysis suggesting the importance of support and illustrated a positive evolving relationship (2010). For four of the students in this study, their parents served as advocates and provided support, which intensified their bond as they held a meaningful, shared experience.

All of the participants reported receiving some level of parental support during their first semester as a college student. Support was demonstrated through financial contributions, interest in their academic performance and achievement, assistance with coursework, and a willingness to intervene during times of conflict. Based on the analysis, the students in this study organically described responsiveness parenting. Baumrind (1991) classified responsiveness parenting, as supportive parental behavior that intentionally cultivates individualism, self-motivation and self-assertion. The responsiveness characteristically transpired as students reflected on the support they received during their first semester in college (1991).
The positive connection to responsiveness parenting supports Wintre & Yaffe’s argument that parenting styles can both positively and negatively impact student integration (2000). Four of the participants relied on the support from their parent(s) to help them integrate into both the academic and social systems of the institution. Based on Mary’s account, responsiveness parenting positively impacted her academic performance and achievement, as her mother’s involvement helped her successfully pass several of her classes.

The findings in this study support the current scholarship implying that parental involvement positively impacts the student’s experience. Moreover, students value encouragement from their parents. This study support’s Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, and Toews (2010) analysis on the student’s perception of parental involvement, the positive outcomes they experience, and their constant reliance on their parents for support.

The study suggests parental involvement positively impacts the college student’s academic experience, in particular within their academic life. The findings substantiate Hiester, Nordstrom, and Swenson’s (2009) study of first-semester freshmen demonstrating positive outcomes associated with stronger parental attachment. Though all students reported a level of emotional closeness to their parent, there was a close connection to academic support and encouragement that they received. All five first-year students reported their parent(s) showing an avid interest in their academic life. Emotional support for academic achievement was demonstrated through regular dialogue about their academic progression, financial contributions to their academic career, financial rewards for strong academic performance and help with coursework.
The findings affirmed the challenges that first-generation college students experience as they prefer the support and advocacy from their parent but their parent’s inexperience, affects their ability to intervene. Mike and Khadija identified themselves as first-generation students. Khadija was the only student that reported challenges within her academic and social life. Though she desired her mother’s intervention, her mother’s unwillingness to interfere confirmed the dilemma that Hsiao’s (1992) research identified with parental involvement and first-generation students. Hsiao (1992) concluded that first-generation students enroll with a disadvantage and have an inadequate support system.

Aligned with the findings in this study, Hicks’s (2003) research divulged that first-generation students receive emotional support but lacked both financial or academic assistance (Hicks, 2003). As in Khadija’s case, she was satisfied with the emotional support that she received but strongly preferred her mother to become an advocate in her academic life. In contrast, Khadija reported that the advocacy role naturally surfaced when she experienced an issue within the social system. Though first-generation students receive varying levels of parental support, results suggest that the lack of experience of parents of first-generation students limits their range of support that they can provide (Hicks, 2003). Further research is warranted on fully understanding the type of support first-year, first-generation students receive and the meaning they associate to it.

All five students reported that they solicited advice from their parent(s) concerning areas in both their academic and social life. Additionally, when issues arise in the academic and social system, they initially react by seeking input from their parents. Because of close knit relationship, students articulated the importance of obtaining advice from their parent(s). This
claim supports Levine and Cureton’s research indicating that college students categorize their parent(s) as the most influential person in their lives and request their constant advice (1998).

When faced with a challenge, three students specified that they would obtain advice from parent(s) and request involvement. Mike was the only student that reported that during a challenge he would begin by seeking his mother’s advice but not request her involvement. The findings are contrary to Pizzolato and Hicklen’s (2011) research implying that college students are more likely to involve their parent(s) for consultation rather than intervention. In contrast this study affirms the current research that suggests that during times of conflict, college students revert to their former reasoning patterns and for most first-year students this includes their parents.

