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Parental support during the transition to college has been associated with late adolescents' adjustment. Adolescents begin to seek greater autonomy by individuating from parents to achieve the ultimate goal of independent identity (Blos, 1979). However, in order to achieve individuation process, a balance is required between independence and emotional connection to parents (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). This thesis considered the extent to which parental support was beneficial to adjustment in college as well as whether emotional detachment moderated associations between parental support and adjustment. A sample of 384 first-year college students completed self-report questionnaires on parental support, emotional detachment from parents and college adjustment. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with greater academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. Higher levels of emotional detachment were associated with greater institutional attachment. Emotional detachment moderated the association between parental support and college adjustment, but the nature of such effects differed based on generational status. For first-generation students, lower levels of parental social support were associated with greater levels of academic adjustment when students were highly emotionally attached to parents but associated with lower levels of academic adjustment when students were very detached from parents. For continuing generation students, higher levels of parental social support were associated with greater levels of personal-emotional adjustment when students were

emotionally attached to parents but associated with lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment when students were extremely detached from parents. Generational status and emotional detachment from parents are two important factors that should be taken into account when considering how parental support may benefit adjustment in college.

EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT MODERATES THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL SUPPORT AND
FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
College Students.....	1
Separation-Individuation Theory	2
Adjustment in College: Definitions, Measurement, and Implications.....	6
Academic Adjustment.....	9
Social Adjustment.....	10
Personal-Emotional Adjustment.....	11
Institutional Attachment.....	12
Summary.....	13
Predictors of Positive Adjustment in College.....	13
Individual Characteristics.....	14
Parenting Styles and Parent-Child Relationships	15
Parental Support as a Predictor of Adjustment in College.....	16
Emotional Detachment as a Potential Moderator of Associations between Parental Support and Adjustment in College.....	18
Proposed Study	21
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	22
II. METHOD.....	24
Participants.....	24
Procedures.....	25
Measures	25
Parental Support	25
Emotional Detachment.....	26
College Adjustment	27
Analytic Strategy.....	28
Preliminary Analyses.....	28
Focal Analyses.....	29

III. RESULTS.....	31
Bivariate Intercorrelations Among Variables.....	31
Preliminary Analyses	33
Model Predicting Adjustment in College from Parental Support and Detachment	34
Model Predicting Adjustment in College from Parental Support, Detachment, and the Interaction of Parental Support and Detachment	35
Developing the Interaction Model.....	35
Final Model for the Full Sample	36
Multiple Group Analysis with Generational Status.....	36
Probing for Significant Interactions.....	38
IV. DISCUSSION	40
Effects of Parental Support and Emotional Detachment on Adjustment in College	41
Emotional Detachment as a Moderator of Association Between Parental Support and College Adjustment	42
First-Generation Students.....	43
Continuing-Generation Students	45
Limitations.....	46
Implications	47
REFERENCES.....	49
APPENDIX A. DATA TABLES.....	54
APPENDIX B. FIGURES	59

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among Model Variables.....	54
Table 2. Parental Support and Emotional Detachment as Predictors of Adjustment in College	55
Table 3. Regression Analyses Predicting College Adjustment from Overall Parental Support, Emotional Detachment and Interaction Terms	56
Table 4. Contrast of First-Generation and Continuing Generation Regression Analyses Predicting College Adjustment from Parental Support, Emotional Detachment and Interaction Terms	57

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Model Examining the Moderating Effect of Emotional Detachment on the Association Between Parental Support and College Adjustment.....	59
Figure 2. Regions of Significance Findings Probing the Significant Interaction of Parental Social Support and Emotional Detachment Associated with Academic Adjustment among First Generation Students	60
Figure 3. Regions of Significance Findings Probing the Significant Interaction of Parental Social Support and Emotional Detachment Associated with Personal-Emotional Adjustment among Continuing Generation Students	61

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

College Students

A developmental period tends to start with a transition in life, such as attending a new school or starting a new job. For some late adolescents, that transition is attending a college. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) reported that approximately 44% of students enroll in college right after completing high school. This is a time during which college students adjust to new academic expectations, new friends, new environments, and new responsibilities. However, this experience can be stressful to some. Many first-year college students experience anxiety, depression, loneliness, and sleep deprivation during the initial transition to college (Doane, Gress-Smith, & Breitenstein, 2015; Drake, Sladek, & Doane, 2016; Lee, Dickson, Conley, & Holmbeck, 2014; Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). The psychological distress may contribute to the low retention rate among college students. The NCES (2017) reported that only 59% of students who enroll in 4-year institutions graduate within 6 years.

Existing research has indicated that when students report high levels of adjustment to the college environment, they are more likely to remain enrolled and graduate (Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, & Toews, 2010; Woosley, 2003). Kolkhorst et al. (2010) reported that the quality of parent-child relationships predicts student adjustment during the first year of college. When students receive more support and have positive

relationships with their parents, they report better school adjustment and higher GPAs, but only in the first year of college. In turn, college students' adjustment in their first year predicts retention rates (Schnuck & Handal, 2011). First year college students may not have had time to form close peer relationships at school, so they are more likely to seek support from parents than do students later in their college careers.

Obtaining a bachelor's degree results in college graduates attaining higher employment status and higher income level. In 2015, college students who graduated with a bachelor's degree had 64% higher median earnings than those with just a high school diploma (\$50,000 versus \$30,500; NCES, 2015). College education is an important predictor of future income levels, and experiences and adjustment during the first year of college are important predictors of college completion. Thus, studying first year college students' adjustment has the potential to translate into higher student retention rates.

Separation-Individuation Theory

The current study is framed by separation-individuation theory. This theory was originally developed among researchers who studied infants, but it has been adapted for use by researchers who study adolescents and late adolescents. According to Mahler's Separation-Individuation Theory (1975), infants begin to develop a sense of separateness from the world while still being very much a part of the world. Infants explore and gradually come to understand the boundaries between the external world and their own bodies. The process of separation-individuation is dependent on relationships with parents during the early stages of childhood. Healthy parent-child relationships foster

emotional independence, while unhealthy parent-child relationships hinder the development of psychological separation (Hoffman, 1984). Infants learn to differentiate their own bodies from caregivers through the process of physical separation (Mahler, 2000). Infants become more aware of separation through increased amounts of time spent away from their caregivers. The process of individuation involves infants' gradual awareness of their ability to independently handle the tasks of that developmental period. However, the process of individuation does not stop in infancy. It continues through adolescence and into late adolescence (Blos, 1979; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

Blos (1979) called attention to what he referred to as the second individuation process of adolescence that plays a critical role in relation to healthy emotional development (Blos, 1979). Relational autonomy is the optimal endpoint of the individuation process (Blos, 1979; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Individuals who successfully negotiate the individuation process during adolescence achieve emotional and behavioral independence from parents and develop a sense of independent identity (Hoffman, 1984).

Individuation during adolescence occurs when reliance on parents decreases and independent decision-making increases through "emotional disengagement from parental ego support" (Blos, 1979, p. 78). Another characteristic of individuation is "increasing responsibility" for ones' own actions (Blos, 1979, pp. 83). The post-secondary context promotes development of conscious decision-making without reliance on parents for approval. It is important for college students to be able to make independent decisions that will lead to positive outcomes. Adolescents also engage in the "process of object

losing and object finding” (Blos, 1979, pp. 81) in which a balance between connectivity and disengagement from parents occurs. In contrast, a negative resolution of the second individual process is ego regression in which adolescents facing new stressors seek out previously discarded sources of comfort and security. For example, seniors in college who are experiencing anxiety related to anticipated graduation may regress to seeking affirmation from parents about their last semester of coursework, even though they have not done so since entering college. When “ego regression reaches immobility of adolescent fixation ... development comes to a standstill” (Blos, 1979, pp. 89). In other words, some adolescents are at risk of becoming frozen in development and unable to move forward in the individuation process. Then, decision making becomes immature due to lack of experience in making conscious decisions. This can lead to negative outcomes.

A perspective that emphasizes individuation as a developmental process occurring during adolescence is different from older perspectives that were rooted in psychoanalytic theory and emphasized detachment. According to such perspectives (Freud, 1958), typical adolescent development involved emotional disengagement or separation from parents, states that were described as representing detachment from parents and stood in opposition to connectedness with parents (Blos, 1962). According to the psychoanalytic perspective, detachment resulting in adolescents becoming more emotionally distant as a result of detachment from their parents was a developmentally normative experience. However, this psychoanalytic view of detachment was altered to describe healthy adolescent development as involving independence from parents while

still maintaining connectedness (Blos, 1979). It is important for adolescents to retain close emotional ties and maintain healthy relationships with their parents (Lapsley & Stey, 2010; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Ryan & Lynch (1989) reported that late adolescents who are more emotionally detached from parents report a lower sense of self-worth, while late adolescents who score lower on emotional detachment have more positive perspectives of self. Therefore, the optimal individuation process involves movement between fusion and enmeshment to ultimately result in an optimal balance between emotional autonomy and connectedness (Josselson, 1988; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

In the present study, I focus on parental support and college students' emotional autonomy to examine how these two factors cooperatively contribute to college students' First Year adjustment. A focus on the individuation process during late adolescence draws attention to the perspective that individuation continues to occur past infancy and adolescence. College students need emotional support from parents to manage stress and experience better adjustment (Hall, Mcnallie, Custers, Timmermans, Wilson, & Van den Bulck, 2017). The second individuation process suggests that as the child matures, emotional autonomy is the optimal end goal. late adolescents need to develop a strong and independent sense of self in order to maintain intimate relations without losing their own identities (Kegan, 1982). Therefore, in this study I examine the influences of parental support and first-year college students' emotional autonomy and the relation between the two in relation to several types of adjustment during the first year of college.

