“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?”: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF DISPARITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT WITHIN FAMILIES OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATES

by

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Abstract

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?”: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF DISPARITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT WITHIN FAMILIES OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATES

by

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This project explores the impact of disparate educational attainment between first-generation college graduates and their family members. This is a conscious shifting of the unit of analysis, from the changing social position and power of an individual student/graduate, to the relational capacity, tensions, and strategies of the family unit that is inclusive of the graduate. This shift in the unit of analysis, from the individual to the family, interrogates the function of higher education by broadening the range of outcomes associated with post-secondary education and credentialing beyond the economic advancement of the graduate. There are currently very few studies of this population that investigate post-degree attitudes and experiences and none of which ask questions about family relationships. Few if any studies have addressed how educational disparities within the family are perceived by other family members, particularly parents and siblings. This work investigates the nature of this affect/effect, primarily from the perspective of the graduate, but also reaching toward a greater understanding of the perspective of family members as well.

Three broad areas of inquiry guide this exploratory first investigation of family narratives surrounding the higher educational attainment of first-generation college

graduates: *In what ways are educational values and justice beliefs (e.g., support of meritocracy), affected by the higher educational successes of one (or some) member(s) of the family?* 2) *How are family relations and power dynamics impacted by disparate levels of educational attainment within the family?* and 3) *What are the ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) of first-generation college graduates and family members, and how are these dilemmas negotiated?* A mixed-method design was employed, consisting of a narrative analysis of interviews with first-generation college graduates' (N=13) and family members' (N=5) and an anonymous web-based survey (N=340) broadly assessing first-generation college graduate attitudes about their college experiences, post-college family relationships, current educational values and ideological dilemmas related to educational differences within the family of origin. A principal components analysis of survey items, and bivariate analyses were conducted to test relationships between factors and independent variables; a grounded theory approach was taken in the analysis of open-ended survey items.

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“Who do you think you are?”: A multidimensional analysis of the impact of disparities in higher educational attainment within families of first-generation college graduates

Upward Mobility Through Higher Education

For poor and working class people, higher education has been the most utilized path to upward mobility. While moving up in social class was always possible through union jobs, skilled labor, and entrepreneurial success, these are now less viable options given the shift from an industrial to a service-based economy, an increasing hostility towards unionized labor (Russo, 2010; Mar 22) the current recession and recession-attributed ‘austerity’ budgets, and the wave of foreclosures and newly restricted access to home loans launched by the housing market crash. So despite the formidable impediments to educational access and success, educational attainment nevertheless, remains the most reliable means of moving up in social class, even as the rate of social mobility continues to shrink (DeParle, 2012).

Despite the lack of family implied by the “bachelors” degree, degreed individuals (both men and women) from working-class backgrounds do come from families whom they often remain in close (see Ayala, 2005), though not necessarily intimate (see Jones, 2005), contact with after college. Even though family members aren’t included in institutional and governmental tallying of educational “outcomes,” they are frequent features of published student and graduate narratives of their educational motivations and experiences (e.g., Jones, 2005; Quinn, 2004; Rodriguez, 1983; Shaw & Coleman, 2000; Strom, 1995; Walkerdine, 2003).

Yet, in working class communities, higher educational success, like upward mobility, has remained narrowly associated with the individual. This is not the case in

upper and middle-class families where earning a college degree is very much tied to kith and kin, socially and morally grounding individuals in their communities/families of origin. Having beaten the odds in a country that disparately educates citizens by race and social class, first-generation college graduates enjoy far greater opportunities for social mobility than do other members of their families and communities. What does it mean then to live with educational disparities within one's own family?

In their review article addressing the psychology of social class and education, Fine & Burns (2003) write that, "For poor and working class youth and young adults, particularly youth of color, 'opportunities to succeed' may tear at the fabric of biography, identity, loyalty and belonging" (p.850). The "who do you think you are" tension highlighted in the title has been alluded to and addressed by researchers of class and mobility (Bourdieu, 1984, p.380; Jones, 2005; Lawler, 1999; p.18; see also Hollibaugh, 2000). Ochberg & Comeau (2001) suggest that the incredulity with which working-class parents ask their college-going children this question, in subtle and not so subtle of ways, stems from an indictment they perceived from their upwardly mobile children. When parents ask their child this question, Ochberg & Comeau argue that they are also asking, "and who do you think I am, if I have chosen differently?" (p. 140; See also Lucey, et al, 2003). Besides the degree of choice assumed in working class positionality, such theorizing indicates that the transformative impact of higher education within the working-class is understood to go beyond the individual student or graduate to affect the family in important ways. This question also points to issues of identity and values, renegotiated within and through the experience of education, and forcing an associated

renegotiation of family members' identities, beliefs and values as well (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992).

While the experiences of first-generation graduates has been addressed in research, few if any studies have addressed how educational disparities within the family are perceived by other family members, particularly parents and siblings. This project explores the extent to which upward mobility through higher education, "improves only the life of each individual" (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; 40), to understand what kind and quality of intervention higher education is for working-class families at a time when college is almost universally seen as a great social equalizer, even while its value is being questioned (Pew, 2011). This is a conscious shifting of the unit of analysis, from the changing social position and power of an individual student/graduate, to the relational capacity, tensions, and strategies of the family unit that is inclusive of the graduate.

This shift in the unit of analysis, from the individual to the family, interrogates the function of higher education by broadening the range of outcomes associated with post-secondary education and credentialing beyond the economic advancement of the solitary graduate. Such a lens also invites a very different look at higher education for non-typical student populations than does the current literature on first-generation graduates, which rarely questions the viability and desirability of social mobility through education, the broad relational consequences of exiting ('escaping') one's social class of origin, or the relationship between institutions of higher education and the working class constituents they ostensibly serve.

While disparate levels of educational attainment within families tends to disappear over the course of several generations, it is a phenomena that will persist in a

culture that identifies the college degree (i.e., individualized success), as opposed to larger sociopolitical changes, as the antidote to entrenched and growing inequality. However, growing inequality is pulling the "rungs" of the ladder further apart and the rates of upward social mobility continue to decline while downward mobility is on the rise (OECD, 2010). When a working class person incredibly makes the leap to "college graduate," chances are greater that this achievement also heralds a transformation of the family to a context of within-group disparities rather than heralding shifting winds for one's family. This work investigates the nature of this affect/effect, primarily from the perspective of the graduate, but also reaching toward a greater understanding of the perspective of family members as well.

Research Goals:

Three broad areas of inquiry guide this exploratory first investigation, or "first fracturing" (Weis & Fine, 2004) of family narratives surrounding the higher educational attainment of first-generation college graduates.

1. In what ways are educational values and justice beliefs (e.g., support of meritocracy) affected by the higher educational successes of one (or some) member(s) of the family?

This is an exploration of participants' (both graduates' and family members') social justice beliefs and expressions of educational values, as well as an analysis of shifts in participants' understanding of their social, political and economic opportunity. For example, does the higher educational attainment of one person strengthen or undermine family members' commitment to the idea of meritocracy?

2. How are family relations and power dynamics impacted by differences in educational attainment within the family?

Disparities in educational level within families typically translate into increased differences in social and cultural capital, and financial and professional opportunities between graduates and their family members. How are such differences understood, experienced and negotiated by graduates and their families post-degree?

3. What are the ideological dilemmas (Billig et al, 1998) of first-generation college graduates and families members and how are these dilemmas negotiated?

Upward mobility through higher education has been associated with loss, inner guilt, turmoil, and relational conflict for the graduate (Rodriguez, 1983; Christopher, 2002; Jones, 2005; Hochschild, 1996). What are some of the specific ideological conflicts and dilemmas facing first-generation families? In what ways are these dilemmas navigated by graduates and their families or origin?

Contribution to the Field

The social and psychological outcomes of a college degree remain a severely understudied area of education research, especially given the great personal and social promise attached to higher education[1]. Not only does the educative experience create new economic and professional opportunities, it also changes the sense of self and how one sees the world, which inevitably effect family relations. London (1996, p.10) reports that not all, but many first-generation students find the college experience transformative in a way that facilitates "powerful intellectual, psychological, cultural and family dramas"

[1] Consider, for example, the Obama administration's goal to raise the nation's college graduation rate to 60 percent in 10 years, in order to "retake the lead" in the rate of degree holders among other developed nations.

(p.11). One of London's participants reported, "I just kept growing and changing and becoming more political. I guess that's what a student does when you go to school. It's what education does to you. I started changing (…) it caused a whole lot of stuff at home" (p.11). This student connects his college experience to personal transformation, which in turn "caused" a related shift in his family home. The current research investigates the nature of the "stuff at home" that a college education is believed to have fomented.

Not only does education transform the individual, but it transforms the social environment as well. In a participatory action research project, Fine et al, (2003) addressed the ways in which a college program operating within a women's prison effected the larger prison environment, other inmates and the families and children of inmates participating in the program. In addition to effectively reducing recidivism rates, they found that the effects of college went beyond the individual, contributing to a more peaceful prison atmosphere characterized by fewer incidents, a greater sense of community among participants, parental pride and a sense of possibility expressed by the children of participating inmates. But like much higher education research, the effect of inmate education on their families of origin was not explicitly addressed. This dissertation represents a rare look at adult development of the "sending" family specifically in interaction with the experiences of offspring and siblings. Also, past research has focused on first-generation students while the current work investigates post-graduate experiences.

My methodological design and areas of inquiry are informed by Jones' (2005) social psychological research on the effect of upward mobility through higher education

on family relations. I extend her work by employing a mixed methods approach. Jones pursued a dedicated narrative analysis, while I incorporated larger scale survey data (with both quantitative and open-ended items), as well as interview data with first-generation graduates and family members of graduates. Jones focused on women in academia, while this project expands the range of educational attainment levels to include first generation college graduates from the BA level through the doctoral level. Jones' conceptual findings also informed my own areas of inquiry; for example, Jones discusses her participants' experiences of living in "different worlds" from their family of origin (161), which I translated into an open-ended survey question.

As a multi-method study deploying both smaller (i.e., narrative interviewing) and larger (i.e., survey of attitudes and experience) scale methodologies, this research represents a methodological contribution to the field as well. The contribution is not, however, the tandem utilization of both qualitative and quantitative data, but the employment of paradigmatically distinct analytic stances and data to dialectically (and imperfectly) inform my analysis. Sociological studies of higher education and social mobility tend to rely on large data sets to ask questions about educational outcomes and mobility patterns of populations while psychological studies have been much smaller scale investigations, often ethnographic and retrospective, and focusing on either college students (rather than graduates) or academics. The current approach works across these methodological stances that too often represent separate hemispheres of our collective social psychological brain.

Significance of Research

The Bachelor's degree remains an important credential in terms of the earning power it is associated with, and the social capital it confers. Further, it has been identified as "the best and most powerful indicator available to signal readiness to work and train further"[2]. On average, those who have completed a bachelor's degree earn twice as much as those with a high school diploma only ($51,206 vs. $27,915 annual income)[3], regardless of whether they are the first in their family to do so. A recent Pew Research survey[4] "finds that college graduates, on average, are happier and more satisfied with their jobs, their financial situation and their education than are those who did not attend college. It also finds that most graduates say that their college education was very useful in helping them grow intellectually (74%), mature as a person (69%) and prepare for a job or career (55%)" (p7).

Accordingly, students' educational aspirations are rising, as the majority of high school students today now report that they plan to go to college (Ingels, et. al, 2005). Young adults also overwhelmingly narrate the value and importance of a college degree (Johnson & Duffett, 2005). However, the added-value of a degree continues to vary by race/ethnicity and gender, with women and people of color earning less with the same degree. So while the 4-year degree remains a standard requirement for class maintenance and mobility, it often, but doesn't necessarily translate into class mobility.

Research addressing first-generation college graduates is particularly timely given

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[2] Report of the Social Science Research Council, 2011. *Questions That Matter: Setting the research agenda on access and success in postsecondary education* (p. 17)
[3] *Educational attainment in the United States*; http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html
[4] Pew Research Center. (2011). *Is College Worth It? College Presidents, Public Assess Value, Quality and Mission of Higher Education*. Washington, DC, US.

the current emphasis within high school and college reform initiatives (e.g., dual-enrollment[5] and early-college[6]) on better supporting working-class students and students of color succeed in college as a means of ameliorating a variety of social ills: as a measure of the quality of education offered by high schools in the era of increased school accountability; as a means of diversifying campuses as affirmative action programs disappear; as a means of community advancement for racial/ethnic communities; and as a way to establish social equity across race and class. Concurrent with initiatives underway intended to increase access to higher education, federal and state policies simultaneously erode the actual supports for working-class students, such as tuition increases, the shift in financial aid away from grants to loans, the widespread retreat from affirmative action, the end of remediation, and the loss of open admissions.

Market forces also significantly undermine working-class students' college-going efforts and outcomes. Attending college, whether a degree is earned or not, creates considerable debt and a greater financial burden than it ever has in the past, especially for poor and working-class students. Some private universities are abandoning need-blind admission policies[7]. The New York Times reports that for the first time, student loan debt has surpassed credit card debt (Lewin, 2011). The ascendency of predatory for-profit schools, higher loan-to-grant aid ratios adopted by educational institutions, the shift from

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[5] High school and college collaborations allowing students to earn college credit while in high school.

[6] New high schools that incorporate college coursework in the curriculum so that students graduate high school with a year or more of college credits completed. Approximately 96 million dollars in Gates funding has been earmarked for early college initiatives. http://www.earlycolleges.org/overview.html

[7] Kiley, K. (2012, June 1). Wesleyan shifts away from need-blind policy, citing financial and ethical concerns | *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved December 20, 2012, from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/01/wesleyan-shifts-away-need-blind-policy-citing-financial-and-ethical-concerns

the adequacy and availability of single careers, to an era of multiple lifetime careers, and the higher levels of educational attainment demanded and desired, help explain the average $24,000 of student loan debt that two thirds of college graduates now leave college with (ibid). Such levels of debt constitute a crippling burden for working class students who may have more than the average level of debt given their fewer material resources entering college and greater financial responsibility for family members.

As the current economic recession has demonstrated, those with college degrees are not protected from rising unemployment. Moreover, future job growth is predicted to be greatest in positions that do not require a 4 year degree. Currently only 21% percent of jobs require a BA or higher. So while the fastest job growth is predicted to be in positions requiring post-secondary credentialing, growth in this area is only projected to increase to 22% of all positions. The *largest* growth is projected to actually be in the number of jobs that do not require a college degree, for example in the service industry (Metzgar, 2010). For these reasons and others, the Bachelor's degree has been described as, "America's most over rated product" (Nemko, 2008).

Working class studies scholar, Sherry Linkon, addresses this debate in "Should working-class people go to college?"[8] The critical question of whether college is for everyone has shifted from a debate regarding the accessibility of a degree for historically disenfranchised groups -- primarily those individuals without a family legacy of college-going -- to a debate centering around the value of the degree for working-class students, specifically whether college-going is worth the financial investment and effort, given what are considered uncertain returns. As the Chronicle of Higher Ed has frequently

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[8] http://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2011/04/18/should-working-class-people-go-to-college/

documented (see Patton, S., 2012; December 5th, 9th), degree holders are increasingly under-employed (e.g., 15% of telemarketers hold BA degrees; over 5000 janitors have PhDs[9], and over 75% of recent college graduates expect to move back home with their parents. Although more than half (57%) of Americans recently surveyed by the Pew Charitable trust didn't believe that college represented a good value for the money (Pew, 2011), most graduates (86%) did feel that their college education had been a good investment for them personally.

However, the social value of a degree is also potentially more fraught for working-class students who typically come from communities and cultures that are at odds with the middle-class culture of higher education (Lareau, 2003; Schutz, 2008). By not investigating family responses to shifts in education and class within working-class families and communities, we risk the continued assumption that social mobility is in all ways, and to all parties, desirable or accessible. We risk even greater forms of neo-liberal retreat from social responsibility when we assume that education only affects the individual, that such individuals are most concerned about their own mobility, that educational institutions are only responsible to students and not families or communities, or that their responsibility ends on graduation day (Ayala, 2005). We deny that class is lived relationally when we ignore the broad range of social outcomes associated with the pursuit and attainment of a college education. Educational/class differences within the working class family in many ways mirror those that are increasingly dividing our country. Consequently, this research offers insight into the ways in which individuals, motivated by love and intimacy, successfully and unsuccessfully attempt to bridge the

[9] Patton, S. (2012, May 6). The Ph.D. Now Comes With Food Stamps. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

gap between the degreed and less educated.

I first review the relevant literatures grounding this study, and detail my methodology. I then address the survey findings in the First Level Analysis, by means of a principal components analysis (of the quantitative data) and a qualitative analysis of the 3 open-ended survey items. I then offer interpretive profiles of those interview participants whom I quote and make reference to, before individually addressing (in successive chapters) the areas of inquiry organizing this dissertation. I conclude with a brief discussion the conceptual and methodological contributions this work makes in terms of policy implications, and future research directions in the final chapter.

Review of Literature

The most relevant literatures addressing the issue of intra-familial educational and class differences include higher education research, the social psychology of education, and literatures in social class and mobility. The underlying goal of most research on working-class families and higher education, whether it is undertaken on a sociological or psychological level, is the support of academic success and increased educational attainment of underserved students. Sociological studies within the field of education research tend to frame social mobility as the dependent variable, operationalized as (individual) achievement or educational attainment (e.g., Harris, 2008), reinforcing the appropriateness and desirability of the college degree for working class people, an issue currently being debated in the popular press and by critical education theorists (e.g., Aronowitz, 2008; Linkon, April 18, 2011).

In Psychology, working-class parents are understood as having taught their children to survive in a class-stratified society by reinforcing conformity, obedience, and

loyalty (see Kohn, 1989; Sennett & Cobb, 1973). This is seen as understandable yet hobbling to individuals in terms of their ability to achieve educational success, their development of critical consciousness and their potential to create personal as well as social change, even though parental class status and educational level influence intergenerational mobility more than do parental values (Mason, 2007). The dogged investigation of the relationship between parenting (practices, attitudes, and values) and student achievement sets up a deficit model, whereby working class parents are constructed as insufficiently providing academic or emotional support, their parenting practices seen as in need of remediation, and their values understood as misguided.

Social science research literature also tends to emphasize those outcomes associated with individual achievement such as test scores and grades, degrees earned, income, or occupation. Even though in the aggregate, these can also be indicators of institutional and even national outcomes, they remain just one aspect of "success" and do not necessarily constitute family or community well-being (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). The psychological literature on higher education and social class similarly emphasizes individual outcomes (such as self-efficacy, identity, sense of belonging) rather than social group or familial outcomes. For example, higher educational attainment for first-generation students has been associated with a sense of individual (though contingent) inclusion into a middle-classed educated world that they may have felt excluded from in the past (London, 1996; Pope, 1996).

The literature focusing specifically on upward mobility primarily addresses two aspects of the phenomena: 1) the social, cultural, and psychological factors facilitating upward mobility, and 2) the negative individual outcomes associated with an upward

shift in social class. While such discourse sets up upward mobility as an unquestionably appropriate aspirational goal, especially for working-class individuals and racialized minorities, any positive outcomes actually associated with mobility are assumed and not empirically detailed. Paradoxically, the social, relational and health costs associated with the pursuit and completion of a degree – especially for those in academia (Dews & Law, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1984; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993) -- are much more likely to be considered and identified than are the benefits.

The study of the psychological experience of first-generation college students and graduates has also tended to focus on one particular gender, usually the female experience. Research addressing first-generation males has mostly focused on their mobility efforts, motivations, and experiences in a middle-class context rather than on their familial relationships per se. In contrast, research on first-generation female college students and graduates more often addresses their psychological experiences within their families and communities (Ayala, 2005; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Jones, 2005; Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003; Pope, 1996; Shaw & Coleman, 2000; Wintrob, 2001). According to Shaw & Coleman (2000), women's subjective experiences of social mobility through higher education tends to emphasize the importance of family as a source of support and inspiration, across race/ethnicity, but plays an especially important role in the educational success of African American women. However, mothers and children are invoked in both women's and men's narratives of their paths to and through higher education.

Just as much of the research on first-generation college graduates has focused specifically on working-class women or men (with studies on women being more

prevalent), the same literature has also separately addressed communities of color from working-class white communities, with white participants traditionally the more frequently represented. This trend is changing as the demographics of first-generation students continue to change to represent more students of color. College and university admissions policies have also shifted in the wake of a national retreat from affirmative action, toward targeting first-generation students as a means of recruiting more racially/ethnically diverse student populations. The analyses of the educational and social experiences of first-generation graduates of color and their families have thus tended to foreground issues of structural racism and racial formation, with a secondary analysis of social class. Research addressing white working-class has oppositely emphasized a class analysis without, or with a limited, an accompanying analysis of racial formation and privilege (although working-class culture is sometimes invoked).

In general though, these literatures have not yet addressed the perspectives of families and communities that these first-generation graduates come from, and frequently try to return to -- in frustration, confusion, judgment and always affection. While past research has insistently investigated the influence of family and community on student success, social science has yet to consider the possible effect that the graduates' experiences and beliefs may have on their family of origin. The influence of graduate educational experiences could potentially improve family relationships through felt pride regarding the group-level achievement, increasing family positivity around education and schooling, or strengthening the sense of possibility and efficacy. Alternately, graduate educational success could polarize positions within the family and metastasize distance and difference into conflict, tension and avoidance.

Literature Related to Areas of Inquiry

In the following sections, I review conceptually specific literature findings that are relevant to the experience of upward mobility through higher education and within the family context, highlighting those findings that speak to 1) educational values and social justice beliefs; 2) family relationships and power dynamics and 3) ideological dilemmas and ambivalences.

Educational values and meritocratic faith

Liberalization of cultural and political views. The experience of higher education, especially for working-class individuals, has been associated with the liberalization of cultural and political views. London (1996, p.10) reports that first-generation students, "spoke of their growing understanding of the workings of and consequences of class and racial discrimination, and of how that understanding had changed their lives." However, the role that education is perceived to play in an individual's sense of social justice and power relations, particularly around race and class, is an understudied area of first-generation college graduate and family narratives.

Shifting relationships to authority. Applying a psychoanalytic perspective to learning and education, Henderson & Kegan (1989) discuss Perry & Counsel's (1970) model of learning and development, specifically in terms of the developmental shifts that occur during post-secondary education. In this model, students move from the high school context requiring associative learning, memorization and a dependence on the teacher for received truth, to the college setting which structures "contextual relativism" where "authority shifts from being located in the teacher – or being denied to – the student. The teacher is seen more as a resource or model and less as the arbiter of truth or

of method.(..) What this can mean in the broader domain of the self is a collapse of the very foundations of the 'received tradition' and a placing of oneself, reluctantly or eagerly, in the role of having to judge the truth value of any fact" (295). They go on to emphasize, "One of the beauties of Perry's scheme is that it points to the relatedness of learning and identity, of intellectual development and personality development. Complexity of thought and relation to authority change together as part of the same process" (296).

They (and Perry) outline the potential of higher education to facilitate critical consciousness by facilitating a suspicion of authority and legitimating students' own values. However, this developmental shift also has implications for families as students/graduates are likely to challenge the first structures of authority: those within the family. But also to challenge the received wisdom of family and community members, particularly in the form of cultural, religious and political beliefs. An analysis of such tensions contribute to and reveal ideological dilemmas within the family but that reflect larger ideological debates nationally. Even conceptualizing the challenging of authority as a "developmental" milestone positions working-class families as less evolved than middle-class families, who work hard to inculcate a sense of entitlement in their children (Lareau, 2003), while working class families work to foster a sense of communality (Schutz, 2008).

Inequality starts at home: Family relations and power dynamics in a context of disparate levels of educational attainment. As mentioned previously, family members are frequent features of published student and graduate narratives of their educational motivations and experiences (e.g., Jones, 2005; Quinn, 2004; Rodriguez,

1983; Shaw & Coleman, 2000), and there is evidence within these specific literatures that families play a role in determining individual beliefs, attitudes and feelings about education and schooling (Harris, 2008; 614-615) as well as influence academic outcomes.

In *The Pecking Order* (2005), Dalton Conley investigates "which siblings succeed and why." Using national economic data, he describes large disparities in income and educational attainment between siblings[10], which he argues, "imply an American landscape where class identity is ever changing and not necessarily shared between brothers and sisters. (..) We want to think that home is a haven in a heartless world. The truth is that inequality starts at home" (pg.7). Unlike conventional assumptions of family solidarity in matters of social in/equality, Conley locates class and educational disparities squarely within the home. While Conley focuses on the cause of such intra-familial disparities, arguing that the limited resources of families (particularly of larger families) necessitates differential investment in children, facilitating lasting social inequalities within the family -- the current research frames the working-class family as an important and illustrative context for the negotiation of social power and privilege across educational/class difference.

Difficult Emotions: Loss in gain, or the "cost" of educational success.

> *"discourses of social mobility and social capital tend to hold denials: of the losses that are fundamental to and unavoidable in change, even when those changes are desired; of the enormous amount of psychological work involved in transformation; and of the costs of that work..."* (Lucey, Melody & Walkerdine, 2003; p. 286).

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[10] In general, the sibling relationship is not specifically addressed in the upward mobility literature (See Jones, 2005 for an exception).

The "loss implies the gain" (Richard Rodriguez, 1983)

While the discourse around higher education and mobility through education is typically a portrait in positivity, actual upward mobility narratives and research that focuses on 1st generation college graduates represents a complicated and ambivalent picture of the impact of higher education. The larger discourse is positive while individual stories and narratives emphasize the costs, perhaps in response to the positivity of the discourse, necessitating such assertions of loss. Working-Class studies scholar, Renny Christopher (2002) identifies a subgenre of U.S. working class literature as "narratives of unhappy upward mobility" epitomized by Richard Rodriguez' "Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez" (1983). The four texts Christopher analyses are autobiographical in nature although only Rodriguez is non-fiction. For the authors and their protagonists, education is the engine of their upward mobility, often identified as the source of their ambivalent transformations. Through their works, they interrogate the American dream ideology, "emphasiz(ing) the sense of loss that haunts upward mobility," and "show that upward mobility leaves wounds in the consciousness of those who undertake it without denying the claims of their past (Christopher, 2002; 80).

Research on first-generation graduates has often focused on how students and graduates feel about their higher educational accomplishments in relation to their families of origin, often understood in terms of loss (see Benton, 2007; Lawler, 1999; London, 1989, 1996; Lucey et al., 2003; Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001). Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) for example, complicate the assumption that the path to and through higher education represents only gain and emphasize the inherent losses that come with

any gains associated with educational success. Empirical research on working-class students and college graduates describes how the educative process itself estranges students from their families and communities that they hoped to contribute to (London, 1996; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001).

This point is also suggested in London's study of first-generation college students. He noted that the observed behavioral and attitudinal changes of first-generation students "subtly marked the separation of students from their past, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of those who still inhabited the past, and everyone seemed to know that that was the case. Thus these presentations of change were also, in effect, a careful feeling out of possible changes in people's ways of caring and not caring for each other. In many families, the fundamental question was whether people could discover new ways of loving one another" (London, 1996; p. 13).

Such loss-in-gain for graduates must also facilitate gains/losses for their families as well. Clinical researcher, Joellyn Ross (1995) argues that using a social class lens in therapeutic analyses could reveal "the cost paid by individuals and families when upward mobility, highly valued in our culture, results in socioeconomic stratification and emotional dissonance within the family. Social class can be an especially difficult, yet important, lens for viewing problems *within* families" (Ross, 340) (italics in original). Ross is exceptional in that she considers family members of the upwardly mobile, arguing that differences in class status will likely have family effects (341).