Responsive parenting and a closer relationship helped to develop trust between first-year students and their parent(s). Several students in this study reported having a considerable level of trust in their parent(s). Mary and Khadija both used the word trust to explain why they sought their parent’s assistance rather than a university official. The presence of trust offers compelling insight into the importance of relying on preexisting reasoning patterns when placed in a new environment. For most students in this study, trust and the presence of an established relationship dictated who they went to for guidance and support.

Though there was not a transparent link between satisfaction with the level of parental involvement and satisfaction with their college experience, four of the participants reported being very satisfied with the level of parental involvement that they receive. The 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reported that students that seek advice experience higher
levels of satisfaction with their collegiate experience and are more likely to be academically engaged (2007). Additional research is warranted in this area.

Alongside of the supportive role, four of the five participants value their parent’s advocacy role. During times of conflict, in both the social and academic systems, the majority of the first-year students in this study revealed that they commission their parent’s help. This research substantiates the 2007 NSSE survey results indicating that students whose parents intervened during their college career reported higher levels of satisfaction, make larger gains toward degree attainment and educational goals, and are more satisfied with their college experience. The preference for the advocacy role can be connected to the evolved relationship through a shared experience, trust, favorable results from their parent’s previous involvement and their parent’s unrelenting nature. While some data exists suggesting parental involvement delays the developmental process, this study offers valuable insight as to the rationale first-year students employ when seeking their parent’s assistance.

Because of the level of significance, the students in this study sanctioned parental involvement as it served as a vehicle towards successfully becoming integrated into the academic and social systems of the institution. Through support and advocacy, parental involvement helped first-year students navigate through the institution’s system. During both stable and unstable periods of their collegiate experience, first-year students commissioned their parent’s advice, encouragement and interference. Together with the involvement of their parents, all five first-year students became integrated into the new environment. This research supports Mattanah, Hancock and Brand’s contribution to a growing body of evidence suggesting that
college student’s relationship with their parents and a healthy level of separation can be predictive to positive academic and social adjustment to college (2004).

Only one student indicated the intention to transfer to another institution and her decision can be attributed to a low commitment to the institution. Based on Tinto’s model, academic integration reinforces individual aspirations and social integration impacts institutional commitment. Mary’s intention to transfer but still obtain a degree, infers a low commitment to the institution and based on Tinto’s model, could have been altered by improving her interaction between the social systems of the institution.

Conversely, much of the current literature on persistence is based on Tinto’s model and portrays the need for separation, breaking dependency and renegotiating relationships in the new environment (1993). The findings in this study further complicate Tinto’s framework as the continuous existence of parental involvement and distorted separation, showed no obvious bearing on persistence and the student’s ability to become integrated into the new environment. In contrast, for one student, the negative outcome coupled with the lack of parental interference during a challenge within the academic system impacted Khadija’s overall experience and nearly made her not return to the institution during her spring semester.

Young Adult

The final superordinate theme that emerged in this study was the concept of a young adult. There was a general consensus among the five first-year students that they were in an intermediary stage of young adulthood. The stage was described as a period of growth from adolescence to adulthood. Students expressed maintaining levels of emotional and financial dependency on their parent(s) while gaining independence and freedom to manage their day-to-
day lives. Though they used a different term, the description employed by the students in this study substantiates Arnett’s Emerging Adult framework (2004).

Arnett (2004) defined an emerging adulthood as a transitional period, from ages 18 to 28, during adolescence and adulthood. The phrase represents a developmental connection between adolescence and adulthood. According to Arnett’s theory, emerging adults are on the way to becoming an adult (2004). Mike’s description is parallel to Arnett’s definition as he described the stage as learning to become an adult. This study’s findings support Arnett’s emerging adult theory and contribute towards the complexity in understanding why first-year students seek their parent’s involvement.

Arnett explained the term young adulthood is unclear and inaccurately describes developmental stage of college students.