Within the proposed study, parental social and academic support represent factors that are hypothesized to affect students' adjustment during the first year of college. The

developmental outcomes of interest are academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment to college. Levels of students' emotional autonomy are considered as an additional factor that predicts adjustment in college both additively and interactively with parental support. In summary, the second individuation process of adolescence perspective frames the present study by suggesting that parental support continues to impact the college students' adjustment during a time of growing independence and responsibilities – but that the impact depends on the extent to which adolescents have successfully individuated from parents (i.e., are high in emotional autonomy).

Adjustment in College: Definitions, Measurement, and Implications

Adjustment in college is multifaceted and includes dimensions of academic adaptation, psychological adaptation, social adaptation, and commitment to college (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin & Toews, 2007). Students who self-report greater adjustment across these domains are considered to be more positively adjusted to college. Students who score lower in these areas are considered to be less positively adjusted.

In their work focused on understanding the nature and predictors of adjustment to college, different researchers have taken different approaches. A few researchers have combined the multiple dimensions of college adjustment to create an overall measure of adjustment (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; Yazedjian, Toews, & Navarro, 2009). Some researchers have focused on specific dimensions of adjustment in isolation or in combination (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Conley, Kirsch, Dickson & Bryant, 2014;

Hannum & Dvorak, 2004). Still others have studied single dimensions of adjustment in relation to a wide range of correlates and predictors (English, Davis, Wei, & Gross, 2017; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Gebre & Taylor, 2017; Katz & Somers, 2017; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

Baker & Siryk (1986) examined the longitudinal impact of providing feedback to undergraduate students in the extreme ranges of a summary measure of adjustment. One hundred sixty-three first-year students from a four-year institution completed questionnaires assessing levels of adjustment in first and second administration periods. The researchers found that 45% of first-year students reported low scores across all dimensions of adjustment, and 41% of first-year students reported high scores across all dimensions of adjustment. The dropout rate was three times lower among well-adjusted students than less well-adjusted students. Most researchers who have examined academic, personal-emotional, and social adjustment do not provide the exact distributions of students' adjustment. They generally report that students have the highest scores on academic and social adjustment and lowest score on personal-emotional adjustment (Friedlander et al., 2007; Katz & Somers, 2017). When Schnuck and Handal (2011) included a measure of institutional attachment, they still found the lowest scores were on personal-emotional adjustment with institutional attachment as the second lowest reported score.

Consistent with the idea that students are either consistently well-adjusted or consistently poorly-adjusted, Wintre and Yaffe (2000) examined adjustment as one overall construct. They wanted to identify whether parenting style, relationship with

parents, and psychological well-being predicted college students' overall adjustment. The overall well-being scores in the areas of academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional attachment adjustment. Researchers recruited students from a large metropolitan four-year Canadian college. Participants were 408 students who completed questionnaires in first and second semester introductory psychology classes. Student age ranged from 17 to 27 years. The researchers found psychological well-being was the strongest contributor in predicting overall adjustment. They found lower levels of initial stress and higher levels of self-esteem predicted more positive overall adjustment for female students. Increased levels of depressive symptomology predicted poorer overall adjustment in male and female students.

Aligned with the perspective that adjustment is multifaceted, Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie (2007) looked at the different types of adjustment separately. They examined parenting style, relationship with parents, and psychological well-being as contributors to first-year college overall adjustment. The sample of 128 first-year students was drawn from a midsize four-year Canadian college during an introductory psychology class. Information about parenting styles and relationships with parents was collected during the fall semester, and students' overall adjustment was assessed during the spring semester. Psychological well-being was measured at both points in time. The researchers found that the way first-year college students generally feel about themselves is not a good predictor of overall college adjustment. However, different types of self-esteem were related to the specific types of adjustment. Specifically, higher levels of academic

self-esteem positively predicted greater academic adjustment and higher levels of social self-esteem positively predicted greater social and personal-emotional adjustment.

Friedlander et al.'s (2007) findings that there were different predictors of different types of adjustment suggest that researchers should separately examine the different types of adjustment to gain a better understanding of the factors that might predict students' adaptation to college in different areas. Such information is essential to creating effective support programs for college students. Most researchers who have studied adjustment in college have separated the different dimensions of adjustment.

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment reflects educational performance and experiences. It has been operationalized as grade point average (GPA), motivation to study and attend classes, meeting academic goals, or instructors' evaluations (Baker & Siryk, 1986; Chemers et al., 2001). Students experience greater academic adjustment when their stress levels decrease across the first year of college (Friedlander et al., 2007). As students' levels of stress decrease, they may gain more confidence related to their academic work, which can potentially boost their motivation to study, resulting in higher grades.

First-year college students' mindsets and environments before coming to college have been linked to their academic adjustment in college. Chemers, Hu, & Garcia (2001) proposed that academic self-efficacy and optimism would indirectly predict academic performance through academic expectation. They analyzed self-report questionnaire data from 256 first-year students from a four-year institution in California who completed questionnaires in both their first and second semesters. Chemers et al. (2001) found first

year students' academic adjustment is predicted by initial self-confidence during their transition to college. Students who expect to do well at the beginning of their college experiences have better academic performance later on than students who expect to do worse. Johnson, Gans, Kerr, & LaValle (2010) looked at college students' adjustment in relation to their perspectives of family functioning prior to enrolling in college. The researchers recruited 320 first-year students through introductory psychology classes at a four-year institution. Students completed the questionnaires in their second semester of college. Researchers found family functioning to be associated with students' adjustment in college. Academic adjustment was lower for students who perceived their families to be less cohesive before coming to college. The mindsets that the first-year students have before coming to college and their first-year experiences are important predictors of their academic adjustment.

Social Adjustment

Social adjustment refers to satisfaction and engagement with interpersonal relationships and social events. Students who are socially well-adjusted report lower levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and stress; and increased self-esteem (English et al., 2017; Friedlander et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2017). Many first-year students live away from home and become more independent in their decisions (Goldscheider & DaVanzo, 1986) as they are faced with challenges in their new environments. Students may feel lonely, especially early in their college experiences (English et al., 2017). Social adjustment is higher among students who perceive their families to be more expressive about emotions (Johnson, Gans, Kerr, & LaValle, 2010). A healthy emotional connection

between parents and students may also encourage healthy relationships with peers who then become an additional support in college.

Secure attachment promotes exploration of new settings in the absence of parents (Ainsworth, 1989). This is important for college students as they continue to encounter new people in diverse settings and face unfamiliar challenges. Hannum & Dvorak (2004) predicted that attachment to parents would be associated with psychological and social adjustment in the first year of college. They found students with secure attachments to their parents are more likely to experience positive social adjustment and less likely to experience psychological distress. Higher levels of social adjustment are associated with attachment to fathers, and lower levels of psychological distress are associated with attachment to mothers.

Personal-Emotional Adjustment

Personal-emotional adjustment refers to students' psychological and somatic states (Baker & Siryk, 1986). It is typically operationalized in terms of students' self-reports of their responses to pressures in stressful academic and social situations (Friedlander et al., 2007; Katz & Somers, 2017; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Schnuck & Handal, 2011). The transition to college is associated with steep declines in feelings of psychological and social well-being, as well as sharp inclines in levels of psychological distress (Conley et al., 2014).

Personal-emotional adjustment difficulties have implications for other types of adjustment as well. For example, college students who are depressed may find it difficult to gain motivation to complete assignments or engage in social gatherings. Sudden

changes in the environment, which are a defining feature of the transition to college, can be stressful for late adolescents (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). Students who have a hard time coping emotionally have lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment (Johnson et al., 2010). Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand (2004) examined whether secure attachments to parents and healthy levels of separation-individuation were associated with better personal-emotional adjustment. Their sample consisted of 404 undergraduate students from a four-year institution (44.5% first-years) recruited via flyers. The researchers found personal-emotional adjustment to be associated with parental attachment in ways that are consistent with the separation-individuation process. Students who reported greater attachment to their parents had less anxiety about the separation process during college, which led to better personal-emotional adjustment.