Ambivalences and hybridity. Ambivalence and a dual or divided consciousness seem to mark the upwardly mobile working-class subject, both in literature as well as in research. Christopher (2002) argues that a narrative of upward mobility is "necessarily a

narrative of divided consciousness" (89). Ross, a clinician, finds the socially mobile psyche to be characterized by deep ambivalence, and identifies the poles of shame and pride as "strong components" of upward mobility (343), and potentially therapeutic hot spots. Working-class studies scholar Linda Strom (1995; 124) similarly describes sharing the experience of both pride and shame in one's working class origins with other academics from working-class backgrounds.

In their research on the educational paths of a group of working-class young women, Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine pay explicit attention to the psychic and unconscious defenses utilized by working-class women and their families to deal with the drastic and traumatic changes wrought by a shift in gender roles and social class associated with higher education. London (1996) points out that "It seems paradoxical, but first-generation students even in the midst of transformation are almost always looking for ways to minimize disarticulation or to have it proceed at pace and intensity that is acceptable to them" (p. 23). One of the ways that working-class students minimize disarticulation is by maintaining a hybridized identity or dual consciousness.

Lucey, et al (2003) focus on the psychic and emotional labor required to maintain the hybrid identity of an educationally successful *and* working-class girl, emphasizing that hybridity – the incorporation of multiple positionalities into one's identity -- is an emotionally taxing state. Ayala (2005) similarly argues this point in her analysis of the "border work" required of Latina first-generation college students attempting to balance home and cultural commitments with the institutional and corporatized demands of the college, resulting in the hybridized identity she designates *mestiza consciousness* (Ayala, 2005; 58). Ross (1995) references the psychic effort involved in "feeling at home in a

new [class] environment" (342). We can assume, as does Ross, that what's emotionally taxing for the individual student/graduate, is also taxing for the family as well. While this and other defenses are necessary for educational success, such defenses also contribute to difficult emotional dynamics within the working class family. The question is, in what ways and how is it managed? But also, how does the "uneasiness of hybridity" filter into the lives and practices of family members other than the graduate? To what extent do family members themselves maintain hybridized identities and lives?

Being better than. Educational disparities within the family, as differences in privilege and power, potentially undermine family relationships just as they undermine social cohesion. One example has to do with the kind of role models that working-class families provide to upwardly mobile members. High school students with college aspirations report that influential family members conveyed to them the idea that "stressing your mind" was preferable to "stressing your mind and body" (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; p.115), given the physically and emotionally demanding jobs that they have access to without higher education credentialing. The daily labor of pushing oneself physically and mentally hour after hour seemed to generate for some families a desire that subsequent generations have access to college and thus be spared a similar fate. In Knight's counter stories, family members who didn't go to college wanted the students in their families to see them as examples of what not to do. In other research on first-generation Mexican-American college graduates, participants reported that their immigrant parents' employment options acted as an example of what not to be (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; p. 159; Romero, 2002). Gorman's work (2000) with working-class and middle-class parents also reported that some working-class participants indicated that

their parents "taught them what not to do," (707) while middle-class participants identified their parents as examples to emulate.

This negative modeling meant that success for working-class students would be defined as separate and distant from their parents'/siblings' lives. The drive to achieve educational success, in the form of a 4-year degree, could be read by family members as the desire to become something different [read: better] than their family of origin. The difference that first-generation graduates become (or achieve) likely has consequences for family members' sense of self, whether the difference is seen as desirable, alien, or somewhere in between.

In as far as working-class family members' experiences and feelings are considered, there is a general sense that families believe that their now formally educated children or siblings, hold themselves above their family of origin. The "who do you think you are" tension highlighted in the title has been alluded to and addressed by researchers of class and mobility (Bourdieu, 1984, p.380; Lawler, p.18; Lucey, et al, 2003; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001, p. 140). And indeed, many upwardly mobile and first-generation college graduates report being asked this question by members of their family of origin (Jones, 2005). To what extent is this an issue/dynamic narrated by graduates? How do they understand it and negotiate it? Ross mentions a defensive reaction to this dynamic from family members. To what extent do graduates report such reactions from families, and how do family members understand difference between them and the college graduates in their family?

Family perspectives (or lack of). Working class parents, though, are diverse in their experiences and attitudes toward schooling and higher education. Gorman (1998)

found his (white) working-class sample to be more diverse in this respect than his middle-class sample (p.38). While a segment of working-class parents support a college education for their children even though they may have mixed feelings about it (Gorman, 1998; p. 28), working-class people often have strong feelings about college-educated people in general, based on their experiences of the social "injuries of class" (Gorman, 1998; Sennett & Cobb, 1973; Willis, 1977). Willis (1977) also identifies an oppositional relationship within the working classes between people who aspire "up" and those who see themselves as remaining working-class in their future, either because of a perceived lack of opportunity, a devaluing of middle-class culture, or some other reason. Gorman (1998) asks, "what is it about the white-collar, college graduate that makes these working-class parents angry?" He identifies the reasons to be associated with middle-class language, clothing and attitudes (p. 25). To what degree is this dynamic played out in working-class families of first-generation graduates? How do families manage such tensions and what can we learn from the bridging practices for class relations in general? While Gorman doesn't talk specifically to working-class parents of college graduates, he is one of the few researchers who have interviewed white working-class parents about their feelings and attitudes toward college graduates in general. The current research extends Gorman's work to address working-class families' feelings and attitudes toward their college-educated family member(s).

Envy & guilt: Related dynamics. Another inequality-related issue potentially affecting first-generation family dynamics concerns the differential opportunity among members to fulfill educational and occupational aspirations. Gorman (2000) found that a quarter of his working-class participants had goals as young adults that included higher

educational aspirations, but for various reasons were unrealized in the face of obstacles, and became even less possible later in life. Never the less, years and children later, many still had a "desire to return to school to finish a GED, to learn a trade, or to take college-level coursework" (709). On the other hand, first-generation graduates have been able to achieve at least some of their goals while others in their family have not, sometimes causing discord and guilt about "the others left behind" (Lisa Orr, 2001; 199). Ross (1995) identifies social comparison as particularly detrimental to family members (see also Deutsch). Social comparison, particularly in terms of its guilt-inducing potential, is likely to cause ambivalence for some graduates as well. How central of a concern is graduate guilt? What role does it play in family dynamics and power relations? To what degree is guilt indicative of a personal sense of responsibility and obligation to one's family?

Ideological Dilemmas

Ideological dilemmas are not decisions to be made or moral dilemmas, per se. They are the jagged spaces between two incompatible ideological paths, offering affective openings and important sites of analysis. Stanley & Billig (2004) write, "In an ideological dilemma, two sets of commonly shared values will appear to be in rhetorical conflict with each other. However, speakers will try to manage both sets rather than siding with one or the other. (..) When narrating past events, people can be attempting to negotiate such dilemmas of ideology" (p. 160). They further point out that such ideological dilemmas are not resolvable as they represent larger societal ideological dilemmas. While I specifically address power relations within the family in my second area of inquiry (RQ2), I look to interpersonal and individual dilemmas in my third area of

inquiry (RQ3) to reveal larger power/ ideological relations at work. There are a number of ideological tensions inherent in the experience of having educational disparities within the working-class family. An important dilemma that working-class families face is the relative inclusion that first-generation graduates experience within privileged middle-classed institutions, which are constituted on the basis of exclusion.

Lawler (1999) asks in her research on women from working-class backgrounds who shift to middle-class adulthoods, "what happened when people occupy both a working-class and a middle-class habitus during the same lifetime?" given that the middle-class is constituted "on the basis of radical exclusion, pathologizing and Othering of working class existence" (p. 14). Students in London's (1996) study of the effects of college on first-generation college students also discussed the pleasure of a new sense of inclusion: "I was always made to be the outsider. Now I feel like I'm gradually coming inside the circle" (p. 12). Inclusion in this instance is understood as individually based. Middle-class inclusion is often accompanied by a reconstitution of class allegiances that psychologically conflicts upwardly mobile individuals. Valerie Walkerdine (2003) describes her ambivalence around her upward mobility through higher education, which motivated her research on class but also involved a "terrifying invitation to belong to a new place, which was simultaneously an invitation to feel shame about what one had been before and indeed to understand the people with whom I had grown up as a part of a growing political problem, a conservative and reactionary force, not the bedrock of a revolution" (Walkerdine, 2003; 238). Such an understanding of the working class – that is, one's family and community -- as a negative and counter-revolutionary force was and is an unsettling aversive experience for first generation graduates.

For Lawler's participants, the complicated and isolating experience of passing emerged as an important issue, wherein many described existing in a liminal space between a working-class background that they were terrified of being returned to, and a tenuous state of conditional acceptance by the middle-class – a graduation of sorts from anxious achievement to a fear of falling. Do families also gain a sense of social inclusion when a member of their family gains access to a social context of greater social and cultural capital? How might the inclusion of one member affect other family members' sense of justice, as a belief in a just world or as critical consciousness around class arrangements?

False & critical consciousness (& for whom). Anthropologists McC Heyman and Luykx (2006) argue that "college should help students envision not only their own career paths—their own escape from collective marginalization—but also the need for solidarity with wider social groups" (McC Heyman & Luykx, 2006; p. 11). In *Where we stand: Class Matters* (2000), bell hooks discusses our national history of solidarity with the poor, which was especially strong in African American communities and churches. She goes on to note, "solidarity with the poor was the gesture that intervened on shame. It was to be expressed not just by treating the poor well and with generosity but by living as simply as one could" (p. 41). Things have changed though as hooks (2000) describes how starting in the 1970's we as a nation moved from identifying with the poor to identifying with the rich (p. 44). She wasn't particularly hopeful either about the role of education in ameliorating this large-scale shift in class identification. A similar realignment of allegiances, aided by the higher educative project, could be argued to undermine identification with other marginalized groups, including those most oppressed by class

stratification, as well as compromise collective resistance on the part of first-generation graduates and even their families.

Another ideological dilemma posed by the presence of an educated family member within the working-class family is the tension between individual and structural attributions for educational and professional success and failure. In their economic and class struggles, the working-class family can be seen as undermining faith in meritocracy (or in the motivated worker), while the figure of the working-class graduate legitimates meritocracy and embodies the 'American spirit' of hard work, constituting another ideological minefield. Speaking about a group of working-class teachers in an undergraduate teachers education course, McC Heyman & Luykx (2006) found that students "tended to embrace an individualist view of success, viewing themselves as counter-examples to arguments about structural limitations. At the same time, they resisted seeing themselves as exceptional [..]" (Ibid, p. 10). McC Heyman & Luykx argue that, "the promise of mobility motivates them; the dominant ideology is, in some ways, a solace to them. The academic failures or leveled aspirations of their relatives and peers contrast with their own experiences of persistence and accomplishment, and they tend to interpret these differences in terms of individual attributes and opportunities, rather than as manifestations of aggregate inequalities." Here we see a real tension between the investment in the notion of equality of opportunity, and in the equality of family and community members.

Concerted cultivation. Lareau (2003) argues in her extensive family research that middle-class families structure the hyper-development of their children's feelings, opinions, and thoughts through an intense process of "concerted cultivation," while

working-class families support a “natural growth” model of parenting that values child leisure time, autonomy from adults and clear boundaries between children and adults. She finds that “..children raised according to the logic of concerted cultivation can gain advantages, in the form of an emerging sense of entitlement, while children raised according to the logic of natural growth tend to develop an emerging sense of constraint” (p. 7). Such differences in parenting and educational philosophies can be interpreted as a form of false consciousness in that the privileged/ruling group inculcate the expectation of privilege and entitlement to address/challenge authority figures while the oppressed inculcate in their children self-constraint and acceptance of an unequal state of the world. While this is neither my nor Lareau’s argument, the historical prevalence of such analyses of the false consciousness of the working-class underscores the importance of investigating one of the most persistent theoretical assumptions about working-class families. This entails inquiry into participants’ beliefs about the justness of the world, the possibility of changing class relations, and their personal visions of social justice. This will also require a critical look at our notions of class-consciousness. For example, Lareau points out that “concerted cultivation places intense labor demands on busy parents, exhausts children, and emphasizes the development of individualism, at times at the expense of the development of the notion of the family group [..] In a society less dominated by individualism than the United States, with more of an emphasis on the group, the sense of constraint displayed by working-class and poor children might be interpreted as healthy and appropriate” (Lareau, 2003; p. 13).

Methods

This project consists of two branches of investigation: 1) a narrative study of first-generation college graduates and (separately) family members of first-generation college graduates which constitutes the largest and most critical piece of research, and 2) an anonymous web-based survey of first-generation college graduates. The purpose of this web-based survey was to broadly assess first-generation college graduate attitudes about their college experiences, post-college family relationships, current educational values and ideological dilemmas related to educational differences within the family of origin, as there are currently very few studies of this population that investigate post-degree attitudes and experiences and none of which ask questions about family relationships. The web-based survey was also used to gather basic demographic information such as personal level of educational attainment and that of immediate family members, income and occupation in order to multiply determine social class positionality.

Secondarily, the survey served as a recruitment tool for the narrative piece of the investigation. Given that one's social class of origin remains an identity that can be selectively and strategically taken on publicly, a broad-based recruitment method was required. First-generation college graduates do not necessarily self-identify as such, nor does their educational attainment, in relation to their family members', necessarily coalesce into a public identity marker. This was especially the case for the recruitment of family members of first-generation graduates, who are even less likely to identify themselves by the educational attainment or class status of their children or siblings. Online surveys have the advantage of recruiting specialized types of participants that are not easily or often found in college student samples (Birnbaum, 2004; p. 813). This

recruitment method allowed respondents to indicate their interest in participating beyond the survey by submitting their contact information for an additional interview, and also offered a way for graduates to inform family members about the study either by submitting their contact info or by forwarding a hyperlink to a family-specific survey to their families[11].

This multi-method design generated three distinct types of data: quantitative survey data (N=340), open-ended qualitative survey data (N=340), and individual interviews with graduates (N=13) and family members (N=5) which were then brought to bear in the analyses of the three areas of inquiry (previously identified) that organize this dissertation. Each methodology and analytic map is described in detail below.

Graduate Survey

Online survey methodology. Two anonymous internet surveys were constructed using the Form Assembly web application, one for first-generation college graduates, and another for family members of first-generation college graduates, to address the three areas of inquiry across a broad range of participants (e.g., diverse by gender, race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment level) and college experiences (e.g., private/public institutions; residential/commuter campus; recent/past graduates, rural/urban schools) specifically post-graduation. Only the results of the graduate survey are presented here as it was the only one that generated any response[12]. Participants were recruited from alumni contact lists of colleges/universities enrolling large percentages of

[11] However, this did not result in any interviews with family members nor completion of a useful number of family-specific surveys (fewer than 5)

[12] The limitations of my recruitment strategy is addressed in the discussion section.

first generation college students[13]. An internet hyperlink to the secure web-based anonymous survey was either published on the alumni homepage or alumni newsletter, or emailed to alumni via a list-serve announcement. The link was also posted on blogs addressing working class and higher education issues[14]. Survey respondents self-selected by completing the survey. The majority of survey questions were 5-point Likert items assessing graduate attitude and subjective experience around college going, family relationships in regards to one's educational attainment, personal beliefs around merit, personal and educational values, experiences as a first-generation college graduate, and subjective social status. The survey also included 3 different open-ended questions (see Appendix for survey questions).

Survey respondents who were interested in participating further in the project were asked to submit their contact information exiting the survey site. They were then contacted via email and offered details about the nature of the project and what participation in the narrative study entailed (i.e., an individual interview). Interviews were then scheduled with those individuals expressing an interest in participating. They were also asked to forward the survey link to family members who may have an interest in participating.

Survey sample. The survey sample of 340 respondents includes graduates from public and private institutions (64.3% vs. 35.7% respectively), urban and rural schools, and crosses categories of race/ethnicity in proportions (61.4% White, 14.5% Black, 12.4% Hispanic, 5.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.4% other, 1.8 Multi-racial/ethnic)

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[13] i.e., All City University of New York alumni associations were approached but only Brooklyn College and Queens College specifically agreed to disseminate the survey link; and private schools that heavily recruit first-generation college students, such as Berea College in Kentucky.
[14] Specifically http://educationandclass.com and http://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/

comparable to the racial demographics of the total 2008 undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting institutions in the United States (which include AA programs[15]). As table 1 indicates, the current study slightly over-samples minority degree holders when compared to the percentage of degrees conferred by race and degree level nationally. This increased representation of minority perspective is to be expected given the current focus on first-generation college graduates, who are more likely to be Black or Latino, and female (Chen & Carroll, 2005).

Table 1: Comparison of current survey sample and national levels of enrollment and degree completion by race and highest degree attained

Race/ Ethnicity	% of total survey sample	% of BA holders	% of MA holders	2008 U.S. Undergrad enrollment	% of BA's earned in U.S. for 2007-08	% of MA's earned in U.S. for 2007-08
White	61.4	53.7	63.6	63.2	71.8	65.5
Black	14.5	17.4	13.1	13.9	9.8	10.4
Hispanic	12.4	11.6	14.8	12.9	7.9	5.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.3	8.3	3.4	6.8	7.0	6.0
Other	4.4	8.3	2.3	--	--	--
Multi-racial/ethnic	1.8	.8	2.3	--	--	--
American Indian	0	0	0.6	1.1	0.7	0.6
Non-resident Alien	--	--	--	2.2	2.8	11.6

Source: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/tables/table_24_1.asp and http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72

Overall, women are also over-represented in this sample (72.1% women versus 28.6% men) at a rate that is higher than the national average for all degrees conferred.

[15] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/tables/table_24_1.asp

Nationally, 57 percent of bachelor's degrees, and 60 percent of master's degrees were earned by females overall in 2007-08[16]**.** This gender gap/difference is even more pronounced for Black and Latina graduates when level of educational attainment is considered, as Black or Latina women are more likely to earn above a BA than are Black and Latino men[17]. First-generation college students are also more likely to be female[18] (Chen & Carroll, 2005), further contributing to the high percentage of female participants in the current study.

Educational attainment of sample:

Over half (52.1%) of survey respondents reported having earned an MA degree while 64% held an M.A. degree or higher (9.8 % hold a PhD and 2.1% have Professional degrees). Thirty-six percent (36.1%) reported the Bachelor’s degree as the highest degree earned.

Educational attainment of parents:

The survey asked graduates to report on the educational attainment of their parents. All participants had parents who had not earned a 4 year degree or beyond at the time that the graduate started college. No differences were found between parent’s past level of education (i.e., at the time that the graduate first entered college) and their parent’s current educational attainment levels. Neither were there significant differences between those with parents who had some college experience, an AA degree or vocational certificate/training and those with none. Dichotomizing participant responses into “no”/”some” college indicates that the majority of graduates surveyed had parents with no post-secondary educational experiences: 80% of graduates reported “no college,”

[16] http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72
[17] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/indicator6_26.asp
[18] http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/showTable2004.asp?rt=p&tableID=1629

and 20 % "some college" for their mothers, and 75% reported "no college," 25% "some college" for their fathers.

Year that BA degree was earned:

Survey respondents (N=335) earned their degrees across several decades, from the 1940s (n=3) to the 2000's (n=124). However, graduates who earned their degrees in the last 2 decades were specifically targeted in order to reach individuals who have spent time in the work force with a degree, and also may be in the midst of a class shift, rather than recent grads anticipating their futures or retirees reflecting back on a life and career. This was achieved as the bulk of respondents (73.1%) earned their BA in either the 2000's (37%) or the 1990's (36.1%), tapering off in percentage the further back in decade considered: 1980's (10.4%), 1970's (8.1%), 1960's (5.7%), 1950's (1.8%) and 1940's (.9%). No significant differences were found based on decade that degree was earned.

Institutional characteristics of colleges attended:

Survey respondents earned their undergraduate degrees from both public and private institutions. Roughly two thirds (64.3%) graduated from public institutions, while 35.7% came from private schools, which represents an over-sampling of graduates from private institutions. For comparison, in 2007-8, 73.4% of U.S. postsecondary students were enrolled in public institutions, and 26.5% total in non-profit (18.7%) and for-profit (7.8%) private institutions[19]. Graduates were directly recruited from two CUNY alumni associations (Queens College, Brooklyn College) and indirectly through word of mouth to other CUNY and non-CUNY graduates. Consequently 60.7% of survey respondent are alumni of CUNY campuses, while 39.3% come from other colleges and universities. The largest non-CUNY source of graduate respondents come from Berea College (20.4%), a

[19] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/tables/table_24_3.asp

private liberal arts and Christian university serving college students in the Appalachia area.

Residence during college years:

Most survey respondents reported living at home or with family (53.4%) during their undergraduate years. The rest reported living on campus (27%) or in the "other" category (19.6%): away from home, but not on campus. Nunez & Cuccari-Alamin (1998) found that beginning first-generation students were more likely than non-first generation students (84% versus 60%) to live off campus with family. The relatively large percentage of participants responding "other" – nearly a fifth -- presents an interpretive challenge as we can't ascertain exactly what "away from home but not at school" means. These graduates might have resided with a significant other or friends. It may also mean a combination of housing situations over the course of the college experience. A large proportion of 1st generation students, including these respondents come from public colleges and universities, which are much more likely to be commuter campuses with limited student housing options, rather than private institutions which are primarily residential and support a dorm culture. This may explain the large percentage of respondents who reported living at home during their college years, even with the greater than average number of individuals graduating from private institutions nationally.

Graduate and Family Interviews

Interview methodology. As part of the narrative study, I conducted 18 interviews[20] in total: 13 first-generation graduates and 5 family members. Narrative-study participants were identified based on their level of educational attainment (and included if

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[20] I additionally pretested my interview schedule by interviewing two recent 1st generation college graduates, both African American males. Their interviews are not included in my findings.

they indicated an interest in participating), rather than by measures of income and occupation, as I hoped to draw conclusions about the psychosocial value and impact of disparate levels of educational attainment within the family in distinction from differences in social class. I recruited college graduates who were of the first generation in their immediate families of origin to earn a 4-year degree, and in which no one in the immediate family had earned either an AA or BA/BS by the time the graduate entered college. Several graduates had older siblings who earned four-year degrees after they earned the first college degree in their family.

Participants were recruited via an online survey targeting first-generation college graduates (described below). Participant selection was purposeful to ensure a mix of both male and female graduates, individuals who were diverse in their racial/ethnic identities, who attended residential colleges as well as those who stayed near their homes, and included graduates from public and private universities. Selection priority was given to participants who believed that an immediate family member might also be interested in participating in an interview (whether or not a family member ultimately participated). Family member interviewees were recruited through recommendations from participating graduates, or through posts on online classified message boards (e.g., Craigslist). All interested family members were followed up, and I attempted to schedule an interview. Recruitment text can be found in Appendix. Research analyses and family profiles address the multiple levels of intersectionality narrated by subjects, including regarding racial/ethnic identity, immigration status, and gender.

Interviews were semi-structured and covered four major areas: graduates' college experiences, family relations, educational values and ideological dilemmas. Both

graduates and family member participants were asked a set of similar questions (interview questions included in Appendix). Interviews generally lasted an hour, with some running slightly longer or shorter depending on the participant's interest and availability. Interviews generally were conducted face-to-face, but were also conducted over the telephone for those graduates and family members living outside of the New York metro area or who specifically requested a phone interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed[21]. Interview participants were each compensated $25.

Interview Sample. Women make up the majority of interviewed participants: 14 women as compared to 4 participating men, and all participating family members were female (n=5). In terms of race/ethnicity, the sample represented Latino, Black, and White participants in roughly equivalent numbers. However, Asian American participants were underrepresented, with only one interviewee identifying as Asian.

[21] The exception was a phone interview with "Frank" which was only partially recorded due to a technical malfunction. Notes on the interview were taken directly after the interview.

Table 2: First-Generation Graduate Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Race/ethnicity
Ernesto (“Ernie”)	Male	20’s	Latino (Puerto Rican)
Kenneth	Male	40’s	African American
Noah	Male	40’s	White (Eastern European)
Frank (minimally quoted)	Male	30’s	White (Italian)
Esperanza	Female	20’s	Latina (Dominican/Ecuadorian)
Gena	Female	20’s	Latina (Dominican)
Nikki	Female	40’s	African American
Noreen	Female	40’s	African American
Una	Female	30’s	Taiwanese (immigrant)
Wendy	Female	30’s	White
Roz (not quoted)	Female	50’s	White
Sarah (not quoted)	Female	20’s	White (Jewish)
Kimberly (not quoted)	Female	50’s	White

Table 3: Family member participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Race/Ethnicity
Angelica (later earned a BA)	Female	30’s	Latina
Sharon (later earned a BA)	Female	40’s	White
Cora	Female	60’s	African American
Desiree	Female	40’s	African American
Yolanda (minimally	Female	30’s	Caribbean American

quoted)			

Analytic Design and Interpretive Method by Data Format

Quantitative survey data. A Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was employed for the purposes of data reduction and as a means of exploring the underlying constructs of the survey items. Survey questions were designed to tap into areas of experience potentially relevant to the study concerns, such as participants' educational values and merit beliefs; and their understanding of family relationships, specifically in regards to disparities in higher educational attainment. Consequently questions investigating the ways that graduates explain their educational successes as well as the educational outcomes of family members were included, as were questions assessing family intimacy and interdependence, and beliefs about the value and effect of college for themselves and their families of origin.

Qualitative data. I draw from a number of analytic frames and narrative orientations to interpret the two types of qualitative data that were produced (i.e., interview and open-ended survey data):

Discourse analysis of interview data. I utilize a discursive psychological approach, in the tradition of Billig (1996), Harré & Gillett (1994); Parker (1992); and Potter (1996), in my analysis of interview data. Discursive psychologists believe that "the supposedly inner, individual and hidden psychological world is theoretically and methodologically directly observable through examining the practice of talk" (Billig, 1996; p. 293). Through the analysis of dialogue (both explicitly stated and that which is avoided in speech), we can investigate the un/conscious thoughts and emotions of speakers. Supporting the notion that the social order as well as our mental lives (Potter &

Wetherell, 1987) “are constituted and reproduced through talk” (Billig, 1998; p. 293), I also employ a type of “ideological analysis” most explicitly theorized and practiced by Billig et al (1998) (see also Billig, 1992 and Wetherell & Potter, 1992) to delve into the psychological ambivalences, or the interior enactments of societal conflicts, that intensely affect and face first-generation college graduates and their families. These ideological conflicts (namely between notions of merit and evidence of class-based outcomes despite universally high aspiration; love and blame; relational versus social obligation) are psychologically constitutive as well as socially reproductive, warranting this analytic lens.

The narrative approach, specifically a hermeneutics of faith/suspicion (Josselson, 2004), was used in tandem with a discursive approach in the analysis of interview data. Josselson’s organization of narrative stances into a hermeneutics of restoration (faith) and/or a hermeneutics of demystification (suspicion) presented a productive analytic approach to the interview data. The goal of Josselson’s (2004) hermeneutics of restoration is an understanding of research participants that is similar to the way that they understand themselves (6), and entails the process of “distilling, elucidating, and illuminating the intended meanings of the informant” (5). First-generation college graduates, and especially their families, still do not have a significant presence in social psychological or education research and the field of researchers engaging the psychological and phenomenological experience of first generation graduates and their family members remains very small. Consequently, my primary analytic frame for both forms of qualitative data, but especially the open-ended survey data, is a hermeneutics of

restoration, as I prioritize participants' intended perspectives on their family relations in the context of educational disparities, and their views schooling and of meritocracy.

The analysis of the emerging issues related to ideological dilemmas and psychological ambivalences alternately demanded a hermeneutics of demystification, which "attempts to decode meanings that are disguised" (p. 1). A hermeneutics of suspicion requires attention to what isn't said or is avoided in talk, potentially revealing psychologically important phenomena or experiences that are not consciously known by participants. Participants are not always aware of the ideological dilemmas they struggle with, and a hermeneutics of demystification focuses on "discovering meanings that lie hidden within a false consciousness" (p. 5). In this instance "false" refers to the unconscious aspects of participants' positions rather than necessarily a form of ideological blindness. Still, there is significant overlap in the two understandings of a 'false consciousness.' Discourse analysis and positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) allow for the interpretation of unconscious and unintended meanings in texts, and thus facilitated the execution of a hermeneutics of demystification in the analysis of the ways in which privilege, difference and knowledge perhaps go underground in interpersonal interactions within working class families of college graduates.