The Emerging Adult stage lasts from about age 18 to age 25. Part of the definition of emerging adulthood is that it is a period of being in between adolescence and young adulthood, a period of being in the process of reaching adulthood but not there yet…Often, the sense of being in-between occurs when emerging adults continue to rely on their parents in some ways, so that their movement toward self-sufficiency is incomplete (2004, p. 217).

This study’s finding also supports Arnett’s notion of dependency and the significance it plays in a first-year student’s ability to categorize themselves as an emerging adult. Participants described young adulthood by physical separation, an increase in responsibility and maturity while maintaining a level of dependence on their parent(s). Participants acknowledged varying levels of dependency including financial, emotional and moral support. The results are
comparable to Arnett’s account of characterizing emerging adults as having less stable financial situations and maintaining an optimal level of dependency on their parent(s).

When asked if they considered themselves to be an adult, Mike, Madison and Cindy confirmed Arnett’s assessment of the ambiguous, transitional feeling of emerging adulthood. This discovery supports Arnett’s claim that when asked if they consider themselves to be an adult, most students within this stage answer yes and no (2004, p. 14). The affiliation with this stage can be attributed to how first-year students defined adulthood. Arnett developed three cornerstones for becoming an adult, including, accepting responsibility, independent decision-making and becoming financially independent (2004). Arnett explained:

Learning to accept responsibility for yourself means taking over responsibilities that had previously been assumed by your parents and no longer expecting your parents to shoulder the responsibility for the consequences of things you have done. Making independent decisions means no longer having important decisions about your life made or influenced by your parents. Becoming financially independent means no longer having your parents pay some or all of your bills. Emerging adults are on the way to achieving independence in all three of these respects, but during emerging adulthood they are in-between, not there yet. They still rely on their parents in ways they expect will not continue once they become fully adult, especially for money but also for advice and emotional support (2004, p. 48).

Each aspect of this criterion has direct connotations towards developing gradual independence from their parent(s).
The students in this study affirmed Arnett’s cornerstones of adulthood, as they defined an adult based on the level of life experiences and financial independence. Conversely, because first-year students do not consider themselves to be an adult, parental involvement was justifiable. Furthermore, because dependency is embedded within their developmental stage, first-year students struggle with the institution’s expectation of adulthood, in particular when dealing with university officials. When faced with conflicts within the academic or social systems, the first-year students in this study articulated feeling inferior to faculty and expressed anxiety from a fear of ineffectively communicating with them. Holahan, Valentiner, and Moos’s (1995) findings suggest that students with higher levels of parental involvement were better adjusted and report lower levels of stress. The findings imply a possible connection between stress and parental involvement. More research related to first-year student’s stress levels and parental involvement in needed.

Because of their inexperience and youth, first-year students believe they lack ability to handle adult situations. They expressed little self-confidence in this setting and see the benefit of involving their parent(s) when the situation seems more appropriate for an adult. Furthermore, four of the students in this study expressed feeling inferior to university officials and felt that because they were students, they would not be treated seriously. Rather than approach a faculty member or administrator, they prefer to commission the assistance of a trusted adult. The findings in this study imply a potential connection between first-year student’s lack of confidence and the impact of parental involvement on self-confidence. MacCoby and Martin’s study uncovered students with a stronger parental relationships nurtured independence and self-
Further research examining if a connection exists between self-confidence and parental involvement is warranted.

**Intellectual Goals and Implications for Research**

The intellectual goal for this project was to gain a deeper insight into the influence that parental involvement has on the academic and social integration of first-year students. The researcher sought to uncover if parental involvement, in any way, impacted a first-year student’s ability to become integrated into the academic and social systems of an institution. Although the scholarship on parental involvement is vast, much of the existing research has not captured the meaning that students associate to the involvement of their parents during their collegiate experience. Therefore, this study provides invaluable insight into the experience of five first-year college students.

In investigating parental behavior and students’ integration in their academic and social life, this research intended to critically examine current literature that suggest the effects of helicopter parent behavior (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The larger intellectual goal was to examine and attempt to further understand this phenomenon through a different framework that recognizes the importance of developmental process that college students experience, and acknowledges the significance of parental involvement.