Institutional Attachment

Institutional attachment impacts students' overall satisfaction and decisions to commit to their specific college (Baker, 1986). Schnuck & Handal (2011) examined gender differences in institutional attachment among 190 first-year college students in their first semester. They found female students had stronger commitment to their schools than male students. Therefore, it is important to consider gender differences in adjustment to college. Attachment to the institution can serve as a motivation for students to work hard so they can remain at the institution until graduation. Students who have stronger commitment to attend a school are more likely have initial optimism which then leads to better academic performance (Chemers et al., 2001).

Summary

Understanding adjustment defined in these four ways is important area of inquiry in research involving college students because of its implications for students' experiences while in college and the manner in which they view the value of the college experience. Positive adjustment among college students is associated with lower levels of stress and depression, less loneliness, and greater feelings of self-efficacy during the transition to college (Hall et al., 2017; Friedlander et al., 2007). Negative adjustment among college students is associated with poorer mental health and well-being (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Conley et al., 2014). It is more likely that students with better adjustment will perceive college education as beneficial investment and commit to achieving their educational goals (Hackman & Dysinger, 1970). Students with poor adjustment experience lower retention rates and a general lack of integration into the college environment (Tinto, 1975).

Predictors of Positive Adjustment in College

Given the importance of different types of adjustment in predicting college students' experiences while in school, as well as retention, researchers have been motivated to identify factors that predict positive adjustment in college. Broadly speaking, researchers focused on identifying predictors of adjustment in college on three categories of potential predictors: individual characteristics of students, parenting styles and parent-child relationships, and social support.

Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics that have been linked with adjustment to college include optimism, depression, personality traits, and emotional coping ability (Chemers et al., 2001; Friedlander et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2010; Schnuck & Handal, 2011). As an example, Schnuck & Handal (2011) examined whether students' "Big 5" personality traits were associated with adjustment in college. They recruited 190 first-year students to complete an online survey during the first semester of college. The researchers reported that students with lower levels of conscientiousness had lower levels of academic adjustment. Students with higher levels of neuroticism had lower levels of all types of adjustment. In contrast, students with higher levels of extraversion had higher levels of social adjustment and institutional attachment.

Johnson et al. (2010) considered whether students' ability to emotionally cope would moderate the association between poor family functioning prior to college and student adjustment in college. The researchers found that for students entering college who reported less cohesive families, emotional coping skills did indeed buffer the negative impact of problematic family functioning on college students' adjustment. Students from less cohesive families self-reported lower levels of academic and social adjustment, as well as higher levels of psychological distress. However, those students with problematic family functioning who reported having strong emotional coping skills were less likely to report problematic academic and social adjustment in college.

Chemers et al. (2001) longitudinally followed students from the first week of the fall semester to the last week of the spring semester in a single academic year. They

considered self-efficacy and optimism as predictors of academic adjustment. Reports of greater self-efficacy and optimism during the first semester predicted more positive academic expectations, which then predicted stronger academic performances in the second semester.

Overall, the individual characteristics of college students – personality characteristics, attitudes of positivity, and emotional coping skills – generally predict greater academic and social adjustment in college.

Parenting Styles and Parent-Child Relationships

Parenting styles play an important role in determining college students' adjustment. Wintre & Yaffe (2000) investigated students' perceptions of parenting style and mutual reciprocity with parents (the extent to which parents and students respected one another's decisions and had open communication) in relation to overall adjustment in college. Researchers sampled 408 first-year students from psychology classes in Canada during their first and second semesters. They found that authoritative parenting (high parental responsiveness, high parental expectations) has positive effects on overall college adjustment, but mutual reciprocity has a stronger direct association with overall adjustment than parenting styles.

Schnuck & Handal (2011) investigated the impact of both personality traits and parenting styles on first-year college students' adjustment and found personality traits to be a stronger predictor of adjustment than were parenting styles. This may be due to the large number of college students who live away from home, resulting in less direct parental supervision. The physical distance between parents and college students

increases the students' ability to make independent decisions. Living away from parents makes it easier for college students to hide or lie about their social participation, which makes it harder for parents to monitor and supervise their late adolescents – and monitoring is a key component of authoritative parenting.

Parental Support as a Predictor of Adjustment in College

Despite physical distance, college students still need to remain emotionally connected to their parents (Lapsley & Stey, 2010). One factor that increases college students' feelings of emotional connection with their parents is parental support. Students who feel supported by parents have better psychological adjustment including lower levels of psychological distress and fewer feelings of loneliness (Hall et al., 2017). They also report higher levels of social adjustment and more positive relationships with friends (Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, Boswell, 2006).

Parental support moderates the association between student personality factors and levels of overall college adjustment. Students who report higher levels of shyness and maladaptive coping skills have better adjustment when they are supported by their parents (Katz & Somers, 2017). Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos (1994) studied the impact of parental support on students' psychological adjustment during the transition to college. They recruited 175 first-year college students who relocated to attend college. Surveys were administered to students during their first semester and again two years later. Researchers found parental support during the transition to college predicted greater social adjustment and psychological adjustment two years later. Students who perceived greater parental support during the transition reported higher levels of sociability as

upper-class students and higher levels of happiness, greater feelings of self-worth and lower levels of psychological distress.

As much as parental support is beneficial for college students' transition to college, Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco (2005) found that this relationship was weaker for first-generation college students. The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines first-generation college students as individuals with parents who regularly reside with and support students and did not obtain baccalaureate degrees (Department of Health, 1965). Dennis et al. recruited 100 ethnic minority first-generation students to consider whether family support and peer support contributed to academic adjustment in this sample. The data were collected during the first semester of school and again during students' second year in college. The researchers found that for ethnic minority first-generation students, peer support was a stronger predictor of overall adjustment than parental support.

Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert (2011) examined the association of parental emotional and informational support with students' levels of stress among first-generation students versus students whose parents had some experiences in college. They sampled 390 female college students via online surveys a month before the first semester. Researchers found first-generation college students reported receiving less emotional and informational support from parents than continuing-generation college students. Parental emotional support was significantly associated with stress for first and continuing generation students. Researchers found students with higher emotional support reported lower levels of stress. A negative trend was displayed between parental informational support and stress for first-generation students, but not for continuing-generation

students. First-generation students who perceived higher parental information support reported lower levels of stress. These students are more likely to be ethnic minorities and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Bui, 2002). If first-generation college students are from immigrant families, they also may have greater family responsibilities (Tseng, 2004). The absence of parental informational support may create more stress due to parents' lack of understanding for personal school obligations outside of the family.

The lack of college experience among first-generation college students' parents may drive college students to seek assistance from friends (Dennis et al., 2005). First-generation students may perceive their parents to be less knowledgeable about college experiences. This may lead first-generation students to not seek out and expect parental support.

Emotional Detachment as a Potential Moderator of Associations between Parental Support and Adjustment in College

The distinction between emotional autonomy and detachment is not always clear. Steinburg and Silverberg (1986) defined emotional autonomy as growing independence from parents while maintaining a healthy connection to them and developed a measure of emotional autonomy in adolescence. Ryan & Lynch (1989) defined detachment as the absence of a healthy attachment to parents. They reconfigured items on the Steinberg and Silverberg measure to form new scales and argued that what Steinberg and Silverberg had referred to as a measure of emotional autonomy was better thought of as a measure of detachment – with higher scores linked with lower levels of adolescent adjustment. These two constructs are highly correlated (high levels of autonomy are related to low levels of

detachment), yet conceptually distinct. In this literature review, I use the construct names that authors themselves have used in their writings.

In late adolescence, many individuals attend college and explore their identities in the context of decreased time spent with parents at home, but continued dependency on parental support. Many first-year college students live away from home for the first time (Schwartz, 2016), resulting in dramatic increases in decision-making outside of the direct supervision of their parents. Despite physical distance from parents, college students still need support and secure attachment to parents to thrive (Hall et al., 2017). College students who are not emotionally autonomous may become too dependent on their parents, hindering their individuation process. Therefore, moderate levels of emotional autonomy may be optimal in that they allow older adolescents to find a balance between isolation and enmeshment in their connections to parents.

Interestingly, different patterns of emotional autonomy development in late adolescence have been reported in Belgium and in the United States. Beyers & Goossens (2003) examined how emotional autonomy was related to parent-child relationships. The researchers recruited 574 college students in Belgium to complete a take-home survey. They found students who had greater emotional autonomy from parents reported stronger negative feelings toward parents than students who reported less emotional autonomy. In contrast, Frank, Pirsch, and Wright (1990) examined the association between emotional autonomy and psychological well-being in a sample of 376 college students in the United States. Frank et al. (1990) found that students in United States who reported a greater sense of emotional autonomy reported greater psychological health when relatedness was

controlled. The difference between these two studies can be attributed to living arrangements. Most college students in Belgium live closer to home and visit their parents more than students in United States (Beyers & Goossens, 2003). Constant interaction with parents may hinder college students' individuation during a period of identity exploration. Therefore, we need further information concerning how living away from parents may impact the individuation process for college students' adjustment.