Interviews were transcribed using a simplified version of the conversation analysis notation developed by Jefferson (1984), modified by Wetherell and Potter (1992), and utilized by Stanley and Billig (p. 162). Transcripts were coded using the Nvivo analytic software package.

Open-ended survey data: A hermeneutics of faith within a grounded theory frame. Three open-ended survey items assessed participants' perspectives on education, merit and family relations. Pursuing a hermeneutics of faith approach, I represent graduates' intended voices, as well as take an interpretive stance in the following analyses of the opened-ended data. This inductive interpretive method was most appropriate given that I entered this investigation with minimal theoretical coding schemes. While these data could productively be analyzed quantitatively, given the exploratory nature of this work, a more open analysis was chosen that would allow for the emergence of unanticipated themes and suggest additional productive frameworks. Within the grounded theory analytic frame, deep interpretation of specific individual responses (a method best suited to the interview data) isn't methodologically necessary or appropriate given the relatively large data set and short survey responses. Similarly, qualitative survey data doesn't always produce interpretable findings when quantified and analyzed statistically. In general, I reserve statistical analyses for the likert survey items and an in-depth discourse analysis to the interview data.

Through the iterative coding and revision process, the theoretical relationships between the emerging codes evolved and was clarified into more generalizable findings, a process which also lends itself to the large scale survey data that it was being applied to (see Jones, 2005 pp. 148-49; Glazer & Strauss, 1967 & Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Concerns around the loss of context due to the fracturing of texts that is associated with this method were minimized as the open-ended survey data were generally limited to 1-3 sentences[22], or consisted of a few key words, with minimal references to context. In an

[22] Survey participants were allowed roughly the space of a paragraph for their responses to each open-ended question

effort to retain the limited contextual markers of the data, open-ended item responses were kept intact during coding responses. That is, even if only part of a response fell under the "dispositional self" code, the entire response was coded as such, and generally quoted in entirety.

Responses to the open-ended questions were first read by specific question, in order to generate an initial coding scheme, essentially a list of free codes informed in part by the initial coding of the other open-ended survey item(s). Open codes were not mutually exclusive, allowing the multiple coding of responses. For each item, this first list of codes was clarified/refined and then applied to the data using the Nvivo9 analytic software. Selected survey responses were used to illustrate the larger trends in graduate perspective and attempt to provide a range of responses within specific conceptual categories. Main findings by specific question (in order that they appear in survey) are presented in the following chapter, "First-Level Analysis: Review of survey findings." These results were then applied to the analysis of the larger study aims addressed in "Areas of Inquiry" chapters.

Coding structure of open-ended items

Open-ended Item #1 (OE1): "Why do you think you were the first in your family to earn a degree?"

In this first open-ended survey item, graduates were asked to account for their differential educational success, specifically explaining why they succeeded when others in their family (i.e., their social position) did not. The coding structure for this first open-ended item, generated from initial readings of the data, consists of 4 main coding categories: *Dispositional Self,* and *Dispositional Family*; *Situational Self*, and *Situational Family*. The general character and parameters of each code are described in the

appendices, but briefly included dispositional attributions regarding SELF (those attributions made by respondents that relate to *an internal and stable aspect of self*); dispositional attributions of *FAMILY* members (attributions that relate to *an internal and stable aspect of members of respondents' FAMILIES*); Situational and unstable attributions of SELF (attributions that relate to the external/situational and unstable aspects of respondents' context that contributed to their educational success); and situational attributions and unstable attributions of *FAMILY* members (attributions that relate to the situational and unstable aspects of family member's context).

Open-ended Item #2 (OE2) and Open-ended Item #3 (OE3). These open-ended items were follow-up questions to the two likert items below: *"Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently than the rest of their family [politics, likes/dislikes, culture, religion]. How true is this in your family?"* investigating the family differences that graduates attributed to higher education, and *"Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?"* which assessed family ambivalence associated with differences in educational attainment. Graduates were then asked to "Please explain or give an example of this experience" after responding to each item. Responses to these items were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The theoretical coding schemes that were generated within this analysis are detailed in the next chapter where the survey findings are presented.

First-Level Analysis: Review of Survey Findings

The following chapter represents a first-level analysis of the graduate survey data, starting with a factor analysis of the Likert scale survey items, and then addressing each of the three open-ended questions individually, in the order that it appeared in the survey. Subsequent chapters offer a synthesis of these findings, in conjunction with the analysis of the interview data, bringing them all to bear on the areas of inquiry organizing this investigation (i.e., Education and merit beliefs, family relations, and ideological dilemmas).

Factor Analysis of Quantitative Survey Data

A Principal Components analysis (PCA) was employed for the purpose of data reduction and as a means of exploring the underlying constructs of the survey items. The sample size (N=334) was more than adequate for factor analysis. An N > 200 is recommended and N >300 is considered "good" (Comrey & Lee, 1992). The minimum sample size based on cases per variable is an N > 5 cases per variable. The ideal is 20 cases per variable. This analysis has an 18 to 1 ratio of cases (N=334) per variable (18). While I began with some theoretical a priori factors, this was still an exploratory and not confirmatory factor analysis. Therefore, a Principal Components extraction method was utilized in order to analyze both the unique and shared variance between items. The use of Scree plots in combination with total variance explained and model interpretability were used to determine the appropriate number of factors to retain. I relied on the methods outlined by Costello & Osbourne (2005, p. 2) for determining the most appropriate number of factors to retain, which included running models manually setting the number of factors at the number of a priori factors, and also at the number suggested

by a scree test. Four factors/components were generated from the larger pool of 36 (5-point) Likert scale agree/disagree survey items (primarily drawing from those items assessing college experiences, and family relations). Five, six, and seven factor/component models were also evaluated, but ultimately rejected as these models accounted for less variance, were less interpretable, and ultimately yielded low alpha scores of reliability.

An oblique (oblimin) rotation was employed as this procedure allows correlations between factors, and is increasingly considered a 'best practice' for social psychological research (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). Main loadings were all above .7. Communalities, or the proportion of variance in each variable that can be explained by the factors, were generally (i.e., 17 of the 18 items) above .5 (one was .499) indicating that the extracted factors explained most of the variance in the items being analyzed. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the variance can be explained by the extracted factors. The number of items per factor ranges from 3 to 6. Three is the recommended minimum, and between 4 and 10 is reasonable and ideal. See Appendix D for relevant output.

The four factors/components are:

1 = *Family Support* (4 items)

2 = *Educational Tension* (5 items)

3 = *Family Closeness* (6 items)

4 = *Family Effect* (3 items)

Four items, all related to graduates' perception of support for college going from family, loaded onto factor 1, labeled *Family Support*. Overall graduates generally felt that their families were supportive of their college pursuit, although a third (33.2%) indicated

that they wished their families were more supportive. Five items loaded onto factor 2, labeled *Educational Tension*. Items constituting this factor were related to the level of discomfort or tension within their families around the educational attainment of graduates. A large minority of graduates (40.9%) believed that they were treated differently within their families because of their education, although only 15.5% felt that their relationships with family members have been negatively impacted by their attainment. Six items loaded onto to the third factor, labeled *Family Closeness*, all related to graduates' assessment of how close their families of origin are in terms of interdependence and intimacy. A larger percentage of graduates reported that their families approached them for input on big decisions and problems (58%), than those who reported consulting their family members about their own problems and big decisions (43.2%). The fourth factor, labeled *Family Effect*, consists of 3 items related to the perceived effect of the first college degree on the lives of family members (parents, siblings, and extended family). These items show a decreasing impact from parents, to sibling to extended family. Further interpretation of these survey items and factors are presented throughout subsequent chapters. Cronbach's alpha scores on each scale ranged from good to acceptable, demonstrating adequate internal reliability:

Table 4: Factor Items

Factor/ Component	**Factor Items**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Family Support (α = .835)	My parents supported my decision to attend college.	51.6%	22.4	13.4	6.9	5.7
	My family played a big role in my decision to attend college.	30.4%	22.6	19.3	17.2	10.5
	In general, my extended family supported my decision to attend college.	33.4	29.5	26.4	7.3	3.3
	I wish my family would have been more supportive of my pursuit of a college degree. (Reverse coded)	19.3	13.9	17.5	23.8	25.6
Educ Tension (α = .856)	In my family, my education sometimes makes other members feel uncomfortable.	11.3	29.4	10.7	23.2	25.4
	In my family, my education is sometimes the cause of tension.	9.4	22.1	12.7	26.4	29.4
	My education effects how my family treats me.	9.6	31.3	16.9	24.4	17.8
	The fact that I have completed more formal education than anyone in my family has negatively affected my relationships with my family members.	4.2	11.3	15.8	32.4	36.3
		Extr'ly True	Fairly True	Neither	Some True	Not True
	Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?	9.1	20.3	24.2	8.2	38.2

Factor/ Component	Factor Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Family Closeness (α = .822)	My family usually comes to me to discuss their big decisions or problems.	19.3	38.7	22.1	13.6	6.3
	My opinion holds a lot of weight in my family.	12.1	37	33.9	10.9	6.1
	We can talk openly about almost anything in my family.	20.1	32.7	20.7	21.4	5.2
	My family really understands me.	14.3	24.4	25.3	23.2	12.8
	I would describe my family as especially close.	25.6	26.8	20.7	17.7	9.1
	I usually consult with my family about big decisions or problems.	12.5	30.7	17.6	21.3	17.9
Family Effect (α = .740)	"On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has..	No Effect	Very Little Effect	Some Effect	Moderate Effect	Greatly Effected
	…affected your PARENTS' lives."	6.6	20.9	28.2	24.9	19.3
	…affected your SIBLINGS' lives." (6.7% No Siblings)	9.9	28.9	22.9	16.9	14.8
	…affected the lives of your EXTENDED FAMILY."	16.4	35.6	24.2	14.9	8.9

Factor scores were then created using non-refined methods (DiStefano, Zhu & Mindrila, 2009), in order to investigate relationships between components and other independent variables (e.g., demographic data). More specifically, the means of the component items comprising each factor were used, allowing comparisons across factors with an unequal number of items and also preserved the scale metric. Such non-refined methods are recommended for exploratory factor analysis for their ease in computation and interpretation (Ibid).

Table 5: Factor Score Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Family Tension	336	1.00	5.00	2.5819	1.04464
Family Closeness	336	1.00	5.00	3.2788	.90111
Family Effect	317	1.00	5.00	2.9748	.98185
Family Support	337	1.00	5.00	3.6395	1.05172
Valid N (listwise)	316				

While normality of item distribution enhances the solution, it isn't considered necessary for exploratory and data reduction means, "..as long as PCA and FA are used descriptively as convenient ways to summarize the relationships in a large set of observed variables, assumptions regarding the distribution of variables are not in force. If variables are normally distributed, the solution is enhanced" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996, p. 640).

Given that most item variables were not normally distributed, the distribution of some factor scores were also predictably outside the limits of normality: *Family Support* was negatively skewed while *Educational Tension* has close to a kurtotic distribution. The other two factors, *Family Closeness* and *Family Effect*, are in the range of acceptability in terms of normal distribution. Consequently, non-parametric measures, specifically the Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient (i.e., Spearman's rho) which doesn't require a normal distribution, was employed in conjunction with ANOVA in bivariate analyses of each factor. Spearman Rho measures the consistency of a relationship between variables, instead of the linearity of the data, making it a useful tool for analyzing ordinal data.

Bivariate analyses. Statistically significant relationships between factors and independent variables (i.e., gender, residence during college, and attainment level), as

well as between factors, are presented below. Given that effect sizes were very small, these findings are predominantly suggestive (of future research questions and directions) and scaffold the main findings offered in subsequent chapters.

Table 6: Factor Means by Gender

Gender		**Educational Tension**	**Family Closeness**	**Family Effect**	**Family Support**
Female	Mean	2.6663	3.2602	2.9479	3.5163
	N	240	240	224	240
	Std. Deviation	1.06003	.90654	1.01791	1.12267
Male	Mean	2.3787	3.3407	3.0444	3.9663
	N	93	93	90	94
	Std. Deviation	.99325	.86415	.89798	.76662
Total	Mean	2.5859	3.2827	2.9756	3.6430
	N	333	333	314	334
	Std. Deviation	1.04832	.89434	.98458	1.05348

Gender was related to *Family Support* and *Family Tension* factors, with men reporting more support from family for college going than did women ($rs[334] = .152$, $p < .005$), while women reported more education-related tension within their families than did participating men ($rs[333] = -.119$, $p < .03$). Gender was not significantly related to *Family Closeness* or *Family Effect.*

Table 7: Spearman Rho Correlations

		Educ Tension	Family Closeness	Family Effect	Family Support
Gender	Correlation Coefficient	-.119*	.033	.058	.152**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.551	.309	.005
	N	333	333	314	334

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

Residence during college was also significantly related to several factors: *Family Closeness* (rs[333] = -.284, $p < .001$); *Educational Tension* (rs[333] = .228, $p < .001$) and *Family Support* (rs[334] = -.154, $p < .005$).

Table 8: Factor Means by Residence at College

Where did you primarily live while attending college?		**Educational Tension**	**Family Closeness**	**Family Effect**	**Family Support**
At home or with family	Mean	2.3117	3.5485	3.0542	3.9030
	N	176	176	169	177
	Std. Deviation	.93930	.84860	.99512	.93212
Other (Not home, not on campus)	Mean	3.0152	2.8601	2.4758	2.9381
	N	66	66	62	66
	Std. Deviation	1.01212	.82166	1.05963	1.03283
On Campus	Mean	2.7852	3.0537	3.1964	3.6603
	N	91	91	84	91
	Std. Deviation	1.12932	.88922	.76449	1.03371
Total	Mean	2.5805	3.2768	2.9783	3.6462
	N	333	333	315	334
	Std. Deviation	1.04818	.90189	.98393	1.04437

Table 9: ANOVA for factors

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Educ Tension	Between Groups	28.993	2	14.497	14.248	.000
	Within Groups	335.767	330	1.017		
	Total	364.761	332			
Family Closeness	Between Groups	28.982	2	14.491	19.837	.000
	Within Groups	241.069	330	.731		
	Total	270.051	332			
Family Effect	Between Groups	20.626	2	10.313	11.355	.000
	Within Groups	283.364	312	.908		
	Total	303.991	314			
Family Support	Between Groups	44.782	2	22.391	23.275	.000
	Within Groups	318.426	331	.962		
	Total	363.207	333			

A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences in graduate experiences (i.e., factors) among three types of residence during college (At home, On campus, and Other). All four factors were found to significantly differ by residence type. Given the lack of normal distribution for some of the factors (particularly *Education Tension*), the Spearman Rho was also employed. This test found 3 of the 4 factors significantly related to college residence; *Family Effect* was the exception.

Table 10: Spearman Rho Correlations

		Educ Tension	Family Closeness	Family Effect	Family Support
Primarily Residence in college	Correlation Coefficient	.228**	-.284**	.010	-.154**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.855	.005
	N	333	333	315	334

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the *Education Tension* factor indicate that graduates who lived “At Home” during college (M = 2.31, 95% CI [2.17, 2.45]) reported less education related tension than did those graduates living “On Campus” (M = 2.79, 95% CI [2.55, 3.02]), p = .001 or “Other” (M = 3.02, 95% CI [2.77, 3.26]), p = .001. Comparison between the On Campus group and the “Other” group was not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Post-hoc comparisons of the *Family Closeness* factor indicate that graduates who lived “At Home” during college (M = 3.55, 95% CI [3.42, 3.67]) reported more family closeness than did those graduates living “On Campus” (M = 3.05, 95% CI [2.87, 3.24]), p = .001 or “Other” (M = 2.86, 95% CI [2.66, 3.06]), p = .001. Comparison between the On Campus group and the “Other” group was again, not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Post-hoc comparisons of the *Family Support* factor indicate that graduates who lived someplace “Other” than at home or campus during college (M = 2.94, 95% CI [2.68, 3.19]) reported less *Family Support* than did those graduates who lived “At Home” (M = 3.90, 95% CI [3.76, 4.04]), p = .001 or who lived On Campus (M = 3.66, 95% CI [3.45, 3.88]), p = .001. Post-hoc comparisons of the *Family Effect* factor similarly indicate that graduates who lived someplace “Other” than at home or campus during college (M = 2.48, 95% CI [2.20, 2.74]) reported their degree having the least effect on their family than did those graduates who lived “At Home” (M = 3.05, 95% CI [2.90, 3.20]), p = .001 or who lived On Campus (M = 3.20, 95% CI [3.03, 3.36]), p = .001.

Level of educational attainment was found to be positively related to *Family Tension* (rs[334] = -.134, p < .014).

Table 11a: Factor Means by Attainment Level

Highest Degree Earned		**Educational Tension**	**Family Closeness**	**Family Effect**	**Family Support**
BA	Mean	2.3599	3.3709	2.9760	3.7280
	N	121	121	111	121
	Std. Deviation	1.00234	.85550	1.02095	.97383
MA	Mean	2.7169	3.2448	2.9217	3.5833
	N	173	173	164	174
	Std. Deviation	1.01748	.90996	.93453	1.08587
PhD	Mean	2.6652	3.0742	2.9646	3.6944
	N	33	33	33	33
	Std. Deviation	1.18246	1.00910	.97250	1.11350
Professional	Mean	2.4571	3.7619	4.0952	3.7500
	N	7	7	7	7
	Std. Deviation	1.11782	.71916	.71270	.95743
Total	Mean	2.5770	3.2845	2.9714	3.6500
	N	334	334	315	335
	Std. Deviation	1.04020	.90073	.97676	1.04482

Table 11b: Spearman Rho Correlations

		Educ Tension	Family Closeness	Family Effect	Family Support
Highest level of Educ Attainment	Correlation Coefficient	.134*	-.054	.033	-.008
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.326	.563	.888
	N	334	334	315	335

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Post-hoc comparisons of the *Education Tension* factor indicate that the only significant difference was between those with a BA and those holding an MA with the MA group reporting more education-related tension (M = 2.72, 95% CI [2.56, 2.87]) than did graduates whose highest degree was a BA (M = 2.36, 95% CI [2.18, 2.54]), p = .019. Comparisons between the other levels of attainment were not statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Relationships between factors. In terms of factor scores, *Pearson Correlation* revealed statistically significant relationships among several factors: *Educational Tension* was inversely related to *Family Support* (rs[336] = -.458, p < .001) and to *Family Closeness* (rs[336] = -.331, p < .001). *Family Closeness* was positively related to *Family Support* (rs[336] = .421, p < .001) and to *Family Effect* (rs[316] = .293, p < .001).

Table 12: Correlations between Principal Components

		Education Tension	Family Closeness	Family Effect	Family Support
Education Tension	Pearson Correlation	1	-.331**	-.006	-.458**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.920	.000
	N		336	316	336
Family Closeness	Pearson Correlation		1	.293**	.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
	N			316	336
Family Effect	Pearson Correlation			1	.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000
	N				317
Family Support	Pearson Correlation				1
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary. Despite small effect sizes and correlations, this statistical rendering of the survey data nevertheless, illuminates potentially productive research paths and invites new social psychological questions, some of which might be better answered with a

dedicated quantitative design, or with larger statistical power. These findings also challenge the axiom that “more is better” when it comes to higher education for working class families. That education-related discomfort and tension exists for a proportion of first-generation college graduate families, and the greater education-related tension reported by those holding an MA versus those with a BA (again, differences between other levels of attainment weren’t significant), goes against the idea that a college degree is always, in all ways a positive intervention, especially for groups typically disadvantaged in that realm.

These beginning findings, while suggestive, also reveal the limits of a statistical analysis for broad-based exploratory research questions. For example, the “Other” category in college residence stands out as particularly difficult to interpret. Added as an answer option in order to include those who had more complicated housing experiences, I never thought it would end up much more than a very small response category. Instead, this substantial group of graduates seemed to have the most tenuous relationship with their families of origin, reporting the least family closeness, least support for college going, and the most education related tension. However, it isn’t possible to ascertain who this category includes: graduates who lived in a variety of situations while in college? Graduates who lived independently, in their own non-campus housing, or with non-related roommates? Graduates marginalized from their families of origin? And/or those having the most or the least resources?

The factor analysis effectively served its data reduction purpose, conceptually grouping items that wouldn’t automatically have been connected and excluding others that would have. However, the content of the factor components, especially the

Educational Tension factor, isn't clear from the items that make up the factor, which in the case of *Educational Tension* only assess the presence or absence of tension or discomfort attributed to the educational attainment of the graduate, and not the basis of it. The open-ended survey items add another entry point into the experiences of first-generation college graduates, further deepening the level of analysis and clarifying conceptual contours of our understanding of the ways that disparities educational attainment impact in the lives of working class families. It is there that we turn next.

Analysis of open-ended survey data

Three open-ended items were included in the graduate survey, investigating graduates' understanding and accounting of their differential success, perceived differences between them and their family members that they attribute to their higher education experiences, and examples of any mixed feelings or ambivalence within the family about the graduates' educational attainment.

Open-ended Item 1 (OE1): "Why do you think you were the first in your family to earn a degree?" In this first open-ended survey item, graduates were asked to account for their differential educational success, specifically explaining why they succeeded when others in their family (i.e., their social position) did not. Respondents offered a range of explanations for their differential educational success, frequently giving multiple reasons that referenced themselves as well as made reference to members of their families. Out of 340 surveys, there were 311 responses to this item. Two respondents misunderstood the question, leaving 309 relevant responses to this item. Relying on the concept of self-serving bias and general attribution theory, these responses were first coded by the type of attributions given, specifically whether graduate college success was attributed to dispositional or situational factors, and whether these factors referenced the graduate or members of their family.

The self-serving bias is a robust social psychological finding, informed by our cultural context of individualism. The Self-Serving Bias (SSB) posits that people are motivated to protect their self-esteem (Miller & Ross, 1975) and favorably interpret information to their benefit. Given the psychological tendency to protect self-esteem through the enactment of self-serving causal attributions, specifically the tendency to take

credit for our successes and distance ourselves from our failures, the framework of SSB offers a productive means of analyzing graduate accounts of their relative educational success. Type of attribution is, in effect, a proxy for Self Serving Bias, as dispositional attributions for personal success, and/or situational attributions for one's failures, suggest an explanatory bias that privileges one's self.

Table 13: Frequency of type of attribution by relationship to graduate[23]:

% of Respondents making:	**Dispositional Attribution(s)**	**Situational Attribution(s)**
Attributions Referencing Self	43.68%	40.13%
Attributions Referencing Family	12.29%	24.91%

The chart above quantifies the distribution and type of explanatory attributions made by graduates. Respondents often made more than one type of attribution, necessitating multiple coding of responses. Consistent with attribution theory, graduates made slightly more (though still roughly equivalent) dispositional versus situational attributions for themselves. Less consistent with attribution theory though is the significantly greater number of situational versus dispositional attributions made by graduates which referenced family members' lack of success. The fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) would predict that when accounting for the behavior of others, dispositional characteristics would be more salient and accessible to respondents than would situational factors. Instead, graduates were more likely to explain a family members' lack of success by citing contextual rather than individual factors. This finding replicates lab study findings reported by Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, (1998),

[23] Not mutually exclusive categories, therefore percentages may not equal 100%.

who found that relationship (dyadic) closeness reduced self-enhancement tendencies of the SSB. It also suggests that as an integral part of one's identity, one's family is extended the attribution bias that protects the self.

Graduate dispositions. Roughly 44% of survey responses[24] to this open-ended item referenced at least one dispositional characteristic of the graduate[25], typically within a mix of attributions types and targets:

"*I seriously took advantage of opportunities made available to me and I believe luck played a role in providing me an opportunity*" (Graduate #50, White, Male, BA)

"*I am the eldest sibling and always had high goals for myself.*" (Graduate #129, White, Female, MA)

"*I wanted to go to college and it was expected of me since I was an excellent student. Brooklyn College allowed me to do this without creating a financial burden for my family.*" (Graduate #174 White, Female, MA)

What stands out in the analysis of the *dispositional self*-responses -- typically attributions where we would most expect to see a self-serving bias -- is the degree to which graduates did not fully capitalize on the self-enhancement potential of the attribution opportunity offered by this question. A deeper look within the graduate responses suggests that although this sample of first-generation college graduates used self-serving attributions, perhaps as a means of self enhancement, they did not do so at the expense of their family members. Instead, graduates often attempted to maintain a positive portrayal of self as well as the integrity of family members within a context of

[24] Percentages are offered throughout as an indication of the general prevalence of specific experiences and phenomena, not necessarily as a statistical rendering of the data.
[25] Only slightly over a quarter of respondents (26.53%) made singularly dispositional attributions for themselves and no other types of attributions (regarding family or for themselves).

differential educational success, in part by downplaying their exceptionalism, even while taking credit for their educational success. Supporting the position of McC Heyman & Luykx (2006) who found that a group of working-class undergraduate students in a teachers education course "tended to embrace an individualist view of success, viewing themselves as counter-examples to arguments about structural limitations. At the same time, they resisted seeing themselves as exceptional [..]" (p. 10).

The responses above[26] highlight graduates' ambition and initiative ("I took advantage," "had high goals," "I wanted to go"), as well as establish the existence of favorable – almost random -- circumstances facilitating their pursuit of a degree ("luck played a role," "eldest sibling," "Brooklyn College allowed me"). Graduates also qualified their dispositional explanations, for example: "I don't know. My parents would say it's because I am the smartest" (Graduate #48, Black, Female, MA) or "Because I don't know how to do anything else but write. I don't have useful skills beyond this" (Graduate #209; White, Female, BA). Graduate #48 diminishes the label of "smartest" by making it the assessment of her parents and not her assessment, while the second respondent highlights the limitation of her skill set, rather than her expertise, re-situating to whom we assign merit.

Graduates qualified their success by prioritizing situational factors that explained family members' lack of success:

"*My brother and I were raised by a single mother. She didn't have the opportunity to attend college. My brother dropped out of high school and wasn't interested in*

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[26] Annotated with anonymous respondent ID# and basic demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, and highest degree earned, if such information was provided. A small number of respondents choose not to supply certain demographic information.

additional education beyond the GED. I was intent on being a biologist." (Graduate #9, Hispanic, Male, MA)

"*I am the youngest in my family. My parents were immigrants from P.R., they did not have any schooling. It was important to me personally to get a higher education*." (Graduate #19, Hispanic, Female, BA)

In explaining the differential achievement within their families, these two graduates positioned their individual role in their success as last in a list of multiple reasons. Like other graduates, they both first established the limiting circumstances of their family members, rather than their exceptional qualities, in accounting for their attainment.

Desire.

"*I wanted it--they didn't. My siblings all went to vocational school.*" (Graduate #96, White, Female, BA)

Graduates also found ways to simultaneously support meritocratic ideology and individual worth (theirs and their family member's) by emphasizing the role of desire (as "interest" and motivation) and choice in determining educational pursuits and outcomes. A large minority of graduates' dispositional attributions positioned their desire for education and/or their want for "more" as the most significant contributor to their success, fueling their hard work and supporting the development of their capabilities and positive qualities. While desire (as ambition, or determination) constitutes a "self-serving" attribution, it also presents a way of positively positioning oneself that doesn't simultaneously disparage others, at least explicitly. The following responses (below) illustrate the explanatory power afforded to educational desire:

"*I wanted to go to college to better myself in life and college wasn't that important to my parents and brother.*" (Graduate #56, Hispanic, Female, BA)

"*I always wanted to know more about the world around me and really take the trouble to learn more about it -- even at a high price. Others prefer a more comfortable life.*" (Graduate #82, Asian, Female, MA)

Graduate attributions of personal success concomitantly account for the lack of success of similar others, demonstrating their understandings/positioning of family members. What stands out in these three examples is the close connection made to the (lack of) desire of siblings/others, who are identified as having chosen not to pursue a college degree. Graduates #96 and #56 are clear that they wanted "it," their siblings didn't, implying an equality of opportunity and meaningful choice. Graduate #82 is more general in identifying "others" who "prefer a more comfortable life," reversing generally accepted notions of class comfort, but also highlighting the "high price" that many first generation graduates associate with educational attainment.