The practical goal for this study was to evaluate the meaning first-year students associated to parental involvement. The researcher also sought to gain a deeper insight into the multiple layers of parental involvement for students attending USCB. Finally, as administrators continue understand the first-year student experience, the researcher wanted to have a precise
understanding on how students experience parental involvement during their first-year of college.

This study uncovered an overwhelming positive association with parental involvement as it represented support, encouragement and advocacy in times of conflict. By examining how first-year students make sense of the involvement of their parents, this study uncovered a legitimate explanation into why first-year students seek their parent’s assistance. The interpretive analysis revealed three tightly intertwined themes.

Parental involvement is multidimensional and includes every aspect of the college student’s experience. Rather than undergoing a separation phase, integration now includes a mutually supporting relationship with their parent(s). The shared experience and mutual respect that emerges through an evolved relationship strengthens the bond between the first-year student and their parent(s). Most of the students in this study reported having a closer relationship to their parent(s) and are in regular contact with them. This study revealed that a considerable amount of the parental intervention that university officials experience is student initiated. The findings in this study imply that first-year students, value, appreciate and desire some level of parental involvement during their college career.

Parental involvement is very important to first-year college students in this study. As first-year students continue to become integrated in to the new environment, parental involvement carried a stronger level of significance because it symbolized support, encouragement and advocacy in times of conflict. Comparable to the definition of involvement, support was multidimensional extending to financial support, showing an interest in both their academic and social life, help with coursework and a willingness to be an advocate.
Finally, the students in this study did not consider themselves as an adult and consequently, categorized themselves as a young adult. Participants acknowledged an increased level of maturity as they were physically separated from their parent(s) and inherited more responsibility. However, as a young or an emerging adult, they recognized the need for their parent to intervene as they felt inferior to faculty and administrators and had a fear of ineffectively communicating with them.

The findings from this study, coupled with the extant literature calls for an examination of the culture among university officials with regard to the way parental involvement is perceived. Though parental involvement is a widespread phenomenon, many university officials struggle with a negative perception towards involved parent(s) (Conneely, Good & Perryman, 2001). Rather than being seen as supportive, many faculty and administrators perceive parental involvement as a hindrance towards traditional student development outcomes.

This study provides a different lens to evaluate the phenomena of parental involvement. The findings support the existing literature that point to a positive outcome from parental involvement as first-year students integrate through the social and academic systems during their first-year of college. Unmistakably, the findings from this study support parental involvement and show that first-year college students still need their parent(s) for guidance and support as they navigate through the new environment.

University officials may benefit by reevaluating the source of the struggle between the institution and the parent(s). With a potential cultural shift, university administrators may consider that because of the significance in the role that their parent(s) plays, first-year students are more likely to give their parent(s) access to their student account because it helps to maintain
a high level of parental involvement. Because of the ambiguous developmental stage that first-year students identify with, they struggle with wanting their parent(s) to have access to their information but agree with the protections outlined in FERPA. Several students divulged giving their parent(s) access to their student account and justified their decision based on the need for their parent to have accurate information in order to better serve as an advocate. Students emphasized that it was in their best interest to provide their parent(s) with accurate information. The findings suggest that university administrators may benefit by reexamining the strong stance that has been employed in order to comply with FERPA and develop a healthier approach towards parental involvement.

Alongside of the cultural shift, practitioners in higher education could benefit and improve their practice by further understanding the transitional phase of an emerging adult and the unique set of needs that accompanies them. Part of the paradigm shift that may benefit practitioners is, fully understanding that because first-year students may not classify themselves as an adult, they seek the involvement of their parents. Moreover, there may also be a need to develop training for practitioners that introduces the stage of emerging adulthood and outlines the differences within the transition. Faculty and administrators need material that explains the transition in order to fully understand the stage of emerging adulthood. Because a large portion of the current training and programming protocol was developed based on traditional student development theories, similar to Tinto’s framework, a reexamination of applicability may prioritize the cultural shift.