Parental support is associated with positive adjustment during college, as parents can provide emotional and social supports while children negotiate the challenges associated with the college experience (Hall et al., 2017; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994; Mounts et al., 2006). Some researchers have discussed the transition to college as a step towards achieving emotional autonomy (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988). However, for some students, parental support may hinder the individuation process that typically occurs during the college years. Kolkhorst et al. (2010) found that students who are securely attached to their parents access less parental support while in college. This suggests that support can play different roles in relation to individuation process depending on the emotional context within which it occurs. Specifically, students who are overly reliant on parental support, or whose parents are less willing/able to support the development of autonomy, may experience less optimal adjustment to college.

Steinberg & Silverberg (1986) surveyed 865 children/adolescents aged 10 to 16 years old, asking questions about emotional autonomy from parents and resistance to peer pressure. Researchers found that late elementary students were more likely to emotionally depend on their parents and less likely to conform to peers. By high school, adolescents

traded dependency on parents for reliance on peers and became more susceptible to peer pressure. Steinberg & Silverberg's (1986) research contributed to the growing idea that emotional autonomy varies across development and across relationship context (parent versus peer). Greater emotional autonomy from parents did not translate to greater emotional autonomy from peers.

College students who are not emotionally autonomous from parents may be less likely to emotionally depend upon and conform to peers. This could potentially impact students' relationships in college when they are constantly surrounded by peers. College students who are emotionally reliant on parents may feel less of a need to emotionally connect with their peers, with negative implications for their social adjustment. In contrast, students who are extremely emotionally autonomous from parents may be overly reliant on peers for approval and as a result be more likely to engage in potentially harmful behaviors (e.g. drug use, underage drinking, drinking and driving, smoking). Therefore, it is important for late adolescents to negotiate an appropriate balance between emotional autonomy and connection to parents and peers. This study aimed to fill this gap by considering emotional autonomy development in relation to both perceptions of parental support and adjustment to college.

Proposed Study

Previous researchers have found parental support to benefit students' adjustment in college (Friedlander et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2017; Holahan et al., 1994; Mounts et al., 2006; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). This paper examined the association between first-year college students' perceptions of parental support with their academic, personal-

emotional, social, and institutional attachment adjustment in college. College students continue to develop in relation to the separation-individuation process while still receiving parental support (Friedlander et al., 2007; Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004). There has yet been a study that examined the manner in which college student perceptions of emotional autonomy interact with perceptions of parental support to predict adjustment. The proposed study examined the moderating effect of college students' perceptions of emotional autonomy from parents on the relationship between perceived parental support and college adjustment (Figure 1). Associations between emotional autonomy/detachment and indicators of adolescent adjustment are likely to be quadratic in nature, with the best adjustment occurring at moderate levels of emotional autonomy/detachment. Accordingly, I predicted that parental support would be more strongly (and positively) related to college adjustment when levels of emotional autonomy/detachment were moderate. This paper contributed to body of literature on separation and individuation processes in first-year college students by clarifying the role of emotional autonomy/detachment as a factor that contextualizes the impact of parental support.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Does parental support (academic, social) predict college adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment)?
 - Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of parental support (academic, social) will be associated with better adjustment to college (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment).

2. Does emotional detachment predict adjustment in college?
 - Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of emotional detachment will be associated with poorer adjustment to college (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment).
3. Do levels of emotional detachment moderate associations between parental support (academic, social) and college adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment)?
 - Hypothesis 3: The association between parental support (academic, social) and college adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment) will be stronger when students are lower in emotional detachment.
4. Do the predictors (parental academic support, parental social support, emotional autonomy, interactive effects) of adjustment in college (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment) differ for first generation college students verses continuing generation students?
 - Hypothesis 4: The analysis will be considered exploratory and no hypotheses are provided.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants were traditional first-year college students from a large public university located in the southeastern region of the United States ($N = 348$). Students were 90.5% female ($n = 315$) and 9.5% male ($n = 33$). Their ages ranged from 17 to 20 years of age ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.3$ years; $SD = .53$). Students reported weighted high school grade point averages (GPAs) ranging from 1.65 to 5.50 ($M_{\text{gpa}} = 3.85$; $SD = 0.54$). Students identified themselves as Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American ($n = 134$; 38.5%), Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American ($n = 127$; 36.5%), Latino or Hispanic American ($n = 31$; 9%), Multiethnic ($n = 31$; 9%), East Asian or Asian American ($n = 12$; 3.4%), South Asian or Indian American ($n = 7$; 2%), Native American or Alaskan Native ($n = 3$; 0.9%), and Other ($n = 3$; 0.9%). Eighty percent of students lived away from home (75% on-campus, 5% off-campus). Seventy-four percent of students lived with at least one roommate, and 6% lived alone. The three most frequently identified primary caregivers were mothers ($n = 281$, 80.7%), fathers ($n = 47$, 13.5%), and grandmothers ($n = 13$, 3.7%). With respect to the primary caregivers' levels of education, participants reported that 9.5% of caregivers earned partial high school or middle school education ($n = 30$), 26.4% of caregivers had earned a high school diploma ($n = 92$), 30.5% caregivers had

some level of college or specialized training ($n = 106$), 24.7% of caregivers had earned a four-year college degree ($n = 86$), and 9.8% of caregivers received graduate training after college ($n = 34$). In terms of financial difficulty managing the expense of attending college, 20.7% of students reported it has not been difficult at all ($n = 72$), 44.5% of students reported it has been a little difficult ($n = 155$), 27% of students reported moderately difficult ($n = 94$), and 7.8% of students reported extremely difficult ($n = 27$).

Procedures

Data were collected over 3 consecutive semesters from college students aged 18 to 20 enrolled in a single introductory social science course at the participating university. The course was required for students in the Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) major, but also met General Education requirements for a Social and Behavioral Science course. As a result, the sample included many students from the HDFS major, but also from wide range other majors. Students provided consent for participation through IRB approved consent forms. All students enrolled in the course were given the option of participating in the study by completing questionnaires online or completing an alternative written assignment to receive the same amount of extra credit assigned for participation in the study.

Measures

Parental Support

College students' perceptions of parental support were measured using the academic and social support subscales from the Parent Support for the College Transition Measure (PSCT; Mounts, 2004). This scale was designed to measure the extent to which

parents support their children while they are attending college. The PSCT contains 34 items each of which refers to a supportive behavior in which parents may engage. It has three subscales: social support (fifteen items; $\alpha = .91$), academic support (eleven items; $\alpha = .85$), and financial support (not utilized for the current study). Students respond to each item by indicating the extent to which they agree that their parent/caregiver engages in the described behavior using 4-point Likert scale with (1) indicating *strongly agree* and (4) indicating *strongly disagree*. A sample item on the social support subscale is, “Helped me resolve problems with roommates or friends.” A sample item on the academic support is, “Helped me with homework.” Items on each subscale are averaged to yield summary scores with higher scores indicative of more support in each area. Higher scores on PSCT have been demonstrated to be related to greater sociability, lower levels of loneliness, and more positive friendship quality among college students (Mounts et al., 2006).

Emotional Detachment

College students completed the Emotional Autonomy Scale (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). This scale was originally created to measure the four aspects of emotional autonomy: perceiving parents as people, parental deidealization, non-dependency on parents, and individuation. In designing the measure, Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) conceptualized emotional autonomy as decreased reliance on others, such as parents and peers, and increased reliance on self, and believed it to be a positive attribute of adolescents. However, Ryan and Lynch (1989) later reported that the EAS actually assessed the level of emotional detachment from caregivers, rather than aspects of the emotional individuation process. Emotional detachment is the feeling of separation

from caregivers through perception of parental rejection (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). They conducted analyses demonstrating that the measure better represented aspects of detachment. For the current study, we focused on the eight items ($\alpha = .81$) on the emotional detachment subscale. Sample items on this subscale are “I have often wondered how he/she acts when I'm not around,” “I might be surprised to see how he/she acts at a party,” “When at work, he/she acts pretty much the same way he/she does at home” (reverse coded), and “I wish he/she would understand who I really am.” Responses are on a 4-point Likert scales (1) indicating *strongly disagree* and (4) indicating *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicate greater emotional detachment from parents. Higher scores on EAS have been demonstrated to be associated with lower self-esteem and lower grades in school among adolescents (Lamborn & Groh, 2009). In other words, this subscale has been demonstrated to have concurrent validity as an indicator of feelings of separation among adolescents, which is associated with both psychological and academic risk.