Family members' lack of a college degree was similarly framed by some as a lack of personal desire and choice, rather than being explicitly due to an undesirable personal quality or characteristic, or to structural impediments. Rather, these graduates understand their exceptional success to be an issue of differing priorities, supporting the notion of equal opportunity and merit. The next two examples more centrally focus on the personal achievement that a college degree represents. Participant #225 below emphasizes her personal (i.e., individual, idiosyncratic) desire as a motivating factor, and explicitly denies the desire for relative mobility. She is different from many respondents (e.g.,

#107), who actually identified the desire for greater relative success than their parents and siblings as an important motivation in their college pursuit.

> "*Something I wanted to achieve personally. In other words, my reason for getting a degree was not so I can have something my parents did not have.*" – Graduate #225 (Black, Female, MA)
>
> *"I placed going to college and graduating above all else so I could be socially and materially better off than the rest of my family. My siblings decided to marry and have children after getting their GEDs. They never prioritized their educations after their children were born. My mother never believed in herself enough to want to return to school, nor did she have social support to encourage her to do so."* – Graduate #107, (Hispanic, Female, MA)

Participant #107 represents the more typical counterbalance to graduate #225, and specifically indicates the desire to be "better off than the rest of my family," whose siblings were seen as having chosen not to pursue higher education, and whose mother was framed as unsupported in such a pursuit.

Escapist fantasies, freedom dreams.

> "*Because I wanted to escape where I was from, have a life that was filled learning, and a better quality of life than remaining in rural Southeastern Ohio would have given me. I also did not want to be financially dependent on a man. I wanted to be able to take care of myself and to be financially independent.*" – Graduate #54 (White, Female, MA)
>
> "*A mentor in high school encouraged me to attend college. She always said 'education is your salvation'.*" -- Graduate #187 (White, Female, MA)

Deploying a discourse or narrative of personal desire didn't always allow for both the valuation of self and family though, as in the case of the 20% of those respondents

(like the women quoted above) making dispositional attributions for self who explicitly attributed their success to their desire to *escape* some aspect of their lives through higher education; i.e., from a context of perceived deprivation, toward independence and freedom from family, dependency or socio-cultural (e.g., gender) roles. This small but significant group of graduates[27] saw educational credentialing as a means of accessing a better life, financial independence and as a means of economic and social "salvation."

These graduates expressed the profound drive to live very different lives than those traversed by their less-educated family members. They strongly DIS-identified with their family members, seeing them instead as "negative role models" (#185) that they "did not want to do and be like" (#31):

> "*Because I did not want to do and be like my parents or and my friends, receiving the benefits from the government.*" -- Graduate #31 (Hispanic, Female, MA)
>
> "*Being the youngest I saw my siblings as negative role models that I did not want to follow. So that made me pursue a path that was different than theirs.*" -- Graduate #185 (Hispanic, Male, MA)
>
> "*I believed that I had to do something else to break the cycle of teenage pregnancy, welfare, and drugs. I seen how my grandparents and mother struggled so I knew that God had something better for me to do which required education.*" – Graduate #81 (Black, Female, MA)

Of course, their family members might also see themselves as negative role models and hoped that their child or sibling would find another path. Also, family members were likely not seen as negative models in all aspects, but those specifically related to education and education-related outcomes (e.g., employment).

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[27] 8.7% of all responses referenced the desire to escape

The other side of escape is freedom: Graduates dreamed of freedom from dependence, from a hard life and poverty, from "utter intellectual and spiritual deprivation," the fate of older siblings and parents who had to work too hard for too little. And graduates dreamed of the freedom to: learn, travel, grow, and live comfortably -- mobility desires were often explicitly individual, and the paths out of poverty they sought (or were offered) did not appear to include their families: "I wanted more out of life than my family provided" -- Graduate #105 (White, Female, MA). But while the desire for escape might be seen as the acceptance of, or resignation of inequality, it is also a rejection of one's assumed place within it.

(Dis)Positioning family members.

"*They all fucked up and got pregnant or got someone pregnant and ran after the project life. They followed the dumb ass man my mother married and ran the streets. Now they regret it.*" – Graduate #231 (Black, Female, PhD)

A very limited number of respondents (38 in total) offered dispositional attributions for family members (13 referencing parents, and 25 referencing siblings) as an explanation for their success, ranging from generous (e.g., Graduate #316 below) to harsh (Graduate #231 above) in their assessment of them. These were instances of respondents' active referencing of some stable, enduring quality of a family member to account for the graduate's success, rather than passive or implied references or attributions to parents' or siblings' lack of educational success:

> "*I think my parents always made their marriage and children a priority. They married young, bought a home, started a family and had too many responsibilities that encompassed most of their time.*" – Graduate #316 (White, Female, BA)

> *"I followed through where my older sisters didn't. Although 2 of them (oldest and 3rd oldest) had started college they got side-tracked. The older one by a good job that didn't require college and the other began using drugs and became an addict. The second oldest had 2 kids by the time she was 19. I wanted more for myself."* – Graduate #66 (White, Female, PhD)

> *"My parents were immigrants and didn't have either the will or the ambition to attend college."* – Graduate #156 (White, Female, BA)
> "*I never really knew the answer to that. I think I do have a lot of common sense and realized a degree was the way to go. My siblings didn't value education.*" -- Graduate #217 (White, Female, MA)

The harshness of participant #231's response wasn't typical of graduates' discussion of their parents and stands in stark contrast to the other quoted (and more typical) graduates who positively positioned their parents. For example, graduate #316 indicated that her parents made family life their priority rather than higher education – a choice that privileges family values and which few would explicitly critique. She also provided a range of situational explanations as well. Graduates #156 and #217 sit in the affective center of the range of dispositional attributions for family, associating differences in attainment with low educational values, lack of personal will, and limited individual ambition. Still, when interpreted within the context of graduates' full responses, these more average attributions are situated adjacent to other possible explanations for disparate outcomes (e.g., parents were immigrants). These multifaceted and multivalent attributions/explanations again suggest that graduates occupy positions that are supportive to family as well as to the tenants of merit and social class. We might also more broadly interpret #231's anger and rage, regret and disappointment, as directed both at family members and perhaps also at the gap between aspiration and outcome separating her and some of her family members.

Looking deeper within these dispositional attributions for family members (with several graduates mentioning both a parent/s and sibling/s), a pattern starts to emerge: twice as many graduates made dispositional references to siblings than to parents, illustrating their tendencies to judge family members differently depending on their relationship to the graduate. Context inches into graduates' references to parents, while a discourse of differing priorities and conscious choice more often anchors the responses referencing siblings, as evident in the quotes above and below:

> "*My parents were teenagers when they had me and my brother allows life to take charge of him instead of taking charge of it.*" – Graduate #194 (Female, Queens College, MA)

> *"I had considerable support from friends outside the family who helped me get into and stay in college. My parents did not have money to attend school; my brothers weren't interested in attending. I thrived on school."* – Graduate #55 (White, Female, MA)

> "*I think I was the first to get my degree because I made it a priority and did not let outside forces to deter me. My siblings let other aspects rule their existence and then they never pursued further education. My parents were more concerned about working to help support their families and then finally their own family*." (#342, Hispanic, Female, MA)

Graduate respondents understood their parents to be limited by their circumstances (they were young parents, lacked money for college, or needed to support their families) while siblings were passive ("brother allows life to take charge of him" and "siblings let other aspects rule their existence"), or they didn't value higher education (Graduate #55). Graduates on the other hand, "thrived on school" and didn't "let outside forces deter" them.

Situating family. Nearly a quarter (24.91%) of graduate respondents made attributions for their success referencing *situational* (i.e., external, unstable) qualities of their families – roughly double the number of *dispositional* attributions offered for family -- to explain disparities in educational attainment within their families of origin. On the surface, this imbalance indicates a tendency to favorably position family by more frequently highlighting contextual aspects of their lives rather than invoking personal shortcomings to explain their relative lack of attainment. However, the pattern of attribution previously found within the limited number of dispositional-family attributions is reinforced in the situational attributions referencing family members' limited educational attainment. Significantly, these *situational* explanations more often referenced parents over siblings (61 mentioning parents, and 16 referencing siblings), reversing the pattern of *dispositional* attributions which were twice as likely to reference graduates' *siblings*, again suggesting that graduates hold their brothers and sisters more accountable for their lack of educational success than they do their parents for similarly limited formal education.

Many graduates, and some family members, express the belief that all the children within a graduate's family have comparable access to a college education, and differential educational attainment was guided most by their desire, choice and personal prioritizing. Parents are granted the desire for a degree, but exempted from having to earn one by an accepted lack of opportunity. The American dream mythology moralizes doing "better than" one's parents while supporting and being supported by the notion of an inherent equality ostensibly existing between siblings. In individualizing their success as well as the failure of siblings, while granting their parents a 'pass,' graduates bolster and

legitimate the current neoliberal system of educational/class meritocracy. Moreover, such relationship-specific attribution tendencies have implications for relationships within working class families[28], such as tangible differences in the intimacy of graduate-parent relationships and the relationship their siblings have with their parents; and tension between siblings specifically attributed to differences in higher educational attainment.

Graduates: Situated and situating.

> *"I had a caring teacher that heard of a college that had a program that would afford me the opportunity to attend without having money.*" – Graduate #116 (Black, Female, MA)

> *"I was simply, the oldest, and it was understood. Most Asian families put education FIRST, then career, then have a family."* – Graduate #40 (Asian, Female, BA)

> *"Youngest of five children that graduated from high school at sixteen. There were few options, but it was important to my parents that I attend college. Had I decided to drop out at some point, it would not have been too large of an issue"* -- Graduate #12 (White, Male, MA)

While many respondents (44%) understand their success in terms of their own dispositional and stable personal qualities, graduates also attributed their success to forces outside of themselves with considerable frequency (40%). These situational and unstable attributions relate to the external/situational and unstable aspects of graduates' context contributing to their educational success. These outside forces clustered primarily around the themes of opportunity, and family expectations/support for college going. In a sense, all situational factors imply circumstances of luck and opportunity, but within this category of contextual factors, graduates specifically mentioned opportunity/luck and birth order (mostly as the eldest child) most frequently. Together, opportunity and birth

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[28] Discussed more fully in the chapter addressing RQ2: Mama, Don't let your babies...

order constituted over two thirds (74%) of the responses in this category[29]. Accounting for the multiple coding of responses reduces this to around 70% as the overlap in these two categories was limited to 5 respondents. Similarly, only 2 of the situational–self responses that were coded *Family Support* were also coded for *Education as a Family Value* although these two categories are inherently related. Together, *Family Support* responses and *Education as a Family Value* constitute slightly over a third of the situational responses. Graduates also cited, although to a much lesser extent, the different generational standards for higher educational attainment and increased credentialing requirements as additional reasons for differential degree attainment.

Table 14: Situational attributions referencing one's self

"Situational Self" sub-codes (n=124)	% of Situational Responses	% of all "Why First" item responses
Opportunity/Luck	45.96%	18.44%
Birth Order	28.22%	11.32%
Education as a Family Value	17.74%	7.11%
Family Support	20.16%	8.09%
Generational Requirement	10.48%	4.2%

Family expectations of the dream.

The first reason is that my parents always emphasized the benefits of getting an education. The second reason is that after I experienced earning a living as a high school graduate, I became convinced that a college degree will help me live a better life – Graduate #183 (White, Female, MA)

[29] Again, responses were multiply coded and do not add up to 100 percent.

> *My parents were immigrants and understood that an education was the key to attaining immediate assimilation and success in America. – Graduate #224 (White, Male, MA)*
>
> *It wasn't an option, rather a must, and once my family saw I was excelling in school in my early years, it really became less of an option and more of a family wide expectation. – Graduate #256 (Black, Female, MA)*
>
> *As the oldest of 3 kids, it was my father's dream to send his kids to college to get the education he never could afford. – Graduate #321 (White, Male, BA)*

A family's expectation, a father's dream – The promises of a college degree (e.g., assimilation, success) hangs in the balance of degree attainment. But balance is tension -- taut and fraught -- promise and threat teeter there under anxious feet that resist being bare, who support more than themselves. Family is the source of graduate striving and ambition – not the singular source, for graduates have made clear their primary role in translating the hopes of parents, teachers and siblings, the support and opportunities, both found and created, into a college degree. But for many first generation graduates, the hope and aspiration – the "must" -- begins at home in accordance with the dreams of one's family. Home is where many graduates find the support and encouragement, the psychic sustenance, to successfully pursue a college degree.

For other graduates, this ambition is internally driven, sometimes in perceived antagonism to their families' preferences. Across these ends of the spectrum though, graduates use several strands of attributions to tie up an explanation for their success within a familial context of limited educational attainment. Graduates do bolster their self-concept in their explanations for success, but they are not totally self-serving in those attributions: they readily acknowledge the role of opportunity/luck and draw attention to the role of family support and positive educational values in their successes. Graduates

frequently downplay their exceptionalism even while supporting the notion of individual merit (their own, and as the failure of siblings), and the mythos of an American dream, by emphasizing the ways that they ultimately translated this support and luck, via effort and/or smarts, into the reality of a degree. They grant their parents a pass for their limited attainment, but hold their siblings especially accountable for their lack of college achievement. And these attribution tendencies may impact, and be impacted by, family relations, as the following correlations suggest:

Table 15: Graduate Attributions by Factor Scores

Attribution Type		Education Tension	Family Closeness	Family Effect	Family Support
Dispositional Attribution of SELF	Pearson Correlation	.206**	-.150**	-.092	-.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.008	.116	.000
	N	312	312	292	312
Dispositional Attribution of FAMILY	Pearson Correlation	.037	-.061	-.113	-.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.512	.281	.055	.198
	N	311	311	291	311
Situational Attribution of SELF	Pearson Correlation	-.265**	.157**	.135*	.273**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.021	.000
	N	312	312	292	312
Situational attribution of FAMILY	Pearson Correlation	-.156**	.184**	.125*	.164**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.001	.033	.004
	N	312	312	292	312

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

There was a small but positive correlation between *Education Tension* and Dispositional attributions for graduate success (i.e., essentially evidence of graduate 'merit'), $r(310) = .206$, $p<.01$ (There was a non-significant correlation of .037 between *Education Tension* and Dispositional attributions for family members). In contrast, *Education Tension* was negatively correlated with Situational attributions for both Self, $r(310) = -.265$, $p < .01$, and for Family , $r(310) = -.156$, $p < .01$. The more positive factors

of *Family Closeness* and *Family Support* were positively correlated with Situational attributions for self and for family, and negatively associated with personal attributions for success. While these correlations are small, they are conceptually consistent, and support the notion of a dynamic relationship between ideology and interpersonal relationships.

Open-ended Item 2 (OE2): Within-family differences attributed to higher education.

"Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently than the rest of their family [politics, likes/dislikes, culture, religion]. How true is this in your family?"

Of the 334 survey participants responding to this Likert item, 67.7% indicated that this was "**fairly"** or "**extremely true"** in their family. An open-ended survey item ("Please explain or give an example of this experience") followed up this question and generated 246 participant responses. Of the 246 responses, 31 participants indicated that there were no significant differences between them and their family that they attributed to their higher education experiences, leaving 215 generally affirmative responses to this follow-up question[30]. The following themes were identified and coded in the survey responses, in order of frequency:

[30] The 31 "no difference" responses were not considered when calculating the percentage of responses (presented in the table) as I am interested in the nature of differences that are perceived to exist between graduates and their families, as indicated by the prevalence of a specific code within the generally affirmative responses.

Table 16: Frequency of coding categories for Open-Ended Item 2

“Different World” coding categories	**# of coded responses**	**% of all affirmative responses**
Better/More than	126 responses	58.6%
“False” Consciousness	58	26.9%
Liberal Grad	42	19.5%
No Differences	31	12.6% of ALL item responses (n=246)
Religious Differences	25	11.6%
Conservative Family	24	11.1%
Personal Efficacy	15	6.9%
Citizenship, Voting	12	5.5%
Diff in Opportunity	6	2.7%

By far, the largest category of responses coded referenced the relative superiority of the graduate on some level when comparing themselves to their non-degreed family members. Of the 215 respondents who gave an example of the differences developing between them and their family attributed to higher education, 58.6%[31] were coded as "better than"(not inclusive of the "better than" responses from the two other open-ended questions)[32].

[31] Percentages are offered here as an indication of the general prevalence of the better than phenomena, not as a specific quantitative rendering of the data.

[32] There were 16 responses (from different non-overlapping respondents) to the final open-ended survey question (i.e., “Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?”) that also referenced the issue of either being, or being perceived as, “better than” as an issue of tension. These responses are addressed in a subsequent discussion of this particular question.

Responses were coded as "better than" if the differences described explicitly or implicitly positioned the graduate as somehow superior in any way to their family (either a specific member or the family group). Sometimes participants referenced a specific person (e.g., 'my younger brother') or relationship (e.g., 'my siblings' or 'my parents'); while other respondents did not explicitly demarcate who they were speaking about, and instead used "they," "them," or "my family" when answering this question. If the difference stated was merely descriptive and revealed no valence either way, it was not coded as 'better than.' However, this situation actually rarely occurred – some hierarchy was typically easily ascertained, and always favorably positioned the graduate relative to their family.

Forty-three percent (43%) of these "better than" responses included the qualifier "more," while others had 'better,' 'greater,' or 'broader' in them. What does "more," the most frequently used adjective in the responses to this question, mean in this context? In part, it indicates comparison and hierarchy, and positions the graduate as being or having "more" of some (desirable) thing. For example, graduates quite frequently positively describe themselves as being "more open-minded" and "less judgmental" than their families. They see themselves as being especially open to new experiences and interested in exploring different cultures. They discuss their ability to see the world from multiple perspectives and an expanded capacity to understand people, situations and problems.

"Worlds apart" – Graduate "open"ings. The term and concept of 'openness' is used broadly by graduates and is associated with other positive qualities. Openness comes across as a value-neutral description, or at least a term that isn't necessarily or overtly disparaging of others, while also firmly positioning the graduate as superior to

others in their families. An association between openness/open mindedness and liberalism, as well as the hierarchical positioning of the liberal identification, is apparent in the sample of responses presented below:

> *"I think I am more open minded and liberal than my parents."* -- Graduate #44 (White, Female, MA)
> *"I'm much more open-minded regarding peoples of other cultures and races. I also belong to a different political party than anyone in my family."* -- Graduate #64 (White, Male, BA)

> "*I feel that I am more open to new ideas - politically and socially than some of my family members because they tend to go along with what they have known to be the mainstream.*" -- Graduate #76 (White, Female, MA)

> "*Some of my family members are very set in their ways and do not see things broadly or with an open mind.*" (173, Black, Female, MA)

Graduate liberalism -- social and political -- is another salient difference noted by graduates, one related to "openness" or "open-mindedness." This liberal open mindedness is contrasted with the implied closed mindedness of family, people who "tend to go along" with the mainstream, and are "set in their ways." Such differences in sociopolitical views between graduates and their families weren't always explicitly framed as "better than," but occasionally presented as a more neutral descriptive label (e.g., Graduate #44). So while there is considerable overlap between these two codes, they are also distinct.

The concept of liberalism encompasses a range of ideological commitments (Richardson, 2001; p. 17), and in the U.S. has long been associated with higher education and academia (Frank, 2005). Modern liberalism generally refers to social liberalism, and typically includes a commitment to the values of egalitarianism, social justice, tolerance,

and social democracy. Conversely, responses that explicitly or implicitly referenced the conservatism of family (i.e., traditionalism, Republicanism, maintenance of existing social order) were coded *conservative family*. Participant responses to the larger question of difference-through-education were thus coded specifically for “liberal graduate,” (19.5%) and/or “conservative family” (11.1%), as distinct though related conceptual understandings of self.

I initially opted to code for family conservatism as a means of possibly illuminating patterns in how respondents described the differences perceived to exist between them and their families. In this case, graduates were more likely to explicitly name their liberalism than their family’s conservatism as an existing difference between them. However, given the binary nature of the liberal/conservative designation, there was considerable overlap between the *liberal grad* and *conservative family* coding. In fact, of the 24 responses coded *conservative family,* only 7 did not overlap with the *liberal grad* coding. Combined, *liberal grad* and *conservative family* constituted 24.65% of the responses to this question, making it one of the core differences perceived by graduates and also an important way that graduates positively distinguished themselves as ‘better than’ their families:

> *“Political and religious views are worlds apart. My family is very conservative, while I tend to fall into the very liberal category.”* -- Graduate #51 (White, Male, PhD)
>
> *“I was born a Republican, reared as a Republican, knew I was expected to die a Republican - and now I am a Democrat.”* -- Graduate #72 (White, Female, BA)
>
> *“I am much further to the left politically. While I think this is the result of my college experience I believe I got the foundations for my beliefs from my parents--even though they are more conservative than I am.”* -- Graduate #96 (White, Female, MA)

"I think I'm viewed as an extremely liberal person in my family. Two of my sisters are very religious, one is a disciple of Christ and the other is a Jehovah's witness. My views on sexuality, evolution, religion, and even racial identity greatly differ with the views of my family. I'm a fag hag and I embrace Unitarian universalistic views...needless to say we disagree a lot and they attribute my views to my education." -- Graduate #193 (Black, Female, MA)

Graduate #51 and #193 find themselves "worlds apart" from their family members, both politically and culturally (i.e., religiosity). Graduate #193 in particular attributes the relational conflict within her family to extreme differences in their core beliefs, while her family attributes disagreements to the educative process. Graduate #72's response conjures a sense of loss, and traitorous feelings in having defied expectations in such a fundamental way. There is a sense of irreversibility in her transformation from one political party to another, as it leaves her where her family is decidedly not. Graduate #96 stands out from many of the respondents in identifying her family as fundamentally sharing core values and common leftist roots. She and her family are different, but not irrevocable so. Her family has grounded her, provided a foundation for her in a positive way that is compatible with her current beliefs. However, respondents more often portrayed their family members as not just different, but diametrically opposed to themselves, as what they are distinctly *not* (e.g., Graduate #51 above, and Graduates #35, #86 and #126 below):

"I'm not racist." -- Graduate #35 (White, Female, MA)

"I am a radical. My parents were conservative. Three siblings are republicans, one is a democrat. Three of my siblings are quite biased in a wasp-ish way. Oddly, the one who isn't only has a GED but a lot of life experience and is the only one besides me who is not religious." -- Graduate #86 (Hispanic, Female, PhD)

"My family is highly bigoted - I find this offensive in them while they consider me 'radical' and 'left wing.'" -- Graduate #97 (White, Female, PhD)

> *"I'm a liberal. They are conservative - One thing that changed was that I outgrew the Southern Baptist Church and have more of a broader picture of God than a God of Fear."* -- Graduate #126 (White, Male, MA)

If graduates are liberal and open minded, their families are conservative, "bigoted," "racist," and judgmental. Both Graduate #86 and Graduate #97 contrast their radicalism (claimed and perceived) with the bigotedness and religiousness of their family. Graduate #97 is offended by the values/beliefs of her family as they are of hers. In both cases, family and graduates are mutually "offended" by one another, implying mutual disapproval, critique, insult -- rejection and hurt feelings. Graduate #126 "outgrew" his family's belief system and embraces a more inclusive ("broader") understanding of god. Like Graduate #51, he also narrates a transformation that involved a separation from family.

This political and cultural shift to the left narrated by graduates is more often a shift from previous beliefs for graduates and does seem to represent an ideological break between families. Graduate respondents attribute this ideological shift to their exposure to novel ideas and new social and cultural environments, access to a wider array of personal options, experiences in problem-solving and the development of the intellectual tools facilitating novel solutions.

Contested consciousness(es). The notion of *False Consciousness* was another distinct theme running through the affirmative responses to this open-ended question. More than a quarter (26.9%) of the responses referenced some aspect of their families' "false consciousness," defined broadly as acting outside one's personal or class-based

interest, being ideologically (i.e., politically, culturally) clouded, being deluded by religion, and/or showing an inability or unwillingness to see the world as "it really is:"

> *"understanding of the world as it is, a different view and understanding of current world issues"* -- Graduate #38 (Male, Hispanic, BA)
>
> *"Even on TV or magazine commercials, the other family members do not see the underlying ideas, which is very apparent to me."*-- Graduate #165 (Asian, Male, BA)

This coding category only indicates the presence of the notion of false consciousness, but doesn't tell us anything about the degree of this belief, or the degree to which graduates questioned this notion at all. Still, definitive characteristics of the idea of a 'false' consciousness were apparent in many responses. Graduates, for example, describe superior analytical and interpretive abilities that they attribute to their higher education:

> "*With scientific training, I see things more critically, wanting to see evidence and sources of that evidence before I accept something."* -- Graduate #9 (Male, Hispanic, MA)
>
> *"I think in some respects this is due to my specifically philosophical training, but I clearly look for reasons and justifications for claims, or offer counter examples, very much more than the rest of my family."* -- Graduate #52 (White, Male, MA)
>
> *"My views on controversial aspects such as politics, religion, cultural rituals have become more open. I basically do not follow the pack per say. I am able to look at these issues in a different and more analytical way."* -- Graduate #163 (Hispanic, Female, MA)

These "more critical" and "analytical" graduates expect "evidence" before accepting facts, and feel that they are better able to evaluate sources (texts, politics, cultural biases, etc.) than are their family members. Graduates also describe having a broader view of the

world, the ability to take into account multiple perspectives to a greater degree than other members of their family:

> *"I tend to look at things more from a world perspective whereas family seems to be more limited in their views."* -- Graduate #55 (White, Female, MA)

> *"I tend to have a greater appreciation for both sides of every story and question the validity of the popular opinion - many of my family members accept what they read and/or hear on tv at face value."* -- Graduate #66 (White, Female, Ph.D.)

> *"It is extremely true. I often times have a broader worldview and firsthand experiences about topics (race, Middle East conflict, etc.) that result in a different viewpoint than my family."* -- Graduate #80 (White, Female, BA).