Practitioners in higher education could benefit from developing programs that include a component that empower emerging adults to become more independent, develop a sense of self-
reliance, or support their general autonomy development while maintaining close affective ties with parents. Additionally, although there are many university-run programs that target emerging adults to help ease the transition to college (e.g., Freshman Empowerment Program; Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004), many of the programs fail to address the unique issues that arise in relationships with parents during the transition into the collegiate setting. The present study’s results imply a potential need for programmatic efforts with emerging adults and their parents to facilitate communication in order to prevent probable discrepancies about autonomy expectancies. A programmatic focus on resolving discrepancies may be particularly helpful for parents and college students who are struggling with the transition to college.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to uncover and evaluate how first-year students perceive parental involvement and in what way it influenced their academic and social integration. The analysis revealed three superordinate themes and six sub-themes that symbolize how first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement. This study’s findings support the current literature indicating positive outcomes from parental involvement. The participants in this study perceived parental involvement positively and appreciated the efforts that their parents took to intervene. As comparable to their relationship with their parent(s), parental involvement was multidimensional. Students reflected on receiving support in the form of financial assistance, concern for their college career, assistance with coursework and a willingness to intervene.

Additionally, first-year students have a closer relationship with their parent(s) and communicate with them often. Rather than separation and growing apart, entering the collegiate
setting facilitated a closer relationship. Because of the nature of their relationship, students valued the dynamic role that their parents played.

In spite of recognizing an increased level of maturity, rather than being an adult, first-year students self-identified themselves as a young adult. The level of dependency and distinct characteristics as an adult constitutes the need for parental involvement. Furthermore, students with parents that exhibited a higher level of involvement illustrated signs of influence as students indicated the need to obtain advice from their parent(s) and preferred their involvement if the situation escalated into a major issue. In comparison to the academic and social systems, most of the students in this study identify their parent as the willing to intervene in issues within their academic life. Contrary to Tinto’s model, despite the lack of traditional separation, only one student indicated their intention to transfer to another institution.

Though students valued high levels of involvement, their parent’s behavior is complemented by unintended consequences. Students use their parent(s) to safeguard them against possible harms that they might encounter within the college setting. This extends to both the academic and social environment including academic failure, challenges with adjustment, and homesickness.

Students expressed feelings of inferiority to faculty and administrators, which significantly impacts their ability to become integrated. The fear creates a barrier that limits their capacity to develop a relationship with a professor or administrator. This presents a deeper challenge as Tinto’s model asserts that academic integration is measured through academic progression and the selection of a major and social integration, in contrast, is reflected through peer and faculty interaction (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Finally, when
faced with challenges within the social system, two students also indicated wanting to avoid conflict if their parent failed to become involved. This behavior is also problematic as students fail to develop the skill set necessary to handle problems as a young adult and continue to remain dependent on their parent.

This study provides another perspective towards the phenomena of parental involvement, and therefore is useful information for senior-level administrators, student affairs and enrollment management practitioners as they expand their understanding of the significance of parental involvement. Though multilayered, it is imperative that student affairs and enrollment management practitioners have extensive insight on the importance of parental involvement and first-year student’s inability to address challenges as a result of the involvement and ambiguity that accompanies the stage of young adulthood. This information is invaluable and can be used to help reconstruct what the parent-student-institution-relationship should be.

There is an obvious need for both faculty and staff to fully understand the importance of parental involvement to first-year students. Beyond providing valuable scholarship on the student’s rationale behind including their parent(s) through the integration process, it also provides an opportunity to examine the day-to-day policies and procedures that impact the amount of parental involvement permitted. Providing this information and professional development opportunities to practitioners throughout enrollment affairs including admissions, academic advising, orientation, registrar’s and bursar’s office, may serve as a catalyst towards shifting the reaction that administrators have when they encounter parental involvement. Additionally, at USCB, this information may springboard the efforts towards expanding the FERPA release policy and afford students an option to give their parent(s) access to their
academic records. Under USCB’s current policy, students have the ability to grant their parent’s access to their bill and financial aid information. Though both areas are important, based on this study, there may be a need to consider altering the policy and expanding it to include their student account.