College Adjustment

Students' adjustment to college was measured with the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1986). This scale was designed to measure the experiences of college students in the college environment. This 67 item-scale includes four subscales which assess four aspects of adjustment in college: academic (24 items, $\alpha = .84$), social (21 items, $\alpha = .85$), personal-emotional (15 items, $\alpha = .87$), and institutional attachment (7 items, $\alpha = .82$). *Academic adjustment* assesses

students' perception of their intellectual performance and motivation in class. A sample item is "I have been keeping up-to-date on my academic work." *Social adjustment* evaluates students' experiences in social settings with peers and school activities. A sample item is "I have several close social ties at college." *Personal-Emotional adjustment* measures the psychological and physical well-being of college students. A sample item is "I have been having a lot of headaches lately." *Institutional attachment* refers to students' willingness to commit and continue their college education. A sample item is "I expect to complete my bachelor's degree at this college." Students rate all items on a 9-point Likert (1) indicating *doesn't apply to me at all* and (9) indicating *applies very closely to me*. Items on each subscale are averaged to yield summary scores. Higher scores on SACQ scale have been demonstrated to be associated with greater adjustment in terms of academic self-efficacy, social skills, lower levels of negative feelings, and commitment to college (Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011).

Analytic Strategy

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation coefficients were calculated for all variables in the model (Table 1). For all measures, the Outlier Labeling Rule was used to identify outliers that fell more than three standard deviations from the mean (Hoaglin and Iglewicz, 1987). Parental academic support, parental social support, and emotional autonomy scales were mean centered prior to creating interaction terms to reduce multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

Regression analyses were conducted to identify potential covariates to control in focal analyses. Potential controls included race, gender, age, living arrangement, high school GPA, employment hours, and difficulty managing costs of college. A total of 4 regressions were conducted, one for each types of adjustment outcome (academic, social, person-emotional, institutional attachment). The independent variables were emotional autonomy, parental social support, and parental academic support for all regression models. Potential control variables that significantly predicted adjustment outcomes were retained in all subsequent analyses. Potential quadratic effect for emotional detachment were identified by conducting four regression analysis with linear and quadratic emotional detachment as the predictors of the 4 types of college adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment).

Focal Analyses

The first step of the focal analyses was to test the fit of the overall model. Model fit indicates how well the model being tested matches the data. Fit statistics used to assess the fit of the model were the chi-square statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). A good model fit for chi-square statistics is when the statistic is non-significant at $p > 0.05$. However, the chi-square statistics is sensitive to sample size in that large samples mostly result as significance, while small samples lack the power to distinguish between good and poor fit (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980; Kenny & McCoach, 2003). The CFI considers the size of the sample such that small samples do not affect the fit (Bentler, 1990). RMSEA accounts for sample size and favors parsimony, meaning it will favor a simpler model with fewer parameters (Hooper,

Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008; Nevitt & Hancock, 2000). The desired model fit is determined by values of CFI greater than .95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) and values of RMSEA lower than .07 (Steiger, 2007).

The predictors included the control variables identified in preliminary regressions, parental support (academic, social), detachment, and interactive effects of detachment and parental support variables with the outcomes being the four indicators of college adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment).

The second step of analyses involved performing a chi-square difference test for the main effects and interaction models. If this test was significant, then a multiple group analysis was used in AMOS to determine if the coefficients differed for first and continuing generation students. Then, the critical ratio test was used to identify the specific paths that were significantly different based on the generational status.

The third step of analyses involved probing any significant interaction terms using Regions of Significance testing.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Bivariate Intercorrelations Among Variables

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all model variables are presented in Table 1, separated by generational status. There were no outliers in the data.

Among first-generation students, higher levels of parental academic support were associated with higher levels of parental social support, $r(223) = .73, p < .001$. Higher levels of academic adjustment were associated with higher levels of social adjustment, $r(216) = .55, p < .001$, higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment, $r(216) = .52, p < .001$, and higher levels of institutional attachment, $r(216) = .64, p < .001$. Higher levels of social adjustment were associated with higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment, $r(216) = .31, p < .001$, and higher levels of institutional attachment $r(216) = .59, p < .001$. Higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment were associated with higher levels of institutional attachment, $r(216) = .49, p < .001$. Parental social support and emotional detachment were negatively correlated, $r(214) = -.47, p < .001$, and parental academic support and emotional detachment were negatively correlated, $r(214) = -.41, p < .001$. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher levels of academic adjustment $r(216) = .24, p < .001$, higher levels of social adjustment $r(216) = .36, p < .001$, and higher levels of institutional attachment $r(216) = .23, p < .001$. Higher levels of

parental academic support were associated with higher levels of academic adjustment $r(216) = .25, p < .001$, higher levels of social adjustment $r(216) = .29, p < .001$, and higher levels of institutional attachment $r(216) = .17, p = .012$. Higher levels of emotional detachment were associated with lower levels of social adjustment $r(213) = -.21, p = .002$.

Among continuing-generation students, parental academic support and parental social support were positively correlated such that more parental academic support was associated with more parental social support, $r(117) = .77, p < .001$. Higher levels of academic adjustment were associated with higher levels of social adjustment, $r(112) = .42, p < .001$, higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment, $r(112) = .55, p < .001$, and higher levels of institutional attachment, $r(112) = .59, p < .001$. Higher levels of social adjustment were associated with higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment, $r(112) = .25, p = .008$, and higher levels of institutional attachment $r(112) = .45, p < .001$. Higher levels of personal-emotional adjustment were associated with higher levels of institutional attachment, $r(112) = .37, p < .001$. Parental social support and emotional detachment were negatively correlated, $r(110) = -.53, p < .001$, and parental academic support and emotional detachment were negatively correlated, $r(110) = -.51, p < .001$. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher levels of academic adjustment $r(112) = .22, p = .023$, and higher levels of social adjustment $r(112) = .25, p = .007$. Higher levels of parental academic support were associated with higher levels of social adjustment $r(112) = .19, p = .05$. Higher levels of emotional detachment were associated with lower levels of social adjustment $r(110) = -.20, p = .034$.

Preliminary Analyses

Regression analyses were performed entering all potential covariates, parental social support, parental academic support, and emotional detachment as predictors of the 4 types of adjustment (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment) to determine which potential covariates should be included in the model. The potential covariates were gender, race, age, high school grade point average (GPA), living arrangement (on campus, off campus, home with parents), roommate status (roommate, alone, home with parents), work hours, difficulty managing cost of college, and primary caregiver identity. The results indicated only high school GPA and difficulty managing the cost of college were significantly associated with any of the measures of adjustment. These two variables were included as controls in all subsequent analyses.

I conducted additional regression analyses to examine whether there was a quadratic effect of emotional detachment in relation to types of college adjustment. A quadratic term for emotional detachment was computed by multiplying the emotional detachment variable by itself. Then, regression analyses were conducted for each of the four adjustment outcomes with emotional detachment and the quadratic emotional detachment variables entered simultaneously as predictors. Emotional detachment was significantly associated with academic adjustment, $\beta = -.13$, $p = .038$, and social adjustment, $\beta = -.23$, $p = .001$. However, the quadratic emotional detachment was not significantly associated with any of the four types of college adjustment. Therefore, quadratic emotional detachment was excluded from subsequent analyses and effects of emotional detachment were considered to be linear.

Model Predicting Adjustment in College from Parental Support and Detachment

The overall main effects model was tested using IBM SPSS Amos 25. The model included both types of parental support (social, academic) and emotional detachment as predictors of the four adjustment outcomes (academic, social, personal/emotional, institutional attachment). The included controls were high school GPA and difficulty managing cost of college. All the residual variables were allowed to covary. The two interaction terms were allowed to covary. Parental social support, parental academic support, and emotional detachment were all allowed to covary with one another. This model was a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(7) = 18.596, p = .01, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.07$). The regression paths for this model are shown in Table 2. The control variable of GPA predicted higher levels of academic adjustment, $B = .44, \beta = .24, SE = .10, p < .001$, personal-emotional, $B = .33, \beta = .12, SE = .14, p = .021$, and institutional attachment, $B = .75, \beta = .25, SE = .16, p < .001$. The control variable of difficulty managing cost of college was associated with lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment, $B = -.40, \beta = -.24, SE = .09, p < .001$.

Higher academic support did not predict any indicator of adjustment to college. Higher social support was associated with greater levels of academic adjustment, $B = .29, \beta = .18, SE = .13, p = .03$, social adjustment, $B = .60, \beta = .29, SE = .17, p < .001$, and institutional attachment, $B = .68, \beta = .25, SE = .22, p = .002$. Greater emotional detachment predicted higher levels of institutional attachment, $B = .71, \beta = .20, SE = .21, p < .001$.