One consequence of this perception of an expanded vision and widened perspective is the positioning of family as ideologically blinded or cultural dupes – potentially lacking in political awareness, experience or knowledge. Graduates' families of origin were also described as being more religious than the graduate, even fundamentalist. In the process of pursuing their educational paths, graduates questioned their previously held religious beliefs, which strengthened faith for a very few, but more often was associated with diminished religious identification and a loss of graduates' faith:

> *"They are mostly religious fanatics and I have escaped from that nonsense"* -- Graduate #108 (White, Female, MA)

> *"I have become secular and very liberal as a result of my educational experiences"* -- Graduate #202 (White, Male, PhD)

> *"When someone is sick in my family, I seek professional help (doctor or specialist) while my family get on their knees to pray for the devil's failure. Prayer is the answer to everything"* – Graduate #220 (Black, Female, BA)

> *"I am less religious and more politically involved than my family and this cause tension and discomfort that I don't follow the norms of conduct that my parents do"* – Graduate #260 (Hispanic, Female, BA)

Beyond the connection between religiosity and consciousness, graduates also directly position their family as ideologically misguided by describing them as reactionary and politically simplistic:

> *"Sometimes some members will jump on a hot button band wagon and even threaten violent reactions. I tend to study, think, look at long term, and try to seek effective solutions which don't do harm.*" Graduate #118 (White, Male, MA)
>
> *"Politically. Family members often rely on commercials and 'one liners' as a basis for voting decisions. Often their views are narrow and built upon hearsay. I have learned that listening to opposing opinions and doing my own research is more valuable"* -- Graduate #299 (White, Female, BA)

These two graduates contrast their families naïve and reactionary behavior to their own more mature and thoughtful responses. Graduates also believe they possess a stronger sense of self-efficacy and belief in their ability to create change in the world and in their lives. Their families on the other hand, are generally unable to see their ability to affect meaningful change:

> *"I understand why we struggle as a people instead of just complaining about it"* –Graduate #230 (Hispanic, Male, MA)
>
> *"They see government as doing things that can effect or change their lives and have a low sense of controlling their own lives"* -- Graduate #185 (Hispanic, Male, MA)
>
> *"yes because people who are uneducated don't have the knowledge and resources to open their minds"* – Graduate #257 (Asian, Female, MA)
>
> *"I feel that my family's extremely conservative opinions neglect the reality that our family is working class, not middle class. My parents look negatively upon government funding aimed at assisting people in our family's financial level."* -- Graduate #293 (White, Female, BA)

Graduates #230 and #293 identify a "struggle," and establish a common working class identity ("we," "as a people," "our family is working class"). Yet, their statements

(particularly by graduate #230) are an indictment of family, a charge that they could do more – not necessarily in terms of achievement, but in terms of a class struggle. This seems to be more of a charge of passivity than laziness (a common stereotype of the working/poverty class). Nevertheless, understanding "why we struggle" is not necessarily any less passive than is complaining about or critiquing a system of power is. The last statement above suggests that her family's conservative values represent their identification with power, one that is counter to their class and family interest – a straightforward example of what could be called "false consciousness." She then frames government funding programs (perhaps as entitlements) to be in the general interest of her family, as members of the working class -- a position that Graduate #185 might dispute, illustrating the contested nature of "working-class interests."

The degree to which these graduates actually understand their families to be "falsely" consciousness is difficult to know from these limited responses, but what is clear is that the data beg the question of precisely who is falsely conscious. Is it really truly just our families? Because while they tow the conservative line, we uphold a hierarchy that we are favorably positioned within. Who is more committed to their position? To a struggle? And as we have seen, each of these positions are relational, dialogically constitutive, and inherently contested, as is the issue of whether or not higher education is necessarily a vehicle for class liberation (e.g., Graduate #257).

What we don't hear in these "different world" responses is a positive account of difference held by graduates about family members. We don't even hear the stereotypic yet "complementary" formulations of working class people as hard-working, happy, practical, straight talking, etc. (Kay & Jost, 2003). There were notable exceptions which

are important to bring forward when presenting the range of experiences. Where we do see positive portrayals of family is in the "no differences" category (n=31; 12% of all responses in this category). Graduates in this category refuted any significant differences between them and their families, and clarified this in the examples they provided:

> *"Interestingly (to me), my politics are very similar to my parents, especially my father. I think we would articulate our reasoning a bit differently - present different rationale, but we would probably end up at the same place".* – Graduate #83 (White, Male, Professional)
>
> *"Values are similar, but level of exposure to different ideas, people and places is different. Not better or worse, just different. I have a different way of inhabiting space and place.*" – Graduate #164 (Black, Female, MA)
>
> *"Though my family has a limited education, we continue to share the same values, culture, education and others.*" – Graduate #314 (Black, Male, MA)
>
> *"I am the same person I would have been without a degree. My personality and the way I see the world is all my own. If it differs from the rest of my family that is cause I have different experiences not necessarily connected with education. For instance, I was born in Brooklyn a lot of my family members were born outside of America in countries that are comparatively conservative and traditional.*" – Graduate #35 (Black, Female, BA)

The first three graduate responses above emphasize having similar core values as family and identify differences between themselves and their family members in terms of expression, articulation, and embodiment of those values – they might take different routes and modes of transport, but they will "probably end up in the same place." Or in the case Graduate #35, differences exists, but are individual, idiosyncratic and not due to differences in educational attainment. She was not the only graduate who dismissed a connection between within-family differences and higher educational experiences. There doesn't seem to be much middle ground offering graduates and family members equal status and worth, that also allows for a positive understanding of difference. The

available discursive positions seem to be the identification with one's family, but with concomitant denial of difference, or an acknowledgement of differences between them, but then either a denial of the role of education, or the acceptance of a hierarchical positioning of graduates as 'better than.'

Summary. Graduates and their families often live in very different worlds, and this world is understood by graduates and the middle classes as being superior (morally, ethically, culturally) to the lives and worlds of the working class. This may well be due to the fact that my question asks specifically about difference, but still illustrates that differences related to college attainment is rarely understood neutrally, or positively, even (especially) within families -- and may even be understood differently by graduates and families (see Schutz, 2008).

We (educators, academics, middle class) value difference in a way that working class peoples don't always, and in fact can feel threatened by (Schutz, 2008; Stephens, Markus & Townsend, 2007). These differences are huge, creating emotional and relational canyons between graduates and families. This difference could be the basis of relational tension within the working class families for the following reasons: graduates and family distance themselves from one another -- through their own life choices, judgments, silence or emotional and geographical separation – in order to avoid conflict; families also distance themselves. One respondent even describes himself as an "observer" rather than a participant within his family (#234 Asian, Male, MA). Clinical psychologist Ross (1995) offers a beginning taxonomy of areas of tensions most likely to be associated with upwardly mobility and the resulting differences within families. Tension is associated with upward mobility "when one family member achieves

significantly more – or less—than others, and then does not fit in with the family group because of attempts to differentiate, manifested by changes in interest, points of view, and often, decreasing contact with the family of origin" (Ross, 1995; p. 340). These differences, attributed to higher education, must be considered as a distancing mechanism and an expected outcome of upward mobility through higher education for a significant number of first-generation college graduates.

While graduates effectively distinguish themselves from their families, they of course also remain ***of*** them as well. Graduates take great care to make clear that they don't think that they are better than, and that their families are mistaken, even over-sensitive when they accuse graduates of this. But the data reveal that graduates do accept some measure of the belief in their superiority, and that their families do recognize and respond to this "better than" dynamic.

But to be clear, this is the general perspective of first generation graduates, and not all or every graduate. Their family members might answer this question very differently, quite likely in ways that positively frame themselves, perhaps even as "better than" in positive yet stereotypic ways, such as being more practical or having more common sense. But as Kay & Jost (2003) find, these "complementary" ways of describing self or others (e.g., as being "poor but happy"), are also associated with greater system justification. Social science still knows very little about working class perceptions of and experiences with differential class mobility within the family. How this finding relates to family dynamics is addressed in the next area of inquiry chapter on family relations and power dynamics.

Open-ended item 3 (OE3): Family ambivalence. Survey participants were asked to respond to the following likert scale item:

Figure 1: Family Ambivalence Survey Item

"Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?"	**Extremely True & Fairly True**	**Neither True nor Untrue**	**Somewhat True & Not True**
% of respondents (N=330)	29.4%	24.2%	46.4%

Close to 30 percent (29.4%) indicated that this statement was either "extremely true" or "fairly true." Even though a larger percentage indicated that this was only "somewhat true" or "not true" (46.4% combined), and another 24.2% responded neutrally, this 29.4 percent still represents a sizable minority and illustrates the existence of family ambivalence around higher education in working class families. It should be noted that of those who answered this likert item, slightly over half chose not to provide an example in the open-ended follow up question. The 154 graduates responding to the open-ended follow-up question included both individuals who answered the likert item affirmatively as well as some who answered it negatively. Also, 54 of the responding graduates used this space to describe a lack or absence of any such ambivalence within their families, leaving 100 responses that described at least some form of ambivalence related to higher educational attainment within the graduates' family. "No-ambivalence" responses (N=54) constituted a sizable percentage (35.06%) of all responses to this open-ended item.

When we look into the content of this ambivalence as offered by respondents in the follow up question, family ambivalence tends to center around relational issues of status, hierarchy and inequality within the family. Graduates alternately also used this

space to describe their families and family relationships positively: 46 of all of the responses (inclusive of both examples of ambivalence and non-ambivalence) detailed their family's pride in their achievements or described higher education as a family value.

Table 17: "Educational Ambivalence" code explored

Themes within the "Educational Ambivalence" coding category	**% of Ambivalence responses (N=100)**	**% of all responses[33] (N=154)**
Grads as 'better' than (n=33)	33%	21.42%
"Other" ambivalences (n=28)	28%	18.18%
Disparaging educated people (n=27)	27%	17.53%
Degree unimportant/wasteful (n=21)	21%	13.63%
Positive Emerging Themes:		
Education as a family value (n=30)		19.48%
Family Pride (n=22)		14.28%

Positive emerging themes. As was the case for the responses to the first open-ended question (OE1) asking graduates to account for why they were of the 1st generation to earn a 4 year degree in their family, *Education as a Family Value* also emerged as theme in the responses to the current question. These coded responses (close to 20% of all item responses) similarly emphasized their families' support of higher education in general and/or for themselves in particular:

> *"It's instilled in us that education gives more exposure and opportunity to jobs which is what the next goal is...your career."* – Graduate #40 (Asian, Female, BA)

[33] Multiple coding will mean that the categories don't add up to 100 percent.

> *"My parents and family always talked about how getting and completing a college education will help a person succeed in life."* – Graduate #41 (White, Male, MA)

> *"My family looks upon higher education as a positive and realizes the importance of it as it relates to financial success."* – Graduate #129 (White, Female, MA)

> *"My family greatly values education and respects educated people."* – Graduate #313 (Black, Male, BA)

Family Pride in the graduate's achievement was another significant and positive theme evident in slightly under 15% of item responses. Pride was described in a few specific ways: pride (particularly parental pride) in the vicarious achievement of graduates:

> *"My mother is very smart but didn't have the opportunity to finish her education so she always made it clear to me how important education is and after getting that education she feels great that she has achieved what she wanted through me."* – Graduate #197 (Asian, Female, BA)

> *"My family is very proud of my accomplishment--it makes them feel as though they have bragging rights--substituting "our daughter the professor" for their own lack of education."* – Graduate #208 (White, Female, MA)

There was also situational pride, that is families were not always proud – but expressed more mixed or even conflicting emotions and opinions in different moments:

> *"Well, just because of the Graduate school I attend, my extended family look at me with both a sense of accomplishment and at times a look like oh she's too busy."* – Graduate #29 (Hispanic, Female, MA)

> *"My family is incredibly proud of my accomplishments. Their only disappointment might be that my career has taken me away from them in that I have not lived near them for nearly a decade."* – Graduate #69 (White, Female, PhD)

Graduates #29 and #69 (above) tell us that their families believed that their degree attainment played a distancing role between them, while Graduates #193, #218 and #327 (below) describe their families' pride as somewhat contingent on their downplaying of

difference, their display of family respect, and limiting the extent to which they 'educate' their family members:

> *"I think in many Black families education is prized as the major vehicle of social mobility but at the same time being too smart can be problematic and get you into trouble. I think is especially true for young Black girls. My family is proud of my academic achievements but annoyed when I use the same knowledge to challenge widely held beliefs and practices. As a child it was confusing and as an adult I've learned to pick my battles. My students call me Professor as a sign of respect but when my family members call me Professor it's kind of disrespectfully like--OMG here she comes with her theories and crap."* – Graduate #193 (Black, Female, MA)

> *"Now that I have a Ph.D. family members usually express pride in my accomplishment; even though they don't really know what it means except that very few people and perhaps no one they know besides me has one. But when I got my BA, most family members thought I was full of myself and perhaps they were right because I was always going on correcting people and telling them about theories and theorists I learned about in my classes. I don't do that anymore. I've learned to listen to them and try to understand their perspective. Now, I only interject my opinion when they ask for it and then I do so gingerly."* – Graduate #218 (Black, Female, PhD)

> *"Sometimes I keep my opinions to myself because they believe that because I have earned a degree that I am better than them. Other times they are proud to tell their friends and extended family of my achievements. It depends on the situation. Other times they will call me for advice.*" – Graduate #327 (Hispanic, Female, BA)

That "professor" can also be deployed as a means of disparagement (#193) illustrates the mixed views held by family members about academia, which their kin is now affiliated with. Graduate "theories" and opinions are viewed suspiciously, perhaps experienced negatively, even painfully, if they are used to challenge previously held views, or destabilize established relationships and power dynamics. Family members were also not uniformly proud as Graduates #55 and #194 explain:

> *"My parents seemed to be proud of my educational accomplishments; my brothers were more noncommittal."* – Graduate #55 (White, Female, MA)

> *"The fact is that the topic really doesn't come up. Both my parents told us that education was very important, even though they didn't have the chance to go far, they are very supportive. I would say that on occasion my brother is a little negative, although never in my presence but I believe it is because he really wants to go back to school and finish getting his BA and here I am working on my third degree. I think he just regrets not having finished it sooner."* – Graduate #194 (Female, MA, Queens College)

In both of the responses above siblings were seen as "noncommittal" or "negative" toward the educational attainment of the graduate in contradistinction from their parents' pride, again highlighting the very different dynamics existing between graduates and their siblings, than between graduates and their parents in relation to their disparate educational attainment also identified within the "Why first" findings (OE1). Thus, even within these pride responses, ambivalence -- as the simultaneously holding of multiple, "mixed," or conflicting positions or affects -- is apparent.

The battle of "better."

> *"They think I think I am smarter than they are."* – Graduate #14 (White, Female, MA)

> *"Many people in my family believe that people who have a college education aren't much smarter than they are. I beg to differ!"* – Graduate #187 (White, Female, MA)

The most frequently occurring theme in the "ambivalence within the family" responses surrounds the familiar family perception that graduates believe they are "better than" the less educated members of their families, and the community they came from. A third of the responses to this item (33%) touched on issues around the notion of graduate superiority. The prevalence of this issue doesn't mean that graduates actually believe that they are better than the other members of their family by virtue of their education, but just that it emerges as an area of tension and conflict within their families. Actually,

#187 stands out from the other responses in this category, in the assertion that she *did* actually believe that graduates (i.e., herself) are smarter than those without higher education experience (i.e., her family). More often, graduate's (like #14 above and those below) made reference to their families' belief, fear, accusation of such feelings of graduate superiority while distancing themselves from the actual belief:

> *"My immediate family is very suspicious of high education, particularly regarding religion and politics. There is also a concern about person with education being "know it alls" and looking down on uneducated people."* – Graduate #80 (White, Female, BA)

> *"I've been told during family arguments that "I think I'm better than they are" because of my advanced education. Lots of sarcastic/snarky comments about how "there are some things [like common sense] that you can't get from book-learning." I'm not better than my family, but I'm definitely different as a result of my advanced education, which can be a big problem/pain-in-the-ass during family disagreements."* – Graduate #182 (Hispanic, Male, PhD.)

Graduate #182 makes the point that he isn't better, but different than his family. This difference is in and of itself described by some graduates as a precondition of family tension and conflict. He also describes the reverse notion of working class superiority – that is, the disparagement of the college educated – which also emerges in the ambivalence examples.

"Educated fools." More than one graduate made reference to the phrase "educated fool" and more than a quarter (27%) of the responses to this question illustrated some degree of family disparagement of either the graduate or college educated people in general:

> *"I think there's a tendency to view college educated individuals with contempt."* – Graduate #100 (White, Male, MA)

> *"My family strongly feels that I am "uppity" and "cold" with no "family values" because I have not married and had children. It makes no sense to them and goes*

> *against their traditional ideas of gender difference. They recommend psychiatric treatment for me to help me see that I should marry =)*". – Graduate #186 (White, Female, PhD)

> *"I was told that when one is educated or 'over educated,' one tends to be possessed or adulterated by the flames of liberalism."* – Graduate #192 (White, Female, MA)

> *"They think people who are educated are dumb. I'm always told that I have too much education but no common sense when I have a conversation with them and absolutely no nouns are used in the entire conversation. I ask for the "who" and I'm ridiculed for not reading minds. FUCK!"* -- Graduate #231 (Black, Female, PhD)

Some graduates believe their families are contemptuous of college educated individuals, while other families frame educated people as actually the opposite of smart; "dumb" in important domains like "common sense." Graduate #186 reports that her family oppositionally positions females and schooling, pathologizing her choices to delay or forego marriage and children. Graduate #231 is "ridiculed for not reading minds," but also for not being able to read their social and cultural cues without footnotes. From her perspective, she is criticized when she does try to participate in family conversations. Her "FUCK!" expresses extreme frustration attempting to navigate what must feel like an impossible dilemma, centering around whether she is or isn't one of "them."

Ross (1995) talks about the "defensive beliefs" of families that disrespect upper class and college related things. Defensive or buffering responses (see Cross, 2011) are apparent on both sides of the educated/uneducated divide.

> *"I think there is a bit of identity protection that goes on through some social creativity strategies: smart people have no common sense, things like that."* – Graduate #93 (White, Female, PhD., 2005)

> *"One brother expressed that life experiences are much better than college education."* – Graduate #113(White, Female, MA, 1983)

> *"Comments about book knowledge not being as apt as common sense." –* Graduate #164 (Black, Female, MA, 2009)

> *"There is sometimes a belief that "booksmart" people are not practical" –* Graduate #228 (Black, Female, PhD, 2010)

> *"My father said, 'a lot of these college students are stupid'. My uncle said, 'A college degree is just a receipt for all the money you spent going there.'" –* Graduate #232 (Black, Female, BA, 2006)

> *"There have been remarks made that an education doesn't give you any sense." –* Graduate #*309* (White, Female, MA, 1989)

The responses of family members as reported by graduates illustrate a different/alternative valuation of personal qualities, inversing the "better than" dynamic, and revealing some negative affect toward college educated:

> *"only for non-professional degrees. Doctors, lawyers, etc. are admired, PhDs are not – 'not serious'"* – Graduate #120 (White, Female, MA, 1991)

> *"There is a lack of trust in people who are too educated. They also have voiced their concerns that 'educated' people will look down at them because of their lack of education.* – Graduate #51 (White, Male, PhD., 2005)

The responses below reveal another category of ambivalence related to the issue of perceived graduate superiority: the (direct or indirect) disparagement of the graduate coupled with the disproportionate shouldering of responsibility for the welfare of their family:

> *"Some of my family like to say they "work harder" than I do, but at the same time I am the one they come to to "fix things" when things become a problem such as insurance or medical matters or advice."* – Graduate #111 (White, Female, BA)

> *"They parade me like a trophy ("look at my daughter who's a university graduate") and at the same time tell me "what do you know about life, you are just a child" -- in the meantime I am responsible for the family's financial welfare."* – Graduate #82 (Asian, Female, MA)

> *"My mother thinks that because I am psychologist, I should be able to deal with family problems or disagreements in a "professional" way."* – Graduate #143

Graduate #340 represents the opposite phenomena, where their parents choose to seek assistance from the least educated family member:

> *"As my parents get older, they rely on my brother, who has a GED, instead of asking me (M.A.), middle sister (A.A.) or younger sister (M.A.). Mistakes are made and problems are not resolved. No one communicates."* – Graduate #340

"Other" Ambivalences. The 2nd largest category of ambivalence (28% of ambivalence responses) was coded "Other," and consists of a wide range of ambivalences occurring within a number of contexts and concerning a variety of issues, thus resisting further thematic coding. These "other" ambivalences were both ideological (e.g., gender-specific educational expectations for males versus females within the family) and personal (internal conflict regarding whether the pursuit of a degree and career was at the expense of starting one's own family). Psychological ambivalence was often apparent within the responses themselves, concerning, for example, envy/jealousy of family members (typically siblings), conflicting views of higher education between family members (e.g., one parent was supportive, while the other is/was not), ambivalence about the benefits of college when it is viewed as an intervention putting distance between the graduate and family, or the fact that a degree doesn't necessarily translate into a higher income than other family members without such credentialing. The concept of ambivalence and the data will be deeply investigated within the third section addressing ideological ambivalences.

Introduction to Interview Participants

This chapter provides a brief profile, more sketch than portrait, of those interview participants whose experiences are discussed in depth and quoted within the following *area of inquiry* chapters. Each profile offers demographic information, family background, relationship with family, school and employment history/experiences, and major life issues at the time of interview. These aren't mutually exclusive categories, so overlap and inter-connectedness within these aspects is evident. Graduate and sibling pairs are presented first: Ernesto (graduate) and his sister, Angelica; Noah (graduate) and his sister Sharon. Individual graduates (Esperanza, Una, Nikki, Kenneth, Wendy, Gena, Noreen) are presented next, and then other family members: Cora (Noreen's mother) and Desiree (a sibling of graduates).

A range of people participated in this project, varying by age, year degree was earned, highest degree earned (ranging from BA to PhD), how long it took to earn their first degree, whether they went to a public or private institution, resided on campus or commuted from home. While my intent was to have family member and graduate pairs participate, graduates who were interested in participating in an interview, were not necessarily interested in inviting their family members to participate, and in those cases where an invitation was extended, family members were not necessarily interested in participating either. The result was a sample of first-generation college graduates, and a smaller sample of family members of graduates (3 of which had a participating family member). All but one of the family participants were siblings to a first-generation graduate, and one mother ("Cora") participated. All participating family members were female. Because of the very small numbers of interested family members, I included

every person interested in participating in an interview. Future research efforts will need to focus on the specific recruitment of males, parents and extended family members.

Sibling Pairs

Ernesto ("Ernie") and his older sister, Angelica. Ernesto ("Ernie") was in his late 20's when we met, and identified as Puerto Rican American. Ernie presented himself as a polite and respectful young man – he was warm and easy to talk to. He was the youngest child and the first – and favored -- son between his mother and father. Ernie grew up in public housing with two older sisters and his mother. His father and extended family live in Puerto Rico. Ernie says his family is close, but that they could be closer. Although it was clear that he cared deeply about his small family, seeing them quite regularly, he didn't feel he could talk openly and freely with all members. He and his father rarely talked in depth, and he described his mother and eldest sister as "closed" in their thinking. While his father favored him for his gender, his father spoke more openly with his sister Angelica because of her gender ("men don't talk"). Ernie was also especially close to Angelica, because he says, they spent the most time together growing up, and continued to live near each other. Ernie wished that he could talk to his family about "life" matters without always getting advice from them. Although his family kept Ernie informed of the major developments and decisions in their lives, only the younger members of his family (his nieces and nephews) consulted him for advice.

Ernie was the first in his family to graduate high school as well as to earn a college degree. He was the only one of 15 or so boys he grew up with in his public housing complex to do so. He was fortunate to have attended a respected small high school and participated in a well-established community youth program, both of which

significantly supported his college going. Ernie also had a lot of support from his family for his educational pursuits. They respected higher education and had especially high hopes for him, as both of his older sisters became parents themselves while still in high school.

Ernie earned his degree from a small and elite liberal arts college in the East during the 1990's. His transition from New York City to the mostly White residential campus was a difficult one, and he described feeling isolated and homesick his first year away at school. He didn't feel like he could talk to his family because they wouldn't know how to support him, or what to say. Ernie, like many of the participating graduates, described being intellectually and socially intimidated at college. He now wishes that he would have participated more, reached out more, and applied himself more instead of getting "overwhelmed by the fear." Instead, he was scattered and somewhat haphazard in his academic path, and it took much exploration and false starts before deciding on his major.

At the time of the interview, Ernie was exploring career options, an approach his family did not understand. He held multiple part-time jobs in the non-profit sector, and was considering careers in teaching/education or real estate. There was an open and ongoing dialogue within his family about how his degree would pay off (financially), of how exactly his struggle through college would be made "worth it" for both himself and his family. He felt that his family was anxious to know what he would do now that he had a degree. His family wanted to see him in a long term stable position with benefits. His preference was to teach or work with young people, while his interest in real estate was primarily financial. He enjoyed having multiple jobs, finding it more interesting to have

varied tasks and work settings. After college he took a position with the community organization that supported his college pursuit. He had a hard time finding a job after funding for this position evaporated, and ended up working at a high pressure mortgage company, which he quit after a year. For quite some time afterward, he provided informal childcare for his family, while he looked for another position. They believed that the opportunities were there, but that he wasn't taking advantage of them. For Ernie, it was more complicated. He didn't want to take a job where he earned only slightly more than minimum wage, or a position that didn't even require a degree.

Angelica. Angelica is Ernie's older sister by 3 years and the middle child in her family of origin. While she is also a first generation college graduate, for this project she was interviewed as a family member. Her younger brother was the first in their family to earn a college degree, but in many ways, she traveled the furthest. Her journey from a teenage mother and high school dropout, to college graduate took 10 years of diligence, sacrifice and tremendous effort. She earned her GED, and then progressed through an Associates program at a CUNY community college, and later enrolled into a BA program at CUNY. Along the way, she transferred to Hunter College, where she ultimately earned her BA in Sociology. She was the 2nd in her family to do so and had plans to earn an MA.

Angelica pursued her degree for greater career options, financial security and to feel good about herself. However, her intense investment in the degree wasn't just about earning a credential -- she enjoyed the content of her courses and the learning process. Even though her brother had already successfully navigated college, their experiences were so different that Angelica still felt like she was on her own in terms of academic support during her years of coursework. This speaks to the significant structural and

experiential differences between residential and commuter campuses, public and private schools, age of enrollment, a GED background versus a college prep curriculum.

Even though many would argue that Angelica came the furthest, exerting perhaps more effort to earn the same degree, Ernie's degree is seen as the greater accomplishment, and his path represents the preferred model of the college endeavor for the next generation. This differential valuation is epitomized by their strikingly different marking of their respective accomplishments: there was a whole family celebration for Ernie's graduation, while Angelica didn't attend her graduation, feeling that she didn't make strong connections during her long journey, and also felt her BA was only one phase of her academic path.

Angelica describes her family as particularly close. She described feeling strongly connected to all members of her family, but in different ways. She identified with her older sister as a parent, and young mother, while she was most comfortable talking to Ernesto about more "worldly" matters. At the time of our interview, Angelica was raising her teenage daughter and pregnant with her 2nd child. Her family helped her through her long college struggle by providing childcare for her daughter. She worried that the birth of this child would spell the end of the road of her academic dreams. She even asked herself within the interview what the point was of all her hard work if she will "just have to stay home with a baby."

Noah and his older sister, Sharon. Noah was born and raised in the Bronx, in a largely White ethnic neighborhood (Italian, Jewish, Russian, Albanian). He attended a Yeshiva through middle school and then graduated a year early from a public high school. Noah is the youngest of 4 children; his eldest brother is 16 years his senior,

followed by his 3 older sisters. His 2 eldest siblings had moved out on their own by the time Noah enrolled in college.

Noah describes his family as "pretty close," as everyone lives in fairly close proximity to one another, the furthest of his siblings living only 2 hours away. "I kind of feel close to all of them. Like, we're all pretty close with each other, but we give each other space. We're not one of those enmeshed families where we're all in each other's business all the time, but when we get together we enjoy the time that we spend together." He says that, for the most part, there is very little conflict in his family.

Noah was 16 when he graduated from high school and enrolled at Hunter College under the advisement of his parents who saw him as especially bright and in need of a suitable activity to occupy him before entering the world of work. He lived at home during his studies and commuted to school from the Bronx. Noah described feeling especially proud after having earned his BA degree in the 1980's, explaining:

> *At that time, I felt "oh so accomplished. I mean, you couldn't tell me anything [laughing]. I had a bachelor's degree and you know, I thought that was all I needed. Like I thought it was like a free ride for the rest of my life, you know."*

His feelings about that achievement changed very quickly when looking for employment. "I remember going to employment agencies in the city and the first question out of everybody's mouth was, 'Can you type?' I was like, excuse me? Like, I have a Bachelor's degree. And I remember saying it to one of the agents and she said, 'so does everybody else in the waiting room.' And *that* like totally knocked me down a peg." After working in publishing for many years, he eventually went back to school to earn a Masters in social work once he realized that the acting career he aspired to wouldn't likely materialize. He was employed as a social worker at the time of our interview.