Orientation staff and academic advisors need to be aware of first-year student’s preference for involvement and the anxiety levels student’s experiences when their parent(s) are excluded from the process. In reflecting on their orientation experience, several participants reported that they preferred for their parent(s) to be involved during the advisement process as they lacked trust with their advisor at the time of advisement. This is relevant for staff and faculty at USCB that facilitate the advising process as it challenges the current protocol that excludes parent(s) during the process.

Faculty and student affairs practitioners also need to be fully informed of the byproduct of parental involvement and the ambiguity associated with being a young or emerging adult. As a result of the involvement and the uncertainty from the stage of young adulthood, first-year students reported an inability to address challenges. This is pertinent to both the academic and social systems of an institution. Within the academic system, faculty need to be knowledgeable of the barriers that exists as a result of the fear that first-year students expressed and their lack of confidence to approach a professor or administrator when academic related issues arise.

USCB’s faculty recently proposed a Center for Excellence in Teaching that would provide resources, workshops, and ongoing training for faculty. If implemented, this information would be beneficial towards developing programs for faculty that teach first-year students.
Training would provide adequate resources needed to address the fears associated with communicating with faculty and help to foster self-confidence.

Within the social systems, student affairs practitioners need to be mindful of adjustment issues that first-year students experience. Rather than addressing a problem, most students indicated that they would avoid conflict if their parent(s) were unwilling to become involved. Mary’s reaction to avoid conflicts speaks to her level of dependency on her mother and illustrates the struggle that many first-year students experience. As conveyed in this study, while transitioning into adulthood, many first-year students articulated that they lacked the maturity of an adult. While student affairs practitioners may be proactive in encouraging first-year students to become involved, these findings highlight the consequence that avoidance and level of dependency plays. This information can serve as a resource for practitioners in student activities, residential life and counseling services and help to develop or strengthen programs that teach first-year students how to embrace conflicts rather than avoid them.

The findings in this study contribute to the current literature and provide another layer towards understanding the complex phenomena of parental involvement. Though a widespread issue that all practitioners encounter, the findings advance the understanding towards parental involvement for students attending USCB. The findings suggest the need for cultural shift among practitioners. In doing so, both student and enrollment affairs professionals at USCB will have an opportunity to not only examine day-to-day policies and procedures but to philosophically redefine the meaning associated to the parent-student-institution-relationship.
References


NetResults.


Appendix A - Recruitment Email

Dear First Name,

Hello, my name is Joffery Gaymon, the Director of Admissions at University of South Carolina Beaufort and I am also a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am conducting a research study exploring the experiences of first-time, first-year college students and parental involvement. All students selected for the study will receive a $25.00 gift certificate to iTunes, Barnes and Nobel, Starbucks or a gas card.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Share your experiences as a new freshmen
- Participate in a face-to-face interview for a 60 to 90 minute interview

All information will be kept confidential and the information will only be used for this research.

For more information please contact Joffery Gaymon, Ed.D student, at gaymon.j@husky.neu.edu

Thank you for your help.

Joffery Gaymon
Appendix B- Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Name:
Date of Birth (Month & Year):
Gender: Male Female
Race/Ethnicity: White
Classification/Year in College: Freshmen
Major: Bio
Do you live on campus? Yes No
Are you a first-time, first-year student? Yes No
Are you enrolled at USCB full time? (At least 12 credit hours) Yes No
Have you been raised by a parent or parents? Yes No
Describe the make-up of your parental household:
Single-parent Two Parents Two Parents/Same Gender
Are you financially supported by a parent or parents? Yes No
How much support, including emotional and financial, do you receive from your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Very Little Support</th>
<th>Moderate Support</th>
<th>Strong Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Very Little Support</td>
<td>Moderate Support</td>
<td>Strong Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you communicate with your parents? (On Average per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seldom (0-1)</th>
<th>Moderate (2-4)</th>
<th>Frequently (5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Tell me a little about yourself.
Can you describe your experience with your family?
Can you give any examples?
How were your parents involved during high school?
Were they supportive? Can you give examples?
Appendix C- Consent to Participate