Model Predicting Adjustment in College from Parental Support, Detachment, and the Interaction of Parental Support and Detachment

Developing the Interaction Model

The overall interaction model was tested using IBM SPSS Amos 25. The model included both types of parental support (social, academic) as predictors of the four adjustment outcomes (academic, social, personal/emotional, institutional attachment). The moderator was emotional detachment and it was included in the model as a predictor and then a moderator by entering interaction terms for parental academic support and emotional detachment, and for parental social support and emotional detachment, as additional predictors. The included controls were high school GPA and difficulty managing cost of college. This model was a poor fit to the data ($\chi^2(35) = 1167.95$, CFI = 0.08, RMSEA = 0.30). In order to improve the model fit, IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used to create a covariance matrix from the data. The model was then run in AMOS with the covariance matrix as input rather than the raw data. This eliminated issues related to missing data and allowed AMOS to produce modification indices. Modification indices were then used to adjust the model in the following ways. All the residual variables were allowed to covary. The two interaction terms were allowed to covary. Parental social support, parental academic support, and emotional detachment were all allowed to covary with one another. After each change to the model, its fit was checked, and changes to the model stopped when all modification indices dipped below 10. At this point, the covariance matrix data was switched back to the raw data. After making these adjustments to the model, fit using the raw data was dramatically improved, $\chi^2(17) =$

63.41, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09. Next, the model was trimmed by running the model repeatedly and removing the interaction term with the lowest regression coefficient each time until every remaining interaction was significant. The final interaction model was a good fit to the data, ($\chi^2(15) = 51.56$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .084).

Final Model for the Full Sample

The interaction term for emotional detachment and parental social support was significantly associated with levels of academic adjustment, $\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$.

Multiple Group Analysis with Generational Status

Prior to conducting the multiple group analysis, I split the sample into two groups, first-generation and continuing-generation, and ran the interaction model separately for each group. For the interaction model, each model was separately trimmed by running the model repeatedly and removing one nonsignificant interaction term at a time until every remaining interaction was significant. The trimmed models for each group were identical to the trimmed full-sample model in that they retained the social support x emotional detachment interaction term but not the academic support x emotional detachment. Therefore, I conducted the multiple group analysis for the interaction model using the trimmed model.

To test for differences in path coefficients between first-generational and continuing generation students, I used a chi-square difference test. This involved first specifying a multigroup model with all regression paths freely estimated in the two groups. I next specified a model with all of the paths in the regression model being constrained to equality across the two groups. A statistically significant increase in chi-

square after constraining the path coefficients to equality would indicate that some paths vary statistically across the two groups. This would indicate that some paths were moderated by generational status. I compared the main effects model with all paths constrained to be equivalent for first generation students versus continuing-generation students. The chi-square difference test comparing these models indicated that these models did not differ significantly, $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 10.21, p = .177$.

I compared the trimmed model with the trimmed model with all paths constrained to be equivalent for first-generation students versus continuing-generation students. The chi-square difference test comparing these models indicated that there was a significant generational status difference in the strength of regression coefficients, $\Delta\chi^2(22) = 37.28, p = .22$. Then, I used critical ratios to identify structural paths that were significantly different between first-generation and continuing-generation students. Using 95% confidence level, Z score values less than -1.96 or greater than 1.96 were identified as significant. I found 3 structural paths that significantly differed across groups. First, the association between difficulty managing the cost and personal-emotional adjustment significantly differed, $z = -2.63, p < .05$, between first-generation, $\beta = -.15, p = .03$, and continuing generation students, $\beta = -.40, p < .001$. Second, the association between the interaction term for parental social support and emotional detachment, and academic adjustment significantly differed, $z = 3.185, p < .05$, between first-generation, $\beta = -.22, p < .001$, and continuing generation students, $\beta = .05, p = .439$. Third, the association between the interaction term for parental social support and emotional detachment, and

personal-emotional adjustment significantly differed, $z = 2.608, p < .05$, between first-generation, $\beta = -.06, p = .327$, and continuing generation students, $\beta = .19, p = .012$.

The results of multigroup analysis indicated for first-generation students (Table 4), the interaction term for emotional detachment and social support was associated with academic adjustment, $\beta = -.22, p < .001$.

For continuing-generation students (Table 4), the interaction term for emotional detachment and social support was associated with personal-emotional adjustment, $\beta = .19, p = .012$.

Probing for Significant Interactions

In order to understand the meaning of the significant interaction effects, I probed them using regions of significance testing accessible on Simple Intercepts, Simple Slopes, and Region of Significance in MLR 2-Way Interaction (Preacher, Curran, Bauer, 2019). I used one of the online utilities to calculate Region of Significance for two-way interactions.

The first significant interaction that was probed was found in the first-generation model in which the interaction term for parental social support and emotional detachment was associated with academic adjustment. Figure 2 shows the results of the Regions of Significance test for this interaction. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher academic adjustment for students who were moderately to extremely low on emotional detachment (-0.44 and below on centered detachment variable, 15.4% of the sample). Lower levels of parental social support were associated with higher academic adjustment for students who were extremely high on emotional

detachment (0.80 and above on centered detachment variable, 5.6% of the sample). This indicates that parental social support was helpful to students' academic adjustment when they were moderately to highly attached to their parents, and hurtful when students were very detached from their parents.

The second significant interaction that was probed was from the continuing-generation student model and involved the interaction term for parental social support and emotional detachment as a predictor of personal-emotional adjustment. Figure 3 shows that for students who were extremely to moderately low on emotional detachment (-1.11 and below on centered detachment variable, 55.3% of the sample), higher levels of parental social support were associated with lower personal-emotional adjustment. For continuing-generation students who were extremely high on emotional detachment (3.51 and above on centered detachment variable, a score that was only theoretically possible for continuing-generation students but not observed in this sample, higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher personal-emotional adjustment. In other words, parental social support was hurtful to continuing-generation students' personal-emotional adjustment when they were moderately to highly attached to their parents, but potentially helpful when they were at extreme levels of detachment from parents.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The current study examined parental support as a predictor of college adjustment and the moderating role of emotional detachment on this association. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with greater levels of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment, but parental academic support did not predict any indicators of adjustment to college. Higher levels of emotional detachment were associated with greater levels of institutional attachment. For first generation students, a significant interaction term indicated that higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher academic adjustment when they were moderately to extremely low on emotional detachment. Lower levels of parental social support were associated with higher academic adjustment for students who were extremely high on emotional detachment. For continuing generation students, a significant interaction term indicated higher levels of parental social support were associated with lower personal-emotional adjustment when students scored low on emotional detachment. Higher levels of parental social support were associated with higher personal-emotional adjustment for students who were extremely high on emotional detachment.

Effects of Parental Support and Emotional Detachment on Adjustment in College

The main effects of parental support and emotional detachment in relation to indicators of adjustment to college did not differ for first-generation and continuing-generation students. Therefore, the results for main effects were produced based on the model for the full sample. My first hypothesis was partially supported in that higher levels of social support were associated with positive adjustment to college; however, academic support was not associated with adjustment to college. These findings are consistent with existing research that has reported parental social support being related to higher levels of academic self-efficacy (Nicpon et al., 2006), higher grade point average (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, and Russell, 1994), and more positive friendship quality (Mounts et al., 2005). Also consistent with my findings some researchers have found parental academic support does not explain a significant proportion of variance in college adjustment (Katz & Somers, 2017). The reason academic support does not always predict college adjustment may be the limited face-to-face access parents have to provide academic help to their children. The close proximity of parents and students who live together in high school may allow higher levels of parental supervision and attention to school work. For example, parents with high school students are more likely to check on homework completion, and students can easily ask for help while a parent may be fixing dinner in the kitchen. Parents of college students have less ability to supervise day-to-day academic habits and lose the ability to support children academically due to distance. Academic support may require more physical presence, whereas social support is

something that can be provided through technological communications even when children are living out of the parental home and attending college.

My second hypothesis was that higher levels of emotional detachment would predict lower levels of college adjustment. This hypothesis was not supported in that students who reported higher levels of emotional detachment had higher institutional attachment. This suggests that my measure of emotional detachment may be more of a measure of emotional autonomy, which has been observed to be linked indicators of more positive adjustment (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). My findings are also consistent with the work of Soucy and Larose (2000) who found students who perceived both greater levels of security in their relationships with mothers and greater security in relationships with campus mentors reported higher levels of institutional attachment. Perhaps students who are more emotionally autonomous from parents are comfortable emotionally committing to attending college, which allows them to form attachments to the institution itself and the people at it. It is also possible that students who are more emotionally autonomous feel less pressure in selecting a college based on parental preferences and attended one of their top personal preferences, leading to greater institutional commitment upon enrollment.

Emotional Detachment as a Moderator of Association Between Parental Support and College Adjustment

The interaction effects of parental support and emotional detachment in relation to indicators of adjustment in college differed for first-generation and continuing-generation

students. Accordingly, moderation findings were generated using models that were specific to the different generation groups.