Like Ernie, he believed that his educational attainment also positively impacted his older sister's educational attainment:

> **Noah:** Um…hmm. I think honestly had I not gone to college, my sister probably would *not* have gone. Um..I don't think that they would have treated me any differently. I'll say this, I think my family had high expectations of me academically because I ..had skipped a grade and graduated early. I think they had this perception of me that I was the genius in the family, which I really wasn't, but I think for them, I was.
>
> **April:** and did she talk to you about, you know, that process?
>
> **Noah:** Yes. She was...actually, I think what happened was she was gonna go to a regular 4 year college and just take forever to do it and I remember mentioning to her that there were accelerated programs for adults returning to school. And I told her of a school I knew and she ended up looking into it and going there.

Sharon. Sharon was in her early 40's, married and had 2 children in grade school at the time of our interview. She and her family live in a suburb in the Tristate area. She chose to pursue college as personal and intellectual goal, more as an aspect of self-fulfillment and actualization than for financial or professional gains as she held a stable, well-compensated administrative position. She entered college to get a "true education," to learn about many topics, and to better "understand" the world around her.

She is the third (and Noah is the fourth) sibling in their family of 4 children. Both she and Noah believe that his having earned a college degree played an important role in facilitating Sharon's eventual enrollment and completion of a BA degree. She came to Noah for input and support for her college ambitions, and he advised her to consider an accelerated degree program for non-traditionally college aged students, which she pursued. Her mother's significant help with childcare, her brother's support translating the expectations of college and his moral support for her to continue at her break neck speed was crucial to her success.

While her family of origin was supportive and expressed pride in Sharon, her created family experienced tension and stress while she was doing her coursework. Her college endeavors were at odds with the perceived needs of her created family; her husband was vocally and consistently unsupportive or her college pursuit. She described feeling a tremendous amount of guilt around time spent away from her children and unresolved resentment from her unsupportive spouse.

While she was older than Angelica when she entered college, she was able to finish in much less time. Sharon enjoyed her coursework, especially her Psychology classes. She described a feeling of camaraderie with her classmates in part because of the intense and compressed commitment of her accelerated program, and common non-traditional age. However, she also brought her social support with her, enrolling with a dear friend who she "did everything with." At the time of our interview, Sharon was deciding between an MSW or Teachers Education program to matriculate into in the future, but her "dream job is to be a school social worker with adolescent girls."

Angelica and Sharon differ in many ways (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, community, family background), but their narratives also have much in common: lack of educational focus early on, children, a younger brother who completed college first, and then their long pursuit of a BA, both are close to their brothers. Also, the support they receive from brother differs, but the fact that their younger brothers went first influenced them, particularly Angelica, who even implies that it wasn't an option until her brother achieved it first ("it wasn't in the family yet").

First-Generation College Graduates:

Esperanza. Esperanza was in her late 20's at the time of the interview; she is a 1st generation American, identifying as Latina; her parents are from Central America and the Dominican Republic.

Esperanza is the youngest child in her family by many years and has an older brother and sister. She describes herself as exceptionally close to her parents, who she and her boyfriend were living with at the time of the interview. During our interview, she discussed her deep involvement in her parent's lives, describing her significant influence on both major and minor household decisions, including financial matters. She and her parents vacationed together and at the time of the interview were considering buying a house together. This type of closeness and all around intimacy with her parents did not include her older siblings, who lived in their own households and existed more independently from the family of origin. Esperanza described conflict with her older sister that she attributed to her sister's emotional reaction to the differences in their educational levels, life opportunities and relationship with their parents. Her siblings' opportunities for higher education were limited by circumstance, as well as a lack of full support from their parents. At the time of the interview, Esperanza's sister was planning to return to school to pursue her Bachelor's degree.

Esperanza offers us a clear American dream narrative. As a 1st generation American having grown up in "the projects," she felt extremely fortunate in her ability to go away to college and the associated opportunities that that venture brought, such as international travel, expanded social relationships, and greater job opportunity. She felt her parent's immense pride in her accomplishments, but also felt intense pressure from

them to succeed. Her parents came to the United States as teens and worked extremely hard, often from early morning until late at night, at low paying service sector jobs to provide for their family. Esperanza doesn't remember her father being home much during her childhood. She consequently saw her success as a communal resource and as a benefit to her family as well as herself.

Esperanza earned her BA from a small liberal arts college in the East. Her residential campus was primarily white and she felt both marked and socially isolated while in college. She earned her MSW directly after her undergraduate years, and was working in a counseling position at the time of the interview. She wasn't settled in that position and expressed her interest in pursuing further graduate study, but was unclear on a specific career direction.

Esperanza talked fast, words and emotions swirled out almost constantly, and yet it was clear throughout our conversation that she was simultaneously reflecting on, interpreting and reinterpreting, her experiences, making sense of them as both a counselor and as herself. She was quick to smile and laugh, but also very serious about the research topic. Esperanza tended to be open and forthcoming about her family and experiences, and at times, quite emotional when talking about her family, especially her sister who she described as having a fraught hot/cold relationship with.

Una. Una was born in Taiwan, and came to the US in high school. She is the third of 4 children, and the only girl. No one in her family was supportive of her desire to go to college and earn a degree. Her oldest brother was especially hostile to the idea. She was admitted to Cornell but wasn't able to attend because her parents said they were going to

support her younger brother in college instead (as he was male). He enrolled, but later dropped out of, an Ivy League University despite Una doing some of her brother's homework out of a sense of familial duty. She supported herself through college, and after much solitary perseverance, she graduated with a BA in accounting economics from CUNY, and went on to earn an MBA. Her family still believes that her pursuit of higher education has been detrimental to her and their family. When asked if she thought this was due to her ethnic culture or her specific family, she attributed their lack of support for her achievement as an element of her family's dysfunction.

Una worked and studied a lot during college, but didn't have much of a social life or make lasting friendships. Like Ernie, she also expressed the wish that she had been more involved at school, and more connected. She had to work especially hard as a non-native English speaker and tried many majors and paths before landing on economics which she found "easy." She was a successful consultant for a major accounting firm for many years, but had chosen to retire from that field. She worked in a non-profit social service agency at the time of the interview.

She described her family as not close at all, and in fact indicated that they rarely talk. She saw her role within the family as facilitator of the family's communication, but often felt thwarted in this endeavor. She wished that her family was closer, that they would choose to spend time together, for no particular reason (as opposed to the formal events requiring attendance like major birthdays, weddings, funerals). She is closest to her younger brother, but doesn't attribute their closeness to their close age, or the fact that they both are the only ones with any college experience in her family. Instead, she

explained their closeness as the result of her allowing him to live his life without her constant advising ("nagging") him.

Una's parents both wanted to pursue college degrees, but lacked the financial resources to do so. Her mother attempted a nursing degree in the U.S., but her limited English made it difficult to continue, even with Una significantly helping with her homework. Una's father would sometimes tell people that he had in fact earned a college degree because the institution that he attended for job training in Taiwan later became a university.

Kenneth. Kenneth, who identified as African American, was born in the south and spent his early childhood there, but grew up in Harlem. The middle son in a family 5, he was raised by his single mother. He did well in the public school he attended, and was placed in gifted classes early on. He attributed his early success in school, in part, to a lack of self-control, explaining that he "didn't have the self-control to *not* to raise my hand – answers came to me, I blurted them out. So, even though I was pretty, I guess, academically inclined, I still had a little discipline self-control to develop, which took a long time." At the urgings and support of his middle school teachers, Kenneth applied for and earned a scholarship to an elite private high school. At 13 he went away to boarding school, where he would graduate high school. He was initially very hesitant about going away school, explaining "It would have been my first time away from home for an extended period of time. I was a mommy's boy." But his mother insisted, arguing that, "well you know, this is the best thing for you, so but you're going! I want your life to be better than mine."

Kenneth describes his early experiences at prep school as a cultural and academic "shock" that he was still contending with. His prep school peers were chauffeured in while he arrived with a duffle bag by bus. This difference made a strong impression on him, and he struggled with a new sense of relative deprivation that he didn't feel at home as the son of promise. He majored in economics and calculus at a top ranked private university in the Northeast. College for him was an easier transition as much of his experience felt like a review of his prep school years. However, he didn't pursue a career in a related field, but took a position in broadcasting out of state for many years. After relocating back to New York, he worked at several different jobs. At the time of our interview, he was a certified paralegal and active in his church.

He describes his family as a matriarchy and "very very very close." They regularly communicated by phone, and he visited weekly with his mother. He indicated that one of his motivations for going to college was to one day be able to buy his mother a house. He succeeded in that goal, but his mother wasn't actually interested in living there, and instead preferred her apartment in Harlem. He was also especially close to his older sister (his older brother was deceased). Kenneth did see himself as somewhat more separate from his family of origin, in part because he went away early. While Kenneth didn't mention his younger brother much who lived in the south with his own family, he did convey respect for him and his life's path (he did not finish high school), when he did mention him. While his family is close, there is much that they don't talk about that Kenneth wished they did (e.g., his father in particular).

At the time of the interview, Kenneth was in his late 40's and happily married and the father of a son in grade school. He hoped his son would want to follow in his

footsteps and attend prep school, and he was actively encouraging him by taking him to visit his alma mater.

Nikki. Nikki, a graduate of an elite campus of the University of California system, is a very accomplished and ambitious woman in her 40's. She holds multiple MA degrees in education and social work. She grew up Queens, in a middle-class African American neighborhood. Her father served in the military and worked in corrections while her mother was in banking.

A single mother of a young son, she describes being close with her family of origin (with the exception of her older sister), and she was especially close to her father. Family was important to her, and she had recently moved back to New York to be closer to her parents, who lived a few blocks away from her at the time of the interview. She and her son ate dinner with her family most evenings. She got along well with her brother and his family, who lived out of state, and was in frequent telephone contact. She described a complicated relationship with her older sister, who is mental ill.

Nikki excelled in high school, and felt a lot of personal and family pressure to succeed, as her older brother never graduated from high school, and her sister was still pursuing her BA degree after many years and personal pitfalls. Nikki also was determined to defy racial stereotypes she felt were projected onto her as a black woman. She reported enjoying college and was involved in student activities, especially with her campus church group. At the time of our interview, she was pursuing a 2nd MA degree in education and was confident in her ability to support her family.

Gena. Gena is of the first generation to earn a college degree, but was not the first of her siblings to do so. Her older sister went to Columbia, and encouraged her sister to

enroll there as well. She has many siblings, most of which had some college experience, or had earned their degrees but from schools that were less prestigious than the one she earned her degree from.

Gena really takes her time to think about her responses before she speaks. She speaks slowly, choosing her words carefully. She was exceptionally confident in her undeniable abilities and competencies. She forwarded a meritocratic worldview, believing that success is available to anyone willing to work hard; and presented herself as ambitious and professionally driven.

She described her schooling experiences as intense and formative experiences for her. She felt under threat and unwelcome in the perceived hostile environments of her Catholic primary school and later, elite university. In elementary school she was often under threat of expulsion – for the day or longer -- for non-payment of tuition, and although she had adequate funding in college, she faced racial and class-based marginalization, culminating in calls for her impeachment during her tenure in student government which she felt was racially and class motivated. She also felt under attack while in college for her strong religious convictions.

She described her family as loud, but close and loving. However, she also mentioned tension and conflict with her parents and siblings, centering around others' perception of her as arrogant and emotionally cool. She discussed conflict with sister closest in age around the notion that Gena thinks she better than other members or her family. Gena insists that this is not the case, but reveals in her other characterizations of self and family that in many ways she does believe she is stronger, braver, smarter than

them. Gena also experienced guilt in regards to the sacrifices that her older siblings made, specifically their own educationally ambitions, to support her college pursuit and success.

Gena had experience in lobbying, and was interested in pursuing social policy at the city and state level. At the time of our interview she was working in a counseling position at a public high school.

Wendy. Wendy, a white woman in her early 30's, grew up in a midsized city in the East, with her mother, older brother and much younger sister. She describes her hometown as racially divided, and saw the almost uniformly White side," that she grew up on as "racist" and "exclusionary."

Her brother was the first to go to college and she followed him a year later. Her mom was known as the smart one in her family, but had unrealized college aspirations for herself, and instead, worked in service industry jobs during Wendy's childhood. She passed these ambitions on to her children, all of whom had earned a degree, or were enrolled (i.e., her younger sister) at the time of our interview. Growing up, her mom supported their family by working as a waitress, and later moved on to an administrative position. At the time of our interview, her mother had opened her own small business.

Wendy emphasized that she and her mother were not close growing up, explaining, "I mean, we were very close in some ways, like survival mode close, but then..not, at the same time. Like, my mom sort of always treated us like, oh you're an adult and you have your own life." She goes on to explain that although they spent a lot of time together growing up, it wasn't family time per se, "we didn't do this nice kind of family thing that I think of as what families do." And yet, she does say that she grew up very connected with her extended family, particularly her aunts and uncles, who she is

still fairly close to. Her father wasn't in the picture but at some point her mother remarried a man who Wendy wasn't especially fond of.

As adults, Wendy is closest to her brother, whom she consults with on important matters. In terms of the other way around, her mother only comes to her children after there is a problem, not before at the decision making stage. At the time of our interview, Wendy was much less connected to her extended family, but still in occasional but friendly contact.

Wendy was in the final stages of completing her PhD. in Anthropology at the time of our interview and worked as an organizer around issues of economic justice in a non-profit advocacy organization. She was in a long term committed relationship and had a young child.

Noreen. Noreen is the youngest of 2 children; her sister is 5 years her senior and lives with her son and their mother, *Cora*. She grew up in a predominantly Black and working-class neighborhood in Queens. She describes herself as outgoing although her family sees her as a loner. Noreen always wanted to go to college and didn't believe that her family played any significant role in that process. Her mother, Cora, also gives Noreen most of the credit for getting herself to and through college.

It took Noreen many years (10+) of part-time study, and full-time employment to work her way through college. She worked her way up to the executive level in the corporate sector, which required intense work commitments in addition to her part time school commitments. She began her studies at Hunter College, but then transferred to Queens College, where she earned her degree in Philosophy, graduating with honors. She

said that she wanted a true college experience, not just "classes after work." Noreen "had a really great time at Queens college. I got everything I needed, I got to join clubs and..you know, meet people and learn and it was a nice campus. I had a really great time. It was what my..*dreams* fulfilled was." She felt deep pride and accomplishment when she graduated, especially because she was able to graduate debt-free, something that her family is also especially proud of. Noreen's work life and educational pursuits were mutually supportive but ultimately separate endeavors. Although she didn't have plans to leave the corporate sector, she did hope to one day enroll in a graduate program, but hadn't yet decided on the type of program.

Noreen joked that she and her family are "too damn close" because they spend so much time together. She lived within walking distance from her parents, and sister and nephew who also lived with her parents. Her whole family was connected by their mutual care and love for her sister's special-needs son. Her family talked frequently to one another, getting together often, including for family meals. While they are close, they usually deal with personal issues/problems on their own, separate from their family. Noreen explained that members of her family typically deal with conflict in a direct manner, with one person usually telling another that they are "getting on my nerves." Neither Noreen nor Cora identified any particular area of conflict. However, Noreen did indicate that she tends to be somewhat distant from her family, and that they (and she) understand her to be different from them. But this difference was seen as historical, idiosyncratic and not a target for revision.

Family Members

Cora (Noreen's Mother). Cora was in her mid 60's at the time of the interview, and identified as African American. She grew up in Brooklyn and Queens; an only child raised by her single mother in the 1950's. She described her father as physically abusive, and out of the picture for that reason. She met her husband in high school and they married shortly after their graduation. She has two daughters, and one grandson that she is especially close to.

Cora identified as a bookkeeper at heart, she loved numbers and dealing with money in both her paid and volunteer work. Cora has done a variety of jobs, and at the time of our interview, worked as a Kitchen Coordinator at a senior center. She never considered college for herself, in part because she found the discursive demands especially aversive: "..certain parts of school I didn't like, like English and, and ..saying the words. I hate writing sentences, I hate writing uh, uh stories". While she describes mostly enjoying school, she was most confident in the world of work. College was not a specific goal or dream she held for her children: "I wanted it for them if they wanted it." She was supportive in her own way, which was in giving them the freedom to pursue that path, but she wasn't able to contribute financially to that endeavor. Her eldest daughter completed a few semesters of college, but then decided she would rather pursue paid work. Cora emphasizes that her youngest daughter Noreen "always wanted to go" to college.

Cora describes their family as especially close. They all live geographically very nearby and have family meals together weekly. They talk or see each other 3-4 times a week. Her eldest daughter and grandson live with her. Cora stresses that she is close to

everyone (but singles out her grandson when explicitly asked), demonstrating the importance of equality within the family. In their family, there is not a strong "better than" dynamic that favors Noreen. In fact, the power dynamic within the family seems to favor Cora as the mother and matriarch of the family.

Desiree. Desiree identified as African American, and comes from a large family with many siblings, a third of which grew up in the South, while she and her other siblings mostly lived in the boroughs of NYC. She and her siblings were raised by their single mother, who was deceased at the time of our interview. She locates herself chronologically in the middle of all her siblings. Desiree was in her 40's at the time of the interview, and worked in customer service for a national transportation company. Her eldest brother and sister both have degrees (an MA and BA respectively), and very early on in the interview, Desiree compares her standard of living against theirs, explicitly longing for their quality of life, characterized by material security and comfort.

Her mother did not graduate from high school, but Desiree did and completed a year of community college before dropping out. She describes having done well in high school by showing up and being good (being a "goody two shoes"), strategies that do not guarantee success in college the way they might in an urban high school. Desiree tends to blame herself for not earning a college degree although within the interview, she does describe the significant impediments to her college success (enrolled in a community college, as a single parent to an infant, and pregnant with her second child, working more than part-time), indicating her awareness of the contextual factors hindering her educational success.

She describes her family neutrally, indicating that closeness is relationship-specific: she was closest with those family members without formal education, and the least close with her two siblings who hold college degrees (eldest brother and eldest sister). In fact, she described a lot of conflict and tension with her degreed-siblings, centering around their disproportionate success and privilege. However, Desiree also expressed a strong desire to be closer to them as well.

At the time of our interview, Desiree felt grateful for, but also “stuck” in her job, lacking any real hope for advancement or an improvement of circumstance without a college degree. She didn’t see herself going back to school, but did never the less, still see it as an option. Desiree has 2 young adult sons, who she hoped would go to college, but indicated that she also didn’t think that this was likely either.

Educational Values and Meritocratic Faith

> The white folk of Altamaha voted John a good boy,—fine plough-hand, good in the rice-fields, handy everywhere, and always good-natured and respectful. But they shook their heads when his mother wanted to send him off to school. "It'll spoil him,—ruin him," they said; and they talked as though they knew. But full half the black folk followed him proudly to the station, and carried his queer little trunk and many bundles. And there they shook and shook hands, and the girls kissed him shyly and the boys clapped him on the back. So the train came, and he pinched his little sister lovingly, and put his great arms about his mother's neck, and then was away with a puff and a roar into the great yellow world that flamed and flared about the doubtful pilgrim. […]And they that stood behind, that morning in Altamaha, and watched the train as it noisily bore playmate and brother and son away to the world, had thereafter one ever-recurring word,— "When John comes." Then what parties were to be, and what speakings in the churches; what new furniture in the front room,—perhaps even a new front room; and there would be a new schoolhouse, with John as teacher; and then perhaps a big wedding; all this and more—when John comes. But the white people shook their heads.
>
> -- W.E.B. Dubois (1903), On the Coming of John

Much has changed since Dubois wrote *On the Coming of John*, though less than is conscionable. Working class families, particularly families of color, nurture tremendous hope and pride in the young adults they send into the world of higher education, envisioning joy and celebration, financial and material gains, returns for their family, community and scholar alike. Like John's people, the families of most first-generation college graduates kissed them goodbye while sneaking their own dreams into promising coat pockets, sent wild longings hidden in care packages, while hazy fears of deep change and loss, doubts about their ability to understand the new languages their sister or brother, son or daughter was learning to speak, stowed away in the recesses of their waited return. The educationally privileged and class dominant, continue to shake their heads, aware that the college experience of one will increase the aspirations of others -- and also generate dissatisfaction and unrest. Though the education of the subordinately raced and

classed might not spell the same trouble to hierarchy it once did, higher education still retains the power to reshape vision and language, psychological thought and social relations. The current power elite shake their heads too at the naïveté of the panacean belief in the power of a degree.

This chapter is an exploration of participants' educational values and justice beliefs in the context of unequal opportunities and disparate educational outcomes within the family:

RQ1: In what ways are educational values and justice beliefs (e.g., support of meritocracy) affected by the higher educational successes of one member of the family? For example, how does the higher educational attainment of one (or some) member(s) of a working-class family impact the commitment to the idea of meritocracy? How does it shape graduates' and family members' beliefs about the value and accessibility of higher education? Four different types of data provide the analytic ground for addressing this first (and subsequent) areas of inquiry, including a factor analysis of online survey data, a qualitative thematic analysis of three open-ended survey items, and a discursive analysis of interview data from interviews with both first-generation college graduates and family members of graduates.

Graduates: The Meritocratic Faithful

> *There's certain realizations that I, that I come to in my college career that if I work really hard, I can achieve what was considered impossible, and there are—there is really unlimited potential in life that I don't have to be..be told by others what I can do and what I cannot do. As long as I believe in it, and as long as I wanted to, I think I really can do whatever project or goal I set up for myself.* – Una, first-generation college graduate

Una, a first-generation college graduate and Taiwanese immigrant, voices the gospel of other first-generation college graduates who have sacrificed much, worked exceptionally hard, and whose success was significantly supported by some form of seemingly divine intervention encountered along the way. Her subscription to a meritocratic belief system – that with hard work she can achieve "what was considered impossible" -- is realized specifically through her college experience. Her successful, though improbable, navigation of the higher education system has cemented her commitment to the notion of equality of opportunity and the legitimacy of merit. At the same time though, her use of the word 'impossible' to describe the likelihood of her success hints at the constricted nature of social mobility within the United States (NYT, DeParle, January 4, 2012), and the multiply contingent nature of the meritocratic bargain: in addition to hard work, she must also be faithful -- her hope, her dreaming and dedication must be unwavering, or she is potentially held accountable for any limits to her success.

Kenneth, who grew up in Harlem and attended an elite prep school, narrated a similar conviction in the power of self and the efficacy of action. Like several of the graduates interviewed, this faith was strengthened by the college outcomes they experienced, and further reinforced by the perceived stagnation of those without college experience:

> **April:** How would your life be different if you had never gone to college?
>
> **Kenneth:** [..] I don't think I would have the understanding that if I work, I can *get* what I am striving for. College does show you that. I mean, for me it did. When I worked, and I busted my butt, good things happened and when I didn't, it didn't happen. So it taught me that, you know what, apply yourself and things will be better than what they are. If you don't apply yourself then they're just going to be what they are if not worse. If I want something different, I have to do different

> things. So i think that if didn't go to college, I wouldn't have gotten that experience. I wouldn't have-- One thing about college that I really liked, is that no matter what I did one semester, if I learned from what I didn't do, or learned from what I did and didn't do the same thing, I could do better. There was always an opportunity to better myself, academically, socially, whatever. There was always that opportunity. So it taught me that I could do better regardless if I would just learn from prior situation. […]

Kenneth connects his college experience with an increased awareness of, and commitment to, the notion of meritocracy. He points out that no matter what, if he tries and puts forth the effort, he can always do better. The question is, how much better? And how much effort is required. Are there circumstances under which, despite such efforts, things get worse? Several times during the interview, he connected himself with his high profile classmates from prep school and college as examples of the social capital he has gained, but made no mention of calling on them for his own advancement (just the advancement of some of his family and friends).

On a broader scale, quantitative survey data (presented below) indicate that this sample of first-generation college graduates similarly endorses meritocratic beliefs, both in general and specifically regarding themselves, as a majority credit themselves for much of their educational success (items a and b), and roughly three quarters of respondents believe that success is available to anyone putting forth sufficient effort (items c and d).

Table 18: Selected Merit-related Survey Items

Survey item [N=336]	**% Strongly Agree**	**% Agree**	**Total %**
a. I basically got through college on my own	57.4	26.8	84.2
b. I work as hard or harder than anyone else in my immediate family	33.4	34.6	68
c. With hard work, anyone can succeed educationally	42.9	35.1	78%
d. If given a chance, anyone can earn a degree	33.4	41.2	74.6

First-generation college graduates also believe in the value and efficacy of higher education, as the survey items presented below illustrate (items grouped together conceptually). Close to 62% of survey respondents agreed that earning a college degree was one of their most important personal accomplishments. In comparison to their meritocratic beliefs, graduate respondents less strongly endorsed statements regarding the benefits and outcomes associated with an earned degree, but a majority nevertheless associated a college degree with significant personal gain (as respect, sense of accomplishment, and positive individual change). What stands out in the trichotomized survey data below is the relatively small percentage of respondents who disagreed with these statements, even if the percentage of those in agreement isn't necessarily overwhelming.

Table 19: Selected survey items addressing the impact of a college degree

Survey item [N=336]	**% Agree & Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**%Disagree & Strongly Disagree**
I believe that a college education changes a person for the better.	81.9	14.5	3.6
Earning a college degree has been my most important accomplishment.	61.8	16.7	21.5
Earning a college degree means that people respect you more.	59.2	22.4	18.4
People with a lot of education tend to judge those with less.	58.4	19.3	22.3
There are important differences between people with a college education and those without.	57.8	23.7	18.5

This investigation focuses primarily on the social psychological consequences of disparities in educational attainment, rather than the college experience itself (which has been addressed, in recent research; see Chajet 2006). No matter what the college experience was like (whether in a public/private setting, taking 4 years versus 10, attending after high school or at midlife; more than average or less than average debt), the credential itself plays a role in family relations. What happens in college is relevant, though, particularly how these experiences and specific achievement is then understood and experienced within the working class family.

Across the board, graduates felt very fortunate in the opportunities that they had access to, and the experiences they gained while in college, and tended to frame the personal benefits of their education primarily in terms of increased professional opportunities, greater access to social and cultural capital, and gains in self-esteem and efficacy. Most graduates interviewed specifically mentioned the personal significance of

their opportunities for international travel, which offered up a set of previously unknown vistas to consider and conquer.

But most graduates also struggled through college -- socially, emotionally and sometimes spiritually (in their classed and raced "differentness," limited preparation, isolation, homesickness). Several graduates felt the need to take leave for a semester or two before finishing their degrees, while another graduate chose to study abroad (for the 2nd time during her degree) during her last semester, to escape a sense of psychological isolation at her campus. Most graduates also described feeling unfocused in their coursework, and too socially intimidated to really take advantage of the full range of options and experiences that their college had to offer.

Those who went away to school experienced autonomy and independence living away from family, that left them feeling alone, overwhelmed and homesick at first, and later played a role in their gained confidence and a sense of self-efficacy. For those who went to commuter schools as older students, (e.g., Angelica, Sharon, Noreen[34]) a sense of efficacy was gained through their perseverance.

> **April:** Uh huh. So for you what's the most important thing you take away from your experience besides a degree?
>
> **Noreen:** What I learned. Um..I have this degree but it was how I got this degree, and that's the important thing. So when I'm faced with a challenge, I ask myself how did I, how did I solve the problem then, how did I do that then, so I learned how to deal in the world. I think..I mean I didn't just get that from school, but it certainly did help.

They also mentioned, though much less frequently, the multiple ways that their educational accomplishments benefited their families: by increasing family pride, by

[34] Noreen began college at a traditional age (i.e., right after high school), but it took her many years to complete her degree as she worked fulltime throughout her studies.

providing a role model for younger generations, and also connecting families to additional avenues of social and cultural capital. But the greatest impact of the first college degree earned within working-class families has been on the educational paths of other family members.