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Joffery Gaymon, Doctoral Candidate
Dr. Joseph McNabb, Principal Investigator

Title of Project
Making Sense of Parental Influence and Involvement and Retention of First-Year Students: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are am inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a first-time, full-time freshmen attending the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to interview first-year students and determine how you feel about the involvement of your parents in your academic and social life of college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, the researcher will ask you to answer questions about your college experience and how your parents are involved. The semi-structured interview will last 60-90 minutes. The interview session will be recorded. Participants names will not appear on the interview transcripts, pseudonyms will be used.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed in a place that is convenient for you and the interview will last 60 to 90 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

Describing experiences of your first semester in college may uncover painful or uncomfortable memories or anxiety. If you experience any level of discomfort, you are encouraged to utilize the University of South Carolina Beaufort’s Counseling Services. Counseling services are free and
available to all USCB students. For more information about Counseling Services please visit http://www.uscb.edu/campus_life/student_services/counseling_services.php or contact (843)208-8264 or by email at BBeam@uscb.edu.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to improve services and information provided to college students and their parents. It is also hoped that the data that emerges from this study will contribute to the current knowledge about the experiences of college students.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known. That means no one, not even the researchers, will know that the answers you give are from you. Participants will be asked ten questions led by the researcher. Interview session will be recorded and later transcribed to create the transcripts. Each interview will be numbered and each participant will be issued a pseudonym.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student at the University of South Carolina Beaufort.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

For questions please contact the researcher, Joffery Gaymon at (843) 540-2576 or by email at gaymon.j@husky.neu.edu. You may contact Dr. Joseph McNabb, the Principal Investigator at j.mcnabb@neu.edu. For an emergency please contact the University of South Carolina Beaufort’s Department of Public Safety at (843) 208-8911.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
Will I be paid for my participation?

You will be given a $25 gift certificate to either iTunes, Barnes and Noble, Starbucks or a gas card as soon as you complete the interview.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There will be no cost associated with participating in this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission. The researcher, Joffery Gaymon is the Director of Admissions at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, as well as a doctoral student at Northeastern University.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                                      Date

___________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

___________________________________________
Printed name of person above

Appendix D- Semi-Structured Interview Guide
Research Question: How do first-year college students make sense of their parents’ involvement in their academic and social life?

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you think of when I say the words “parental involvement?” Can you give some examples of involvement?
3. How would you describe your relationship with your parent(s) now that you are a college student?
4. How, if any has your relationship changed since you were in high school?
5. How often do you communicate with your parent(s) and through what method? Who initiates the communication and why?
6. Describe how your parent(s) have been supportive or unsupportive of your college career.
7. Which parent is the most involved in your college life?
   a. Describe their involvement in your academic life. Can you give examples on how, when and why your parent/parents have become involved?
   b. How do you resolve challenges related to your academics?
8. In what ways are your parent(s), if any, involved in your social life?
   a. How do you resolve conflicts in your social life?
9. In your opinion, which area of your life, academic or social, is parent(s) more involved?
10. How do you feel about your parent(s) involvement?
11. Are you satisfied with level of involvement?
12. Can you list other ways you would like, if any, your parent(s)?
Appendix E – IRB Approval from Northeastern University

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: January 15, 2013
IRB #: CPS13-01-03

Principal Investigator(s): Joseph McNabb
Jeffery Gaymon

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Making Sense of the Parental Influence and Involvement of First-Year Students: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Participating Sites: University of South Carolina Beaufort

School Site Permission Letter - forthcoming

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JANUARY 14, 2014

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630