First-Generation Students

My hypothesis predicting a stronger association between parental support and college adjustment when students were lower in emotional detachment was supported for first-generation students. For first-generation students, parental social support was helpful to students' academic adjustment when they were somewhat less detached from (more reliant on) their parents, and hurtful when students were very detached from their parents. Previous researchers have found that overall, first-generation college students perceive lower levels of parental support (York-Anderson & Bowmen, 1991). Dennis and Phinney (2005) found peer support were a stronger predictor of academic adjustment than family support for first-generation college students. Many first-generation students' parents lack knowledge of college experience and environment. Therefore, the extent to which students feel emotionally detached from their parents may be important when considering the association between parental support and academic adjustment. When students are more reliant on their parents, they may find it easier to receive the parental support and discuss about the stressful experience of transitioning to college. Students may also feel less pressured to immediately find a social group of college friends. This would reduce levels of stress about social concerns and allow students to direct more energy on academics and focus on studying. However, when students are more emotionally detached from their parents, parental support may create extra stress and hinder students' success. Students who are more emotionally detached may not want to discuss academics

with their parents or seek advice about their social lives. Because of this, first-generation students find it stressful when parents try to provide supportive behaviors, perhaps interpreting it as being nosy. College students who are more emotionally detached from their parents may seek out affirmation and acceptance from peers. In turn, this may increase the likelihood that students will attend parties and/or engage in substance use that has the potential to distract their attention from school-work, resulting in lower levels of academic adjustment. This finding aligns with Steinberg & Silverberg's (1986) finding that greater emotional autonomy from parents does not necessarily translate to greater emotional autonomy from peers.

It is important to keep in mind that associations between parental social support and academic adjustment among first-generation college students were only observed at the extremes of the sample: students scoring in the lowest 15% and the highest 5% on emotional detachment. The beneficial effects of social support may only be present for students at the lower end of emotional detachment. In order for parental social support to be hurtful, students need to be extremely high in detachment. It is important to remember that parental social support is still important and beneficial to college students (in terms of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment), regardless of generational status – there were main effects for the full sample indicating such associations. However, social support has special meaning for a select group of first-generation students who are at the extremes in terms of their detachment from parents, over and above these benefits. This is important to remember, because graduation rates are lower for first-generation students and it is much harder for them to succeed in

college (Ishitani, 2003). Many first-generation students will enter college without understanding how the higher education system works and face potential financial and social challenges that block their success. Because of this, the additional information concerning the meaning of parental support at the higher and lower ranges of emotional detachment is particularly important for this group of students.

Continuing-Generation Students

For continuing-generation students, parental social support was hurtful to personal-emotional adjustment when students were low on detachment from parents, but helpful when they were very detached from their parents. The Regions of Significance test allows theoretical understanding of levels of the moderator beyond what was present in my sample, which did not include students who were extremely high on emotional detachment. However, more than half of my sample reported lower levels of emotional detachment from parents. Making the moderating role of emotional detachment an important consideration for students at these levels. Based on Blos' second individuation process of adolescence, college students should be growing in independence. It is possible that constant check-ins from parents may inhibit late adolescents' ability to individuate. Students could potentially have reported lower levels of emotional detachment because of the over-involvement of parents. This finding supports the idea that enmeshment between parents and college students during the transition to college can derail late adolescents from the individuation process (Schwartz & Bulboltz, 2004). Continuing-generation students may not need as much help as first-generation students, but their parents may be overly-involved as a result of their own experiences attending

and completing college. They may also generally have a hard time letting go of their children (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer & Taylor Murphy, 2012). However, it is interesting that this moderating effect was only found in continuing-generation students. These students may find it easier to transition to college than first-generation students due to preparation provided by parents before students attend college or because they receive assurances that they can always seek out their parents for help. For these reasons, higher levels of parental support may not be necessary for continuing-generation students to adjust well in college – and may actually confer risk for students who are lower in emotional detachment.

Limitations

This study contributed to the understanding of first-generation and continuing-generation students' college adjustment by articulating the roles that parental support and emotional detachment play in relation to such adjustment. However, this study should be considered to have several limitations. The data collection method involved self-report questionnaires administered at one point in time. This restricts the ability to demonstrate causality. Parental support and emotional detachment can only be considered as associated with college adjustment and not predictive of it. When measuring parental support, parents' reports and observational measures were not available, and only the students' perceptions of their parents were examined. However, students' perceptions of their parents are important to consider given that their feelings and experiences shape their views of their parents. Students' perceptions of their parents may be more meaningful than data on parenting that is obtained from other sources. The sample was

collected at one four-year university with the majority of the participants (90%) being female. This hinders the ability to generalize findings to male students, students attending two-year institutions, or students attending college in other regions of the United States or other countries. A strength of this project was that collecting a sample from this particular university resulted in a sample with more than half of participants (66%) being first-generation students (66%). This allowed me to conduct a study that makes a strong contribution to the growing literature on the experiences first-generation college students.

Implications

This research indicated that emotional detachment is important to consider when looking at associations between college students' adjustment and parental support during a time of growing independence and responsibility. Ideally older adolescents continue to individuate from parents while maintaining a healthy emotional connection to them. Parental support was found to be helpful for students in terms of a range of types of adjustment to college, but this study showed that the nature of these associations depends in part on students' generational status and the extent to which they are emotionally detached from their parents. The findings from this study may be of use to parents and college administrators who want to support student success in college. The most effective efforts to support academic success in college should recognize parental support, student emotional detachment, and student generational status. Future research should consider additional factors that may moderate the associations between parental support and college adjustment. Based on this study, it is clear that rather than simply stating more

parental support is better for college adjustment but allow space to consider how emotional autonomy provides nuance against which recommendations should be made.

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APPENDIX A
DATA TABLES

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among Model Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Parental Social Support	-	.77***	-.53***	.22*	.25**	.13	.04
2. Parental Academic Support	.73***	-	-.51***	.11	.18*	.08	-.02
3. Emotional Detachment	-.47***	-.41***	-	-.16	-.20*	-.12	.15
4. Academic Adjustment	.24***	.25***	-.05	-	.42***	.55***	.59***
5. Social Adjustment	.36***	.29***	-.21**	.55***	-	.25**	.45***
6. Personal-Emotional Adjustment	.11	.12	.03	.52***	.31***	-	.37***
7. Institutional Attachment	.23**	.17*	.04	.64***	.59**	.49***	-
Mean: First-Generation	-0.05	-0.07	-0.02	5.90	5.61	5.40	6.82
Continuing-Generation	0.10	0.13	0.05	6.15	5.67	5.43	7.19
SD: First-Generation	0.60	0.61	0.46	0.99	1.30	1.44	1.64
Continuing-Generation	0.58	0.54	0.48	1.00	1.14	1.52	1.62
N: First-Generation	223	223	214	216	216	216	216
Continuing-Generation	117	117	110	112	112	112	112

Note: Correlations for first-generation students are below the diagonal; correlations for continuing-generation students are above the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Parental Support and Emotional Detachment as Predictors of Adjustment in College.

Predictor	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Academic Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.44	0.24	0.10	<.001
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.11	-0.09	0.06	0.069
Parental Academic Support	0.15	0.09	0.13	0.257
Parental Social Support	0.29	0.18	0.13	0.03
Emotional Detachment	0.05	0.03	0.13	0.681
Social Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.19	0.08	0.12	0.125
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0.02	0.01	0.08	0.826
Parental Academic Support	0.04	0.02	0.16	0.798
Parental Social Support	0.60	0.29	0.17	<.001
Emotional Detachment	-0.19	-0.07	0.16	0.231
Personal-Emotional Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.33	0.12	0.14	0.021
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.40	-0.24	0.09	<.001
Parental Academic Support	0.10	0.04	0.20	0.613
Parental Social Support	0.17	0.07	0.20	0.413
Emotional Detachment	0.08	0.03	0.19	0.68
Institutional Attachment				
High School GPA	0.75	0.25	0.16	<.001
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0.04	0.02	0.10	0.711
Parental Academic Support	0.09	0.03	0.21	0.68
Parental Social Support	0.68	0.25	0.22	0.002
Emotional Detachment	0.71	0.20	0.21	<.001

Table 3

Regression Analyses Predicting College Adjustment from Overall Parental Support, Emotional Detachment and Interaction Terms

Predictor	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Academic Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.42	0.23	0.10	< .001
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.12	-0.10	0.06	0.042
Parental Academic Support	0.14	0.09	0.13	0.264
Parental Social Support	0.34	0.2	0.13	0.011
Emotional Detachment	0.02	0.01	0.13	0.86
Parental Social Support x Emotional Detachment	-0.43	-0.14	0.12	< .001
Social Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.19	0.08	0.12	0.125
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0.02	0.01	0.08	0.826
Parental Academic Support	0.04	0.02	0.16	0.799
Parental Social Support	0.60	0.29	0.17	< .001
Emotional Detachment	-0.19	-0.07	0.16	0.231
Personal-Emotional Adjustment				
High School GPA	0.33	0.12	0.14	0.021
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.40	-0.24	0.09	< .001
Parental Academic Support	0.10	0.04	0.20	0.613
Parental Social Support	0.17	0.07	0.20	0.413
Emotional Detachment	0.08	0.03	0.19	0.68
Institutional Attachment				
High School GPA	0.75	0.25	0.16	< .001
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0.04	0.02	0.10	0.71
Parental Academic Support	0.09	0.03	0.21	0.68
Parental Social Support	0.68	0.25	0.22	0.002
Emotional Detachment	0.71	0.20	0.21	< .001