Kenneth, the middle child in a large family, describes a shift in the educational expectations of his family that he attributes to his earning a college degree and the creation of a group identity as college goers. While he believed that his younger sisters would have earned 4 year degrees whether he went to college or not, he didn't think they would have aspired beyond that if they, instead of he, had been the first degree earners in the family:

> **Kenneth:** [..] it's almost like a family tradition now. BA is the basic, you know, I think if I didn't go to college, then high school diploma might have been the requisite for the family. "You've gotta get your high school degree, your high school diploma" and I know-- I do some career advising and some job career counseling, and I know for a lot of families, 2008, high school diploma is the requisite, and that—once they get that, they are happy, and it's a limitation. [..] But if earned that high school diploma, I think that would have been where my family cut the line if I didn't pursue further."

His degree helped establish a "family tradition" of college going, positively effecting the educational aspirations, pursuits, and attainment of siblings. Here Ernesto talks about some of the positive effects his education has had on the educational trajectory of his other family members:

> **April:** Do you think it had any effect on your family, the fact that you went to college?
>
> **Ernie:** It definitely has because now my brother graduated [high school], so after I graduated, then my older sister graduated college and then my younger [half] sisters graduated high school, because I was the first one to graduate high school as well, so it's that type of ripple effect [..] Now my younger brother [is] going to college as well. And it was funny with him because he, he called me out of

> nowhere – […] he goes, "what school should I go to Ernie, 'cause I know you went to a good school and I want to keep it in the family" and all this craziness, and that would never happen before, like I wouldn't have had that conversation with anybody else. So I think it's definitely been like a positive thing and it's definitely been like an influence that's been kind of like a domino effect ever since I finished.
>
> **April:** Do you think you had any influence on your [older] sister going to college?
>
> **Ernie:** yeah, I definitely think that-- I know it mainly came from her and from me as well because her being a single mom, and being of color, and being poor so she definitely knows that, you know, that it's a tool to, to success and so then like once I finished, it really pulled them, pushed them more to like finish, because after I finished, she goes, "now *I* need to finish" [..]

Ernie's (and Kenneth's) description of the effect that his education has had on his family suggests a shift in his family's group identity, which now incorporates higher educational attainment as an important and valuable family characteristic that they must work to "keep in the family." For Ernie and his family, the range of educational possibility expanded, making a college degree more viable and attainable -- reverberating forward to successive generations, as well as backward to older siblings. His success not only opened the door, it has framed and built the door, where once there was only a window.

Ernie highlights his belief in the importance of higher education particularly for poor people, women of color, and single mothers as a means of success – and he tells us that his sister "definitely knows" the value of education, having struggled without one and witnessing Ernesto's post-degree outcomes. While we can assume that his younger siblings would be more likely to finish high school and go on to college given his position as an older role-model, it was more of a surprise that the "domino" fell backward as well as forward, influencing older siblings as well as younger ones. That his older

sister Angelica was also able to earn a degree, despite the formidable obstacles she must have faced as a young mother, as an older student of color who first had to complete her high school requirements, is exceptional. In a very real and perceptible way, his educational accomplishments demonstrated that hard work pays off and played a role in how his family evaluates their own educational potential. Noah, another first-generation college graduate, also believes he motivated his older sister: “I think honestly had I not gone to college, my [older] sister probably would not have gone.” So far though, neither the quantitative nor the interview data indicate that it reverberates backward beyond older siblings to impact the graduates’ parent’s generation.

Graduate Offerings: Motivation and Inspiration

When participating family members were asked to consider how their lives might be different if a member of their family had not earned a college degree, they similarly cited the positive impact of a family role model represented by the first-generation college graduate, specifically in terms of enrollment in a college program (for Yolanda & Esperanza’s sister) and the attainment of a BA degree (e.g., Ernie’s sister, Angelica and Noah’s sister, Sharon).

> **April:** Do you think that um your brother going to school had any, any effect on your decision—I mean had you started to go to college before he did?//no//Do you think him finishing had any effect of your life?
>
> **Angelica:** Well, yeah [laughs] like I said before, I wanted to like, I wanted to be the first one to be done, you know, so not having that, I was just like, ahhh man, you know, he finished before me [laughs], but you know competition or whatever. But um…can you repeat the question?
>
> **April:** Just if his finishing had any effect on your life?

> **Angelica:** Yeah and it's also great, you know to be like the only boy in, you know, our in our—he's like the first boy, like the first born in the family to finish college, you know and it was great, you know. Like he didn't, you know end up running in the streets, you know, getting girls, you know pregnant or whatever, whatever. That he actually finished school and got that done.
>
> **April:** And you said that there was a little bit of sibling rivalry, and you wanted to be the first, so when he finished, did that motivate you?
>
> **Angelica:** Yeah, totally because I was like, he's not the only one [laughs] with a degree. I'm gonna do it somehow.

In Angelica's description of benevolent sibling rivalry, we hear the extent to which Ernie says his educational success "pulled" (beckoned, promised), and "pushed" (motivated, demanded, expected) his sister to start and finish her degree. She first understands his achievement in terms of her lack (I wanted to be first, "not" having that) which derailed her response to my question. After repeating the question, she details the positive gains of his achievement, emphasizing his gender and that it was a particular source of pride. That he made good, was great for their family, facilitating her pursuit of a 4 year degree, which she also eventually earned after wending her way through a decade of part-time classes, fulltime employment plus fulltime parenting, and piles of credits gained and lost through her multiple transfers between CUNY campuses. Gender acted as a differentiating fulcrum raising Ernie's chances and constraining Angelica's. Despite achieving the same level of attainment, their educational outcomes are differently evaluated with his achievement generally seen as the bigger accomplishment, and more valuable.

An Unimaginable Fate…

Graduate interview participants were asked to consider how their own lives would be different had they *not* earned a college degree. Their perceptions further illuminate the

importance of higher education to them, and also reveal a deep, almost unimaginable fear of such a fate. "I don't know" responses were frequent, followed by predictions of "miserable" or "just awful" lives without a college degree. Una plainly refuses the scenario: "Well, I know for me, that if I don't have a degree, that's it. I really don't have a future, and I do not want to work in any factory or I do not want to work—it's just, it's not an option for me." Other participants envisioned becoming cultural (i.e., racialized and/or gendered) stereotypes of the working class (e.g., running the streets, early parenting, having many children, confined within traditional gender roles). Here Wendy has a hard time articulating the specific ways her life might differ, but she is clear that it would be worse than the life she is currently living (bold added):

> **April:** how would your life be different if you had never gone, or never finished, college, do you think?
>
> **Wendy:** Oh my god. It would be..***terrible***. I mean..yeah. I mean I definitely think that I—college is where I met a lot of the people that I'm still friends with and I still work with um…and I just would have never got—I would have—I'd still be in [her hometown], it would be **awful**. [laughing]
>
> **April:** what do you think your life would be like?
>
> **Wendy:** I mean, I don't know, I always took for granted I'd get out of there, there's a better place, so I can't imagine that being possible, but if I were there, I mean, I think **I would be married for many years, I would have kids**. I don't know what I would do, like work for the state or something//uh huh//but um, I wouldn't make as much money probably. […] um..I do—I don't know, I think my life would be kind of **small**. **I would be up in the family dynamics a lot more, that would be problematic**

Wendy almost shudders at the thought of a life without a degree, characterizing it as potentially "small," even "awful" and "terrible." She envisions her life without a degree as likely to be defined by marriage, children, and family relations. This is not to say that she is specifically against any one of those things necessarily – she is in fact in a

long term relationship and also a parent – but rather she is expressing a clear sense of relief at having escaped traditional gender roles, including the greater responsibility for family relations (“dynamics”) traditionally associated with women. Even more so than Wendy, Gena (below) has a hard time imagining her life taking a path that doesn’t include her college experience, indicated by the frequency of her “I don’t know” statements:

> **April:** Well tell me, how would your life be different, do you think, if you had never gone to college?
>
> **Gena:** Drastically different. Who the hell knows where I’d be right now [laughs]. I don’t even know. I’d probably still be with my high school sweetheart//uh huh//..like a druggie, or something, I don’t know. I was never one to be a druggie, I never did drugs..but..I’d be *depressed*, I’d probably have 4 kids by now, I don’t know//wow//[laughs] I don’t know, I think I’d be—I don’t know, I have no idea, although I have a sister who hasn’t been to college, actually she…she, has credits, she’s been to college, but she kind of took that other road, that hard road of like a GED, and all that stuff, and she’s fine. You know, she’s doing well for herself. But I think the fact that I went to school, finished, I’m much farther ahead than she is, in terms of trajectory, like when you look at a life..in terms of, you know, how much money they make, and how far ahead they are in terms of ..perspective and learning and all that stuff.

Gena echoes some of the same concerns or fears as Wendy, particularly regarding traditional gender roles (e.g., the primacy of a romantic relationship, and motherhood), and stereotypical paths associated with poverty (drug use and low self-esteem). Offering her sister as an example, though, Gena challenges the idea that a lack of a college degree necessarily translates into a life of misery. She first establishes her sister’s value and worth by asserting that her sister has earned some college credits, though not the full degree. Gena then argues that her sister is “fine” and “doing well for herself” (“herself” perhaps indicating a different standard of success between them?), but then unsettles this position by situating herself as much farther ahead in income and in the broad notion of

“perspective and learning and all that stuff.” While Gena hints at the self-esteem gains resulting from her degree (“I’d be depressed”), Angelica, both a family member and then finally a graduate, sees self-esteem as significantly raised by her educational accomplishments:

> **April:** What would your life be like, be different, if you hadn’t finished your degree?
>
> **Angelica:** Um ..I think the self-esteem would have been really low, um having a very stressful, like having to be like OK you know..like having to work at dead-end jobs or whatever, you know, I would have been extremely unhappy and it would have been a total disappointment for me, for my daughter to see that I didn’t, you know, that I’m repeating the circle, you know, being the stereotype that ..you know, that I think people should be out of […]

Angelica frames self-esteem as an important gain of college completion, indicating that extreme unhappiness and profound disappointment were at stake. Having experienced professional limitation most of her adult life, she is also aware of the increased career opportunities associated with a college degree. But somehow, the personal psychological gains come across as the most crucial for her. This dominance of psychic gains is especially clear in my interview with Sharon, also an older sister of her family’s first-generation graduate (also her younger brother) and an eventual college graduate herself:

> **April:** Um, how do you think your life would be different if you had never gone to college?
>
> **Sharon:** […] um, um, I guess I wouldn’t feel..like I feel now, I can go anywhere. Not only do I have the skills, I have the piece of paper. I have that piece of paper, so I never felt like that. You know I worked—I’ve been working for the same place for a long time, and I never—well, I could get another job, you know, I know I’m good at what I do. Um, but…you know there was always that fear, you know. I never really looked, I mean, I was comfortable. So I was very stagnant. Now, I feel like—and I’ll give you an example. We went to an open house at Lehman, and this was before we got our degree, but you know we had to find out

> about their programs and stuff, and we walked into the room and there were all these tables set up. Um, you know social work, and education and all these, you know, so you can go and sit with the department directors or whatever they are, um about their programs and register and stuff like that, and we walked in the room, and we said, "We can go to *any* table," well almost. 90% of the tables we can go to. Like *that's* how I felt. Like I felt like I now have this—I'm not stagnant anymore. It opened up a whole new world for me, so if I didn't get my degree, I wouldn't have felt that much freedom and..um, that much ..not proud of myself, like motivation, or—I can do this," like that kind of stuff. Like real confidence..to do everything. Like I never felt like *that* confident.

For Sharon, completing her degree gave her a tremendous sense of "freedom," from stagnation and fear. She describes a surge of confidence and optimism as she surveyed a new range of possibilities, options, and choices now open to her -- a sense of self-efficacy that she had never felt before. She felt like she could choose any path, "do everything." Her younger brother, Noah and another graduate, Noreen, also identify self-esteem as a major benefit of degree attainment, but secondary to the more salient gains in career opportunities:

> **April:** Well, how would your life be different do you think if you had never gone to college?
>
> **Noah:** Um..if I had never gone to college, how would my life be different? Well, I certainly wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today, that's for sure. [...] I would not be able to do the work that I do without a masters. So that's one thing for sure. Um, I don't know. I think I would had to have ..found a different way to..make a living, I think I would have—I don't think I would have had the self-esteem, quite honestly that I do today if I didn't ..go to college. I definitely think it's a self-esteem builder. Just to be able to kind of set that goal and reach it//yeah//I think it's huge. And I don't think people understand it until they do it. [..]

and

> **April:** How would um, how do you think your life would be different if you had never gone to or finished college?
>
> **Noreen:** Oh my gosh, I can't imagine what kind of job I would have//really?//they're not giving out jobs to people with less than an MBA it seems like these days. So I don't know what kind of job I'd have, what kind of money I would be making. Um, college also helped me to refine myself as a

> philosopher. You know, it's a different path to take, and they cultivated that path. It's not..you know, you don't run into philosophers everywhere on the street and stuff like that, so in that way, you know, I'm I'm—and also I've met a lot of people who helped me along the way. And my mentor always says, college teaches you what you're good at. And it taught me what I was good at, and it helps me to kind of define my life today.

Both Noah and Noreen felt that the MA was a crucial credential in the job market, and were at a loss imagining alternative career paths without having earned their degrees. They also understood their college experience and degree attainment to be foundational to their sense of self and identity. The college degree allowed Noreen, in particular, to identify as a philosopher despite being employed outside of an academic philosophical community, and played an important role in her creation of a positive personal identity.

Living the Feared Life

Siblings of graduates shared similar visions of a degree-less path, and the futures that graduates imagined without a degree. Ernie's sister, Angelica, also saw his hypothetical fate without a degree as bleak, while Desiree even uses the world "miserable" to describe such a scenario for her degreed siblings:

> **April:** Um, how do you think [Ernie's] life would be different if he hadn't gone to school?
>
> **Angelica:** Um I think he would have been..like running the streets doing absolutely nothing, having no direction, hanging out with the wrong crowd, uh…yeah, like having no, no future, not-- no real future, you know, like a positive future um, for himself or..um..you know anyone else he decides to […]

And

> **April:** What do you think um, your brother and sister's life would be like if they never went to college?
>
> **Desiree:** Miserable. [chuckles]
>
> **April:** You think?

Desiree: I think that they would probably be miserable. I don't know.

April: Why do you—

Desiree: Because—not really miserable—because they wouldn't have the life that they have, and they so..proud of themselves, and they just like—I'm not saying they uppity, but they, they proud of themselves. They..they happy for they life. My brother, he has a house, a car, you know, he gets good money. He's, you know—and my sister, she works for [city dept]. She's a supervisor there, so she has a decent job too. She lives like down on [street], nice building.

Similar to the graduates quoted previously (Angelica, Sharon, Noah, Noreen), Desiree also identified pride/self-esteem and happiness to hang in the balance of degree attainment, as well as quality of life and she hints at a sense of pride she doesn't possess. Several graduates described the lives of friends and family who remained home as embodying fates they wanted to avoid. Nikki here discusses the low expectations of her high school teachers as based in stereotypes she wanted to avoid, but also embodied by the people she left back home:

April: And how did your identity, however that is, as a woman, a black woman, as African American, affect your college experience?

Nikki: Umm…hmmmm. I think leaving with the notion that people didn't think I was going to do well, definitely made me want to ..do well, which is one of the reasons why, you know, I didn't cut classes or anything like that because I really felt like I had to do well. I couldn't come back and say that I didn't do well.

April: so when you say that people didn't think you would do well, which people were they?

Nikki: I actually had a teacher, you know, didn't think I would get in, um..in high school. And a lot of my friends stayed behind and they sort of, you know, just floated around or whatever, and I just felt like I needed, you know, to do better. Because when I came home and I saw what they were doing, you know, that wasn't ..an option for me.

April: you came home from school, you mean?

> **Nikki:** Yeah, when I came home to visit and saw that they were doing the same things we were doing in high school, just hanging out, sort of like..you know
>
> **April:** and that was like an example of what not to do?
>
> **Nikki:** Yeah.

Nikki was committed to squashing the negative expectations of a few of her teachers, and the specter of the lives of her non-college bound peers back home was another source of motivation. It's not so much then, that graduates familiar with both sides of the class window, can't imagine, or can't imagine with specificity, their lives without a degree, but rather, on a deep level they would rather not have to. They draw upon the abundant evidence presented by the lived experiences of their closely-related family members who often, in fact, live the life they fear. It is clear from the literature in social class that the knowledge of within-group disparity is difficult to acknowledge or accept, and often has deleterious psychological consequences for the more recently privileged members.

There were also many examples from the survey data (open-ended item 2) that referenced stark differences between the life of the graduate and their family, friends or community. These are just a few such examples illustrating the deep dis-identification by graduates and the still close awareness of what could have been:

> *"Many of my cousins live lives of crime, have married several times, don't own homes, don't travel, etc."* – Graduate #45 (White, Female, BA)
>
> *"Most of my family relies on drugs to cope with daily life. Being that I have the knowledge of therapy and anti-depressants, I have educated them to get help for the signs and symptoms of bi-polar disorder and depression."* – Graduate #81 (Black, Female, MA)

> *"My father, who is now deceased, used to call me a snob, because I didn't want to be at home so much after I graduated. It's difficult to return to severe poverty, once you've escaped from it."* – Graduate #94 (White, Female, BA)

> *"I grew up in an insular Appalachian community where individuals were expected to behave in a certain way and to follow the paths set before them. I broke away from this mold and set my own path."* – Graduate #104 (White, Female, MA)

> *"My family tends to view women as possessions meant to marry young & be a servant to her husband. Taking a few Women's Studies courses in college have helped me overcome much of this negative influence."* – Graduate #187 (White, Female, MA)

These few examples illustrate the sense of material deprivation, and aversive political and ideological contexts that graduates associate with life without a college degree. There were also striking consistency in the visions presented by Desiree (a family member) and Ernie (a graduate), two participants unknown to each other and differing demographically (e.g., by educational attainment, age/cohort, race/ethnicity, neighborhood, gender). They predict the primary emotions connected to one another's positionality, imagining that without a degree, a person (i.e., their siblings or self) would feel "miserable" and "stuck." Ernie says that he would be miserable and feel "stuck" in his social position; Desiree imagines that her brother and sister would also be "miserable" without a degree, and several times specifically describes herself as "stuck" in her position, without a college degree. Ernesto identifies a sense of personal efficacy and possibility that he gained from his completion of a degree; he believes that people are 'stuck' without a college education, and understand their lives as "controlled by an outer force." And in fact, this position is taken up by Desiree… she feels very little direct control over the course of her life. She describes feeling hopeless and stuck, and without

any available career options. Despite her hopes otherwise, she doesn't believe that either of her sons will go to college.

I want to be clear here though, that I am not presenting evidence that confirms the 'false' consciousness of the working class, so much as the accepted individual nature of the accomplishment that earning a college degree represents, as well as a widespread belief in the positive outcomes associated with degree attainment. Although Desiree indicates that her siblings' lives would be drastically different without college degrees, she didn't believe that her own life would change much, except that she would have one less resource to call upon. It's also conceivable though that she might not feel as bad about her relative position and might even feel closer to her older siblings if they had not earned degrees given the distancing/distinguishing intervention the degree seems to be.

Although siblings like Desiree know all too well about the anxiety and insecurity associated with poverty and limited choices, others without a college credential might not similarly judge their lives as miserable and small. How working class people imagine that their lives might differ or change with the earning of a degree is still an open question, one that might tell us something about how they understand the value of a degree and their feelings about the college enterprise itself.

Justice Beliefs – Lessons in Ambivalence

The data and findings thus far suggest that attainment is understood by first-generation graduates (and often families) in meritocratic terms; specifically to be the result of individual effort, and resulting in individual benefits; while family members (including graduates) have at other times, viewed education-related inputs/outcomes in distributive justice terms; that is, as a communal or family goal, one supported and

facilitated by group efforts and as such, obligating the sharing of benefits. The individualized understanding of the college credential and singularity of the experience, make this more communal rendering of college-going difficult to adhere to. Class consciousness then moves disjointedly between these two conceptual poles, shifting the vantage points, and subjects of, critique, and making binary conceptualizations of critical consciousness within the working class inadequate and obsolete. These issues of educational justice are discussed below in terms of attainment as merit, and as obligation/debt:

Merit: Individual effort, individual benefit.

Survey item [N=336]	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
I basically got through college on my own.	57.4%	26.8%	7.1%	7.4%	1.2%

As was suggested by previously presented evidence, graduates tended to endorse the notion of individual merit, attributing their success to a variety of reasons, but often seeing themselves (in the item above, for example) as being most responsible for their success (in terms of desire and effort). The gains of a college degree are also primarily understood to be individually focused:

Table 20a: Reported effect of degree attainment by relationship to graduate

a. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected your… [N=]	**Greatly Affected**	**Moderately Affected**	**Total %**
Life.	79.9	15.6	95.5
Parent’s lives.	19.3	24.9	44.2
Siblings’ lives.	18	15.8	33.8
Lives of your extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.).	8.9	14.9	23.8

Virtually all of the graduates surveyed were at least “moderately” affected by earning a college degree and a close to 80 percent indicated that they were “greatly affected” by this achievement. This total percentage is more than cut in half when graduates assessed the impact on their parents and even further reduced when assessing the impact on their siblings (33.8%) and extended family (23.8%). The individual nature of the perceived impact of the degree is further supported by the following survey items:

Table 20b: Other survey items assessing impact of degree attainment

Survey item	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
b. My life would be very different if I had never finished college N=331	77.6%	14.8	3.0	3.6	.9
c. My family’s life would be very different if I had not completed college N=331	24.2%	22.4	20.5	23.9	9.1
d. My education provides a resource for my family members N=334	28.7%	38	13.5	13.8	6

A similar pattern is seen in likert items b and c, with most graduates reporting a strong impact of the college degree on their lives, while significantly fewer reported a comparable impact on the lives of their family members (92.4% versus 46.6 % combined Agree/Strongly Agree). Although some families describe a ‘rising tide lifting all boats’ phenomena, and two thirds of graduates believed that their degree offered a resource for their family, interview data suggested that other tangible effects (e.g., economic mobility of family members, increased social, cultural or material capital) were more limited on the family. Participant responses also generally highlight the individual nature of the

accomplishment rather than describe a more diffuse or communal elevation of social position or quality of life for either family members or community.

When present, this narrative was more audible within families that are described as close or intimate, as Ernie and Esperanza describe theirs. Ernie's educational attainment has resulted in a rise in educational aspirations and outcomes for many in his family. Within Esperanza's family, the aspirations (e.g., of her sister) have risen, but outcomes haven't yet translated into greater educational outcomes, resulting in resentments, conflict and tension within the family. While the college education of a family member does seem to increase the overall level of aspirations within some working-class families, it also raises standards of comparison and potential levels of dissatisfaction, shame and guilt at one's self for not achieving more. Consider the very limited impact of her brother's degree on Desiree's life:

> **April:** So do you think that *your* life would be any different if he [brother, MA] had not gone to college?
>
> **Desiree:** [..] nah, I think, I think that my, my life would be the same. Because he has really no effect on me. I guess maybe in some sort of ways because I have once I had to borrow money from him so if **he** didn't really the money, the house or the car, the extra money and stuff, I guess he wouldn't gave it to me, and I don't know, maybe my life could've been different. So that's sort of like a um, tricky question [chuckles]//Yeah, it is//But I don't go to him often to borrow money, it's just like maybe once in a blue moon. So maybe my life would probably be the same
>
> **April:** uh huh. So you were mentioning a little bit that your life would be better if you had gone to college
>
> **Desiree:** yeah, it would definitely be better//Uh huh//but basically I'm stuck here. It's like—to me, I don't have no future because I'm living pay check to paycheck. […]

Desiree says that her life would essentially be the same whether her brother, who she has very little relationship with, had earned a degree or not. Like the 67% of graduates surveyed, she indicates that her brother, by virtue of his educational attainment, is a potential resource for her – but a highly contingent one. Although Desiree's siblings have been available to throw her a life preserver during times of need, it's only/always a temporary fix, not one that pulls her out of the roiling ocean, just one that helps keep her head afloat. Despite the hope that increasing the number and proportion of college graduates from disadvantaged groups will translate into a rising quality of life for families and communities of origin, neither family nor graduate participants were able to identify strong and clear benefits to the group/family that were consistent with the way a 4 year degree is currently framed in terms of salvation for the poor and aspirational. So while the college degree may facilitate graduates' ability to throw life preservers to other family members, the current data indicate that a rising tide most directly affects the graduate in the boat.

Escape and vicarious escape.

"Achievers are leavers" – Graduate #340B (White, Female, BA)

"I think I was the first person to actually earn a degree because I felt I had to; for my sisters who tried but life and babies got in the way, but also for myself because I did not want to live my mother's life." -- Graduate #193 (Black, Female, MA)

The opposite of the 'all boats rise' type of narrative: mobility as escapism -- also emerges, particularly in families that are described by graduates as emotionally distant. In these escape narratives, staying and achieving are seen as incompatible (Graduate #340). This oppositional positioning suggests that there is little faith in an 'all boats rise'

notion, given the dual perceptions that educational achievement isn't valued across family members and that success is only possible by going it alone. Merit in this context implies independence, while debt, by definition, implies ongoing relationships. Debt/credit creates and ensures ongoing relationships, while the notion of (re)payment, or earning/achieving 'on one's own,' constitutes the release from obligation and future relations (Graeber, 2011). Insofar as "achievers are leavers," then, leaving is part of an enactment of "merit." Graduate attributions to their individual efforts and skills in accounting for their success is both a claim to merit, and to some degree, also an escape/release from obligation to family.

But having the differential opportunity to attend college was also guilt-inducing and associated with a sense of debt that Gena here describes (emphasis added):

> **Gena:** […] Senior year was very difficult for me, because there were times when I thought of quitting[…]. But I remember talking to this girl who went to school with my sister, she was older than my sister..actually, and her and I had become friends because she used to live in Washington, and I had done an internship in D.C. that summer, um…so I became friends with her and I told her, like, I was telling her about all the stuff that was going through and she was like, you cannot quit now. She was like, trust me, you have to just keep going. And..I know that she's the reason, she was one of the reasons why I finished—I graduated but she's one of the reasons why I didn't like..put my foot forward to try to leave school//uh huh//um, and I'm thankful for that..but it was a tough year. I was going through like a fear of success//uh huh//because my sisters had graduated and like, no—**because my sisters had to stop going to college in order to support me and my younger sister when they were in school. So I was kind of-- it was a combination of fear of success, guilt, guilt.. for their sacrifice…**um

Gena wanted to leave school but didn't; her desire to escape became a desire to escape from college, from the guilt that the differential access brought her, from the felt pressure to succeed, and the crush of hopes and dreams heaped upon her. At this point, Gena began to tear up. Instead of sitting with her in the strong emotions that emerged, I

tried to change the subject by asking an unrelated question as I could tell that she was upset. When she didn't respond, I asked her if she needed a minute, which she took. She recovered quickly, and proceeded to answer the new question rather than follow up on the earlier one, and I didn't push her or the issue.

Gena's quote directs us to another aspect of obligation within escape narratives: the obligation to achieve for similar others who have little hope of doing the same. The desire to escape is fueled by an individual desire to survive and thrive; and many times, this includes the desire to 'save' others in the family. Graduate #193 (quoted at the beginning of this section) is obligated to leave and achieve for her sisters who have no choice but to stay. Like success, though, escape is also vicarious – but so limited in how it can substantively shape the lives of her sacrificial sisters. In this context, escape is understood to be limited and scarce – and not available to all. Like Angelica, Rosalyn, Gena, and Sharon, Graduate #193 is also explicit about her desire to escape available gender roles as embodied by her mother. Providing a model of womanhood within the family that isn't limited to the role represented by their mother, also means abandoning her sisters in those roles, at least temporarily, which could be seen as more abandonment rather than liberation.