Table 4

Contrast of First-Generation and Continuing Generation Regression Analyses Predicting College Adjustment from Parental Support, Emotional Detachment and Interaction Terms

Predictor	First-Generation Students				Continuing-Generation Students			
	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Academic Adjustment								
High School GPA	0.38	0.2	0.12	0.001	0.52	0.29	0.16	0.001
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.09	-0.08	0.07	0.209	-0.15	-0.12	0.11	0.162
Parental Academic Support	0.25	0.16	0.15	0.087	-0.16	-0.08	0.26	0.546
Parental Social Support	0.28	0.17	0.16	0.075	0.34	0.2	0.25	0.167
Emotional Detachment	0.08	0.04	0.16	0.6	-0.24	-0.12	0.22	0.275
Parental Social Support x Emotional Detachment	-0.66	-0.22	0.14	< .001	0.17	0.05	0.22	0.439
Social Adjustment								
High School GPA	0.27	0.11	0.16	0.079	0.01	0.01	0.19	0.944
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0	0	0.09	0.98	0.06	0.04	0.13	0.659
Parental Academic Support	0.07	0.04	0.2	0.704	-0.1	-0.05	0.31	0.739
Parental Social Support	0.67	0.31	0.21	0.001	0.5	0.25	0.29	0.089
Emotional Detachment	-0.15	-0.05	0.2	0.459	-0.26	-0.11	0.26	0.33

Predictor	First-Generation Students				Continuing-Generation Students			
	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>	B	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Personal-Emotional Adjustment								
High School GPA	0.24	0.09	0.18	0.184	0.63	0.23	0.22	0.005
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	-0.24	-0.15	0.11	0.03	-0.72	-0.4	0.15	< .001
Parental Academic Support	0.2	0.08	0.23	0.392	0.16	0.06	0.36	0.661
Parental Social Support	0.19	0.08	0.24	0.426	-0.22	-0.08	0.35	0.525
Emotional Detachment	0.25	0.08	0.24	0.3	-0.19	-0.06	0.31	0.537
Parental Social Support x Emotional Detachment	-0.25	-0.06	0.26	0.327	0.89	0.19	0.36	0.012
Institutional Attachment								
High School GPA	0.92	0.3	0.19	< .001	0.38	0.13	0.27	0.156
Difficulty Managing Cost of College	0.05	0.02	0.12	0.7	0.02	0.01	0.18	0.904
Parental Academic Support	0.08	0.03	0.24	0.741	-0.07	-0.03	0.44	0.866
Parental Social Support	0.79	0.29	0.26	0.002	0.49	0.17	0.42	0.241
Emotional Detachment	0.7	0.2	0.26	0.006	0.68	0.2	0.38	0.07

APPENDIX B

FIGURES

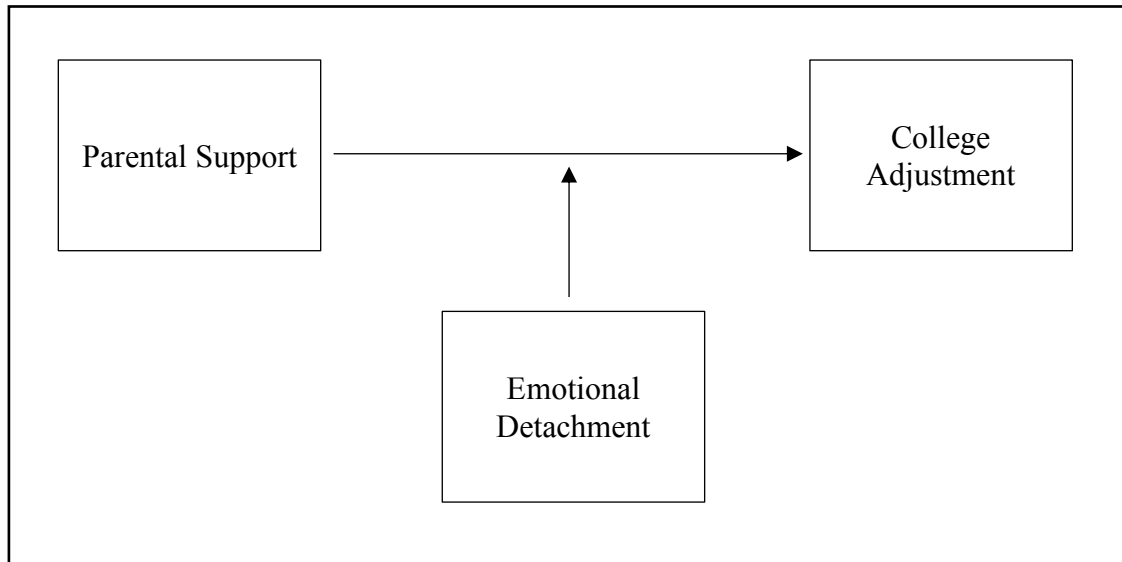


Figure 1. Model Examining the Moderating Effect of Emotional Detachment on the Association Between Parental Support and College Adjustment



Figure 2. Regions of Significance Findings Probing the Significant Interaction of Parental Social Support and Emotional Detachment Associated with Academic Adjustment among First Generation Students.

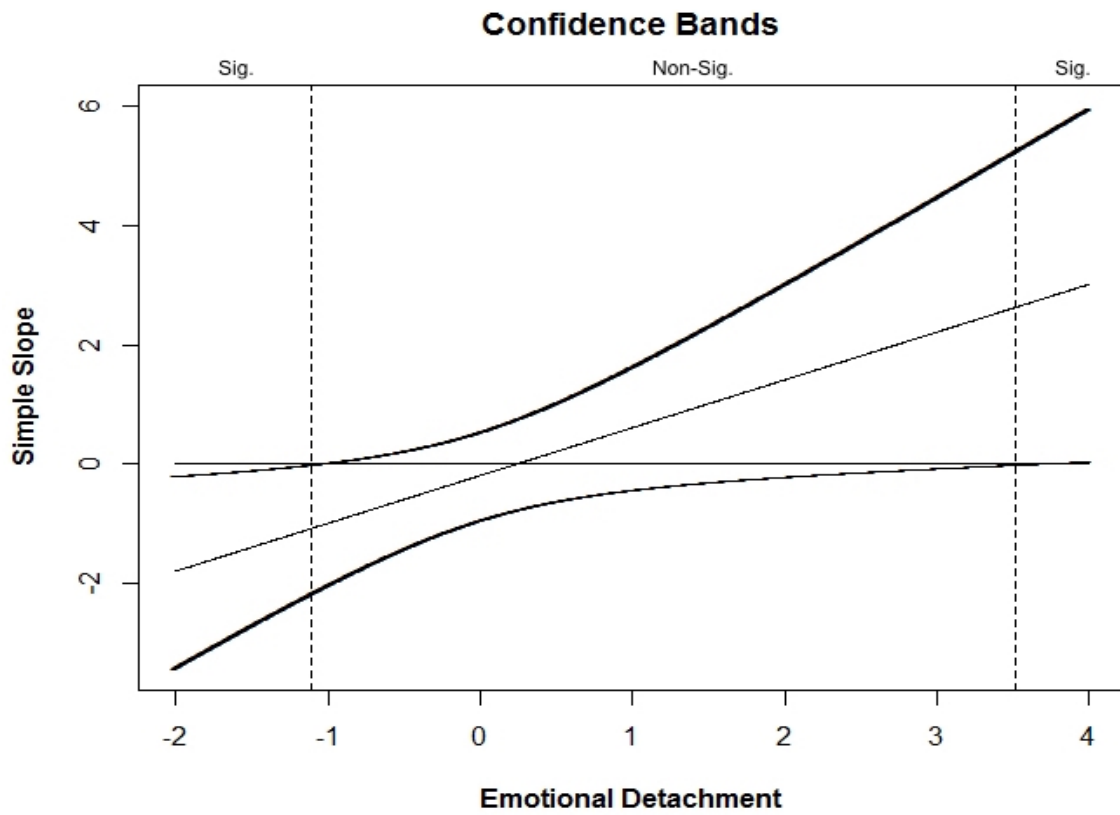


Figure 3. Regions of Significance Findings Probing the Significant Interaction of Parental Social Support and Emotional Detachment Associated with Personal-Emotional Adjustment among Continuing Generation Students.