Duty and debt: Unacknowledged help from, and obligation to, family. Themes of escape, abandonment and 'better than' run through this next graduate response, highlighting a third type of obligation also present in the data, though more subtly: that is, the obligation to family to uphold and maintain the equality between those with college credentials and those without; to not forget who you are, where you come from, and the core values of your group.

> *"My father, who is now deceased, used to call me a snob, because I didn't want to be at home so much after I graduated. It's difficult to return to severe poverty, once you've escaped from it."* – Graduate #94 (White, Female, BA)

The leaving itself impacts the lives and relationships of family members. Her father thought his daughter believed she was too good to come home, and she says that she was escaping deprivation, not her father. She found/forged a path to a preferred life that was not, perhaps could not, be shared. She was judged for it; he was deserted. What was her obligation/debt in this case? What was his?

Unacknowledged help from family. Families/communities want their college-ambitious members to succeed, they try to support them in the ways that they are able to, even though it is the graduate that is primarily helped or advanced. And in this achieving process, the inputs of the family are often erased. While it's true that many first-generation graduates shouldered the greatest responsibility for getting themselves through college, they rarely do it alone, although they may have felt that way. There was often some help along the way, in the form of hard to come by book money, rides to and from school and home, care packages, release from other family obligations. The individual benefit of the degree against the backdrop of family support and/or expectations of reciprocity is perceived as profoundly unfair and unjust, and is a particular source of pain and tension in Desiree's family:

> **Desiree:** I didn't really like my brother when he was going to college because he didn't have—he's was basically living off my mother, so all of us was going out there working and giving my mother money to help with the bills and stuff, food and stuff. He's was basically living off of us//hmmmm//if you really look at it. Well I can say it now, I didn't know it then. So he was basically living off of us. I didn't really like him because..you know, it's not like he went to college and he got the degree and—well, he'll help anybody in the house, but you gotta pay him back. But um, when we was working, he never paid us back the money that we

> used to give my mother, for her to buy food and stuff. He never said, well since I never worked, and I went to school, here goes something. He never did that, so.

Desiree really feels like she and her siblings made her brother's degree possible by contributing to the family group, which he disproportionately benefited from. The feeling is that they supported him on his path to an advanced degree, and not only have their contributions never been acknowledged/recognized, but they have also never been compensated. Worse, his help to them is offered contingently (i.e., they have to pay him back). This conflict points to conflicting systems of (distributive) justice: A communal care-based focus of the family (enforced by their mother, but subscribed to by she and her siblings) versus an apparently merit-based one of her degreed brother (and degreed sister).

The experience of being indebted to or owing someone may create bonds, but it also fosters tensions. Anthropologist David Graeber (2011) identifies the "moral confusion" created by the historically and simultaneously held beliefs that "(1) paying back money one has borrowed is a simple matter of morality, and (2) anyone in the habit of lending money is evil" (p9). This ideological dilemma is likely activated by the disproportionate help that family members sometimes need from degreed siblings, causing significant interpersonal and internal tension for first-generation families. In the case of Desiree, the moral tension is exacerbated by the demand that money is loaned instead of given, when there are such significant and explicit differences in resources and wealth.

While Desiree may come across as extreme, similar issues and dynamics emerge, albeit to a much lesser extent, but as an issue nevertheless, for Ernie's sister Angelica,

and possibly for Esperanza's sister. Esperanza tells us that her sister persuaded their parents to let her go away to college, significantly helped her with her personal statement, and wrote her letters while she was away at school. This would suggest the perception of a joint venture, but one that only Esperanza has benefited from. Esperanza describes significant conflict with her sister in the next chapter.

Obligation to family: Angelica/Ernie. Ernie provides yet another perspective on issues of merit and obligation within families of first-generation graduates. Although Ernie worked hard, exerting emotional as well as intellectual sweat in his pursuit of a college degree, his success was due in no small measure to the efforts and support of his family and community. His mother was more of a disciplinarian with him than she was with his sisters, actively monitoring his whereabouts and protecting him from outside influences; his older sisters supplemented his caretaking and monitoring, and provided models of paths not to follow; within his family Ernie received a lot of attention and positive feedback as the youngest and the first male; he significantly benefited from the small high school he went to, which in tandem with the youth program he was connected with, helped shepherd him to and through college. There were definitely limits to the support that his family and community provided him -- they couldn't ever put him exactly on even keel with students with college educated parents, especially in the selective and White private university he attended, but they were involved and supportive. He achieved the goal of a college degree, blazing a trail for his other family members to similarly pursue and achieve.

If there is a dark side of Ernie's educational successes, it is that he is seen as not taking advantage of his elite degree to accomplish the things that his family sees as his

obligation and responsibility, and that which is an inherent mandate of the degree: to land a stable well-paying job, one that he likes, but doesn't necessarily have to reflect his life's dreams. He is seen as not working very hard, and living "off" his mother, contributing little to the family. He is seen not so much as having wasted his time by going to school, but rather wasting the precious resource of a college degree by not committing to single, good paying job or career.

April: What do you think his college experience was like?

Angelica: Um, I guess good and bad like you know he got to party [laughs] um experience the college life, like living away, hard because he was away and not being around, you know, us and the family, um..but and not having that support I guess he had, um as he was going—that he had in junior high school, you know he didn't really have that full support in high school—college. So I guess, you know, for me I think it was good, you know a good experience.

April: Did you talk to him much while he was away [at college]?

Angelica: Yeah. Actually I helped him out, you know financially 'cause there were times that, in which he didn't have funds to buy books or whatever and you know, he'll call me up, you know I need, I don't have any money, you know, whatever whatever. I would, you know, give him money for books, um or whatever else he needed but mainly it was for books. So um, or I would help him, you know, pick him up at his college, bring him back down for, you know, the end of the semester and in the beginning of semester so I would do that with him, so that was pretty cool [laughs]. It was pretty, and you know I would have to like borrow like a friend's car and like, **but we did it**. You know, **we** worked together to get it done and **we did it**. [emphasis added]

April: was going away to college something you ever wished you could've done—

Angelica: Yeah.

April: Well what about it appeals to you?

Angelica: Um, the independence, having—not having the..stresses of having like to work full time, you know, and having that opportunity to just you know…that space ?? you know and totally concentrate on um, on your studies, as opposed to having the conflicts of you know work like, how, you know um, family life and everything else going on and distracting you from your studies

April: So you can just be focused?

Angelica: Yeah

Angelica sees Ernie's accomplishment as a joint project, asserting that "we did it," "we worked together to get it done and we did it." They were in it together, his whole family supporting him on some level, at least from their perspective, to get through college. But he hasn't yet lived up to his side of the bargain.

Although he's given a lot of credit for being the first and for going away to a "good" school, these are also indicators of his relative family privilege and a privilege of circumstances. Angelica is saying that although his college experience couldn't have been easy, it was still easier than her experience as a long-term returning student was. Angelica's degree cost more (in time, effort, and personal investment) but ironically is worth less (less so financially perhaps, but certainly in terms of prestige and social/cultural capital associated with it). She worked hard but her brother is still the preferred model of the college endeavor for her children.

His family, including Angelica and her sister helped him achieve the college dream, which she understands to be a joint accomplishment, one that she can also take some credit for. But in her story, there is also some tension, perhaps at having her help not acknowledged. She underscores the inconvenience and sacrifice of her help, of having to borrow a car, at being a single parent who gives him money. While his family helped him in his pursuit of a degree, he is not acting yet as a true role model in his position as best and first educated, by being independent, being stable and secure.

> **Ernie:** […] But he's [his father] definitely happy that I finished but now everybody is like, ok now you finished, now what are you going to do?

> Everybody's like oh--, like me and my friend Manny, both of us, we like doing stuff that's all over the place, we work a lot of non-profits, we try and do our own stuff, but no one really understands, you know, what we're doing, so everybody's like, "so what are you doing? You're wasting your time in school. What are you doing now? What are you doing now?"

Ernie struggled with issues associated with new independence and autonomy, while Angelica dealt with gendered issues of interdependence, family responsibility, multiple and conflicting obligations. Here the lines blur between merit and relationship/family obligation and duty when we consider the issue of who is actually 'lazy' and who is 'hard working'? Is it the young people who do not enter (or enter and then leave) institutions of higher education, to instead work, parent young children or both? Or is it the over supported males who suffer from the range of options open to them?

Still, help from family, particularly help from parents, is frequently recognized as a factor in graduate success, just not the most critical factor. Nikki is clear though, that her parent's support made a "huge difference" in her educational trajectory:

> **April:** […] So why do you think you were the first in your family to get a degree?
>
> **Nikki:** (…) I think I'm the only one my parents-- the plan worked for my parents. I think, I think they tried the same thing with all of us, but I I think I'm probably the only one who kind of, you know, carried it though and then after the..after I saw how [laughs] things were going on the other end, it's sort of like – and my parents saw how things were going on the other end, they sort of re..vamped their resources, you know like, we better put our resources over here [chuckles] because it seems to be.. you know, happening, so I think that made a..that made a huge difference

Nikki explains that her parents initially invested in each of their children's higher education, but shifted their resources to favor her when she achieved some success and her siblings struggled. Conley (2005) has argued that families of limited resources are forced to strategically and selectively invest in their children's education, resulting in

differential educational and classed outcomes for siblings. Conley only minimally discusses the potential for emotional and relational fall out of such strategic placement of resources within the family that seems to be a source of family tension, and which is addressed generally and specifically in regards to Nikki, in more depth in the following chapter.

These graduates' stories highlight first-generation dilemmas around educational obligation and debt. Graduates are often in significant debt in terms of formal student loans, and indebted to family for support while in college --perhaps minimally in terms of dollar amounts, but crucial to the graduate at the time and in amounts that were anything but trivial to family. Family who later receive help (financial and other wise) from graduates, become indebted psychologically and financially to the graduate. Whose debts though must be repaid, in such scenarios? The collective sacrifice of one's family tends to get erased at graduation, when the degree becomes an individualized accomplishment, as does the debt to family for their support, whereas the financial obligation to a financial institution like Sallie Mae will last decades (student loan debt being the only debt that can't be cleared in bankruptcy). Debt has the quality of connecting people. A strong sense of debt to one's family may indicate family closeness. What of those graduates though, who wish their families had been more supportive of their college endeavors, who indicate that they earned their degree "on their own?" Does this sense of "owing" nothing to their families for their achievements constitute a withdrawal of relationship?

Summary

I asked why graduates were the first (and concomitantly why their family members were not) to earn a college degree; I didn't ask them to explain class-based failure, which might have yielded a more explicit structural critique (of class, higher education, race, gender). Although such social critique wasn't absent, it was minimal. Thus, the educationally privileged and White dominant class described by Dubois at the beginning of this chapter, needn't shake their heads too hard at the college aspirations of the oppressed, as the college experience for First-generation graduates is often associated with greater faith in the ideology of merit that our current institutions of higher education operate within. Graduates leave institutions of higher education faithful to the concept and veracity of "merit." But this is tempered by their connections to their families of origin, desires that their achievements similarly benefit their loved ones, their own recognition of the external supports they had or found access to. Still, graduates are especially critical of siblings, yet less so of parents; siblings can also be quite critical of themselves. Very little is known about parents' perspective on the disparate educational outcomes among their children, but taking from the graduates comments, it would seem that they are also critical about siblings' lack of a degree. In the context of significant differences in outcomes, it is also difficult to maintain both one's faith in the idea of merit and positive relations with one's family of origin.

Mama, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To …Go To College?

> *"[..] It's like hard for me to talk to my sister because she feels like I'm always..I guess .. rubbing it—she feels like I'm always rubbing it in her face, like my dad even said it: 'Your sister's jealous of you.' I'm like, why? 'Well, because she never got a chance to go away to college.' […] it's like, I don't know, it bothers me ..but at the same time, I kind of understand ..I understand that she's going through a lot right now. It's hard for me to talk about it [tearing up].. because we're really close and uh, I just think this whole experience has kind of changed everybody."* – Esperanza, MA

Although conflict is a taken for granted characteristic of the sibling relationship, there is also an assumed (and desired) equality between siblings, our first set of peers. Given the desired equality between siblings, issues of fairness become heightened and scrutinized within relational contexts of differential attainment/outcomes, as Esperanza here illustrates. Where once she and her sister were exceptionally close, there was now considerable distance between them. Instead of talking directly to one another, we hear the mediating role played by their father, who informs Esperanza about her sister's feelings. Esperanza moved between identifying with and trying to understand her sister's pain, to her own feelings and experience of the conflict, which seemed to make it difficult for her to hang onto either position.

Esperanza's educational opportunities and academic achievements transform her sister's missed opportunity into a public shaming ("rubbing it in her face"). In vicarious fulfillment of her own thwarted college dreams, her sister played a crucial role facilitating Esperanza's access to college by helping her with her essay and lobbying their parents to let her go. Esperanza's sister, like several research participants' older siblings[35], was trying to enter college as an adult, stepping into the beginner position in her 30's and

[35] e.g., Nikki's sister, Noah's sister Sharon, Ernie's sister Angelica, and Yolanda

shifting the power dynamics between the older and younger (now more experienced and accomplished) sibling.

The impact of the first college degree within working class families is multivalent when we look at family relations as the unit of analysis rather than the individual graduate, as Esperanza's family illustrates. Esperanza's experience within her family directs our attention to the social psychological issues associated with a context of unequal outcomes (envy and guilt, tension and conflict, relational distance or preference), that can significantly impact family relationships. This chapter considers the role that such outcome disparities play within first-generation families, asking: *RQ2) How are family relations and power dynamics impacted by disparities in educational attainment (i.e., college degree) within the working class family?* Three primary findings are discussed: 1) Graduates enjoy more privilege and power in the world, and within their families; 2) graduates' relative privilege fosters tension and conflict between family members, especially siblings; and 3) disparities in higher educational experiences and/or credentialing have a lasting cumulative impact on family relationships. Each of these main findings is discussed in detail below, presented in tandem with illustrative survey data and excerpted interview data with graduates and family members.

Graduates' Relative Privilege and Power

Graduate privilege within the family does not typically originate in the educative process alone, rather the privilege that a college degree confers is both the result and cause of significant power differences operating within the working class family. Earning a degree can solidify and entrench existing power/privilege differences within the family (e.g., gender, birth order, skin color, US versus foreign born), as well as create new

avenues of privilege, potentially impacting intimacy and the emotional closeness among family members and exacerbating areas of conflict and tension. In the current project, graduates and families mentioned the ways that more educated family members were positively distinguished from other members of their family prior to their pursuit of a college degree -- avenues of privilege which were then further reinforced and cemented through the higher educational experience and with the conferring of the college degree.

Desiree, a family member participant, described the ways that her eldest brother (holding an MA) and lighter skinned half-sister (with a BA) were privileged within their family by gender and age in the first instance, and race and parentage in the latter. From Desiree's perspective, her credentialed siblings were treated better by their mother (now deceased), and have traditionally had more of a say in important family matters. Here Desiree describes her brother's elevated position within the family during a discussion of religious differences between he and his sister.

> **Desiree:** My brother, he's not into no type of religion or..culture or nothing. He's just into himself [chuckles]
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> **April:** Did he used to be? Did he used to be growing up?
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> **Desiree:** He didn't go to church when he was growing up. […] My mother used to make all of us go to church, but for some reason, he never used to go. He was the oldest and he just like he…you know, just basically kept us in line because it was just my mother. So he was the oldest and he was a boy. He just kept us in line, he used to do what he wanted to do. He never went to church, or nothing, but he's the one that's successful. I don't get that [chuckles] That's why I say sometimes, I'm like I don't know how he made it to go to college and get a Master's degree and got a house, and a car, good job and a good life and it's just like..and he the one that didn't do anything really—basically would go to school, that was it. Beat us up and keep us in line, and never contribute anything to the household. Even when my mother passed, and stuff, he just—he still never contribute anything. He was still going to school […] after Bachelors, he went straight for the masters, he went through 6 years of schools (…)

Desiree characterizes her brother as self-centered and selfish. She sees him as a person who lacks concern for others and whose religion is himself. He wasn't good in the moral sense as he didn't attend church and acted as tyrannical disciplinarian ("beat us up and keep us in line") and yet "good" things happened to him. To Desiree, this defies logic, as being pious and contributing to the communal is what should qualify one for success and prosperity. He didn't earn his success in her mind as he didn't "do anything" except "go to school," (the opposite of legitimate work), and did not contribute to the communal household, but to his own advancement only. She later mentions that he never "worked" at all until he earned his MA, revealing her assessment of work as explicitly paid employment.

Although their mother encouraged all of her children to pursue a college degree, Desiree's two older siblings were best positioned to translate those expectations into reality as they had the greatest access to concrete material support. This excerpt and the following illustrate the historical and current power differences existing between Desiree and her credentialed siblings:

> **Desiree:** [..] [My brother was] really dependent on my mother, like he never used to work, he just went to school, went to school. And everybody used to be working, like you know, have little part time jobs to contribute to the household. And he never used to give up anything. He used to just, you know, go to school. That was his life, going to school, going to school. But he's—in the long run..it's the people—another one of my sisters has a degree too, but she's a younger one. She has a good job too, but she still lives with my other sister. […] I think like if I would have did like he did, like I was struggling just because I had a son. I was struggling really just to pay the bills, and I was going to college and the financial aid and stuff wasn't that good, but my brother, he just went to school, went to school, went to school while everybody else was working. That's why his life is so good, and then my, the oldest sister, the next sister that I have, she has a different father, so her father was financially—he used to help her with school. And she really didn't have to work either. So I think that, that's a part of it too. […]

As the eldest son in a family headed by a single mother, he was put in (and took up) the role of enforcer and surrogate father – as such, he was held to a different set of expectations within the family, and allowed special accommodation. Her brother's life is good because he didn't "give up anything," looked out for himself and "just went to school." His privilege within the family translated into his relative privilege within the world, which isn't seen as fair to Desiree. Desiree's next oldest sister – favored for her lighter skin, and having a different (more supportive) father than Desiree and her other siblings -- became the 2nd person in the family to earn a degree (a BA). For Desiree, she is another example of preferential family treatment that is later associated with educational success and privilege. Desiree lacked the emotional support of her mother and the financial support of siblings (willing or not) that her brother had, and the financial support of a father that her sister had, when she tried to work her way through college as a young mother.

First-generation college graduate, Ernesto ("Ernie") candidly described the privilege he enjoyed as the first son in his family, and directly connects this gender privilege to his educational success:

> **April:** You told me a little bit about where you grew up, what was it like to be a member of your family? Like, if somebody was going to be adopted into your family back then, how would you orient them?
>
> **Ernie:** Into it? Hmmm.. Alright, it's a tough one, because like I got special treatment I feel, like compared to like my sisters. 'cause one thing, like my father, he wanted 8 kids, but he wanted all boys. He ended up getting 4 girls and 2 boys, you know, so then he wasn't too thrilled about –it's so whack though – about having 2 older daughters so then he really—from what I know, or from what I could understand is that he didn't pay too much attention to my sisters at all. And so he paid most attention to me and to my youngest brother and um..
>
> **April:** So you were the first boy?

> **Ernie:** Yeah, I'm the first boy, and then the only boy from my mother. […] And um…and so, it's kind of tough. It depends who you are and what gender you are. But like my mother treated me *royally*, in a way
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> **April:** Always?
>
> **Ernie:** yeah, always – she really treated me well, and um and I don't know if it's probably because I'm a boy, [or] that's the way she is, you know, and so I think it is because I'm a boy or because I'm a male because my sisters didn't have the same type of treatment. […]
>
> **April:** Do have any kind of example?
>
> **Ernie:** one example .. I used to just hang out all the time in the house, but I never cleaned, I never cooked, the only thing I had to do was just like throw out the garbage, but I rarely did that. And so like as a young child I would just like hang out, and I would be sitting on the couch and watch tv and I would be like, "Ma! Ma! Ma!" and I would call her and call her, and she would be like, "What?" and I would say, "I want something to drink" and she'll come and bring me something to drink, you know, in my hands. But meanwhile, my sisters, they were like .. out on the streets hanging out or in the house cleaning up, and the reason why they were out in the streets all the time was 'cause my mother never had the opportunity to like do whatever she could do, like to swim or ride a bike or you know, to just run around the yard, so she gave my sisters all the freedom, you know, to do whatever, but they took advantage of that freedom, and so whatever happened, happened. And like, so when it came to me, she was very strict with me so that I wouldn't go down the same road as they did, which was like—like with me it was either about getting somebody pregnant or using .. having drug addiction, or getting into fights all the time […]

Ernie recognizes that one's position within his family (i.e., gender) influences the type of treatment one gets, how supported you are academically and how much supervision one can expect. He describes being treated "*royally*" by his mother and receiving special attention from his father, relative to his sisters. Evidence of his own personal ambivalence and discomfort with his privilege is also apparent. Looking back with insight gained in part, through his college experiences, he describes the differential treatment by gender in his family as a "tough" (2X) and "whack" situation. However, he

also frames his sisters' outcomes as somewhat justified by their behaviors, i.e., they "took advantage of that freedom." They were offered freedom to fail while he was provided freedom from failure (e.g., negative peer influences, responsibility). Una (below) similarly describes very different gender-based levels of support for college-going within her family:

> **April:** So tell me about your path to college, like how did you get there? What was your line, your trajectory like?
>
> **Una:** Um, I went to high school that's right next to my college and I wasn't planning on going to that college because that's a city university college. I thought that – I wanted to go to a better college, but my family told me they could not support me because they were going to support my younger brother because he's male, I'm female. So when left to myself, I did went to interview with Cornell and um..I think NYU and the cost, which was horrendous, I figured that I don't want to carry a big student loan after I graduated, so I choose the lowest cost college that's the college I went to. And that's how I end up there.

Una's family explained that because of their limited financial means, they could only support her brother's college aspirations, which would make their disparate support an issue of scarce resources. In many ways it is, but Una also makes clear that the financial support represents their greater valuation overall of male achievement relative to that of females. The fact that they paid for tuition at an exceptionally expensive elite university for her younger brother (who later dropped out), which could have covered expenses for both of their children at a public institution, further illustrates the gendered educational expectations within hers, and many immigrant, families. Ironically, she is the only one in her family to have earned a college degree. The factor analysis survey items offers additional support: the greater *Family Support* for college-going reported by men, and greater education-related tension (*Education Tension*) reported by women, though

small in effect size, are consistent with the gender-specific support for college-going, narrated here by Ernie, Una and Desiree.

Sometimes the privilege associated with college graduates appeared to be more serendipitous; for example, having the good fortune of attending a small quality high school instead of a large and/or failing comprehensive middle school or high school; profiting from having older or wiser parents than their siblings or peers had, the advantage of having access to devoted and concerned teachers, their luck and skill in finding mentors and advocates in their schools or communities. Several graduates also mentioned birth order as a factor in their success, as did many of the survey respondents. However, given that there were no other significant trends related to birth order in the data, it seems that the relevance of birth order is family-specific (e.g., older sibs were favored in Desiree's family, while for Ernie, it was being the youngest), and instead, provides an acceptable accounting mechanism for success that is perhaps less emotionally loaded than are other reasons.

This is not to say that gender (or skin tone, or parentage, or birth order) is always – or ever -- the reason for educational success, but rather, in order to successfully travel the vast distance standing between working class individuals and a college degree, some kind of advantage, as well as some internal drive, is necessary to push one over the top of a very large pool of similarly struggling individuals, given the extremely limited material resources for higher education available to the working class and poor. Whether graduates capitalized on their earlier advantages, or accessed them along their educational path, the privileged place in society that they came to occupy in comparison to their

families, translates for many families, into greater relational tension and conflict – an issue we turn to next.

Graduates' Relative Educational Privilege Fosters Tensions Between Family Members

In both the qualitative and quantitative data, participants describe tension and conflict between them and their siblings, and to a much lesser extent, between them and their parents that is attributed specifically to differences in educational experiences, and/or the material resources made possible by a college credential. The generally bifurcated nature of item-responses below, toward general agreement or disagreement, indicate that for a significant minority of respondents, within-family tension related to disparities in higher educational attainment exists and impacts family relationships.

Table 21: Education-related family tension survey items

Survey item	**Agree & Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree & Strongly Disagree**
In my family, my education is sometimes the cause of tension [N=330]	31.5%	12.7	55.8
In my family, my education sometimes makes other members feel uncomfortable [N=327]	40.7%	10.7	48.6
I sometimes downplay my educational achievements around some members of my family [N=333]	46.5%	14.1	39.3
I watch the level of language I use with less educated members of my family [N=331]	40.8%	14.8	44.4

The first two items (plus 3 others) were the basis of the ***Educational tension*** factor, a rough measure of reported education-related tension**.** Interestingly, the last two

items were not a part of this factor, perhaps because they reference attempts to *reduce* difference and hierarchy. As such, they may in fact be evidence of attempts to maintain connections across difference, rather than being a straightforward indication of education-related tension. The substantial minority of graduates agreeing with these four items, in conjunction with the findings from the open-ended items, and qualitative data indicate that education-related tension significantly impacts many first-generation families.

Family tension is generated from 1) social comparisons, and the negative emotions that result, such as envy, guilt and/or shame; 2) persistently lopsided power dynamics (e.g., always being in a position of need, or always being expected to help); and 3) the type of attributions made for educational success and failure highlight notions of merit, accountability and value (who is more valued and "better than" others). *Educational Tension* was unsurprisingly inversely related to *Family Support* for college going. It was also inversely related to *Family Closeness*, suggesting that a close family might act as a buffer to tensions introduced by differences in educational attainment within the family.

Social comparison. Social comparison is one mechanism by which tension is generated within first-generation families. When family members compare themselves – their lives, accomplishments, and material resources -- to those of their college graduate family members, they typically evaluate themselves the way our society judges them: as lacking on multiple levels, which impacts their sense of self (identity, worth, efficacy):

> **Desiree:** […]I'm 46 years old and I'm a customer service rep for [a national transportation company]. And I have, I have a pretty, a decent job, but it's not decent-decent where, you know..I'm living like a luxury life. I'm just living basically normally, average. And I have family members that have, you know,

> degrees. I think that if I would have made it through college, and got my degree, I would have like a better life.//Really?//You know, because um my sister—my brother, he's a supervisor for [company], he makes very good money, you know, he got a house, and he got a car and he got—you know, he's living like the life I would like to live. You know, so I basically went through—I have some years of college but I never graduated. I have a high school diploma and that's it.
> […]
>
> Most of my family, they did pretty good, but it's just that ..uh, I think if I would have had the college education like they have—they both living nice lives, my sister, she has a car. I wish I could get a car, but..unfortunately I can't. um, I think having a college degree makes your life better. Like you have more opportunities, and, you know, you can do more with your life. With a high school diploma .. it's not much.

In telling me about herself and her life, Desiree very quickly confronts a sense of relative deprivation. She initially describes her job as "decent," but then immediately revises that assessment with an upward comparison to the careers of her older credentialed siblings. Compared to her life, her two older siblings enjoy the good life: hold decent jobs, have secure and comfortable housing, own a car. Desiree longs for the material comforts that her brother (MA) and sister (BA) have access to, but is denied those luxuries, in her mind, because she lacks a college degree. That they have what she wants but can't have, brings to the surface issues of fairness, deserving and merit, generating considerable tension and negative affect between Desiree and her siblings. Desiree identifies her siblings' college credentials as the main -- even sole -- reason for the differences in their life circumstances. The differential distribution of resources based on (or excused by) disparate educational credentials can only generate resentment, bitterness, and envy – potentially corrosive emotions when it comes to intimate relationships.

In the following excerpt, Desiree reveals some shame regarding what she sees as failure in her college attempt ("I was the one that failed"):

> **April:** [..] Why were you motivated to go to college at first?
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> **Desiree:** Because that's how my family was, and my mother, she wanted everybody to go to college just like my older brother and my sister. They went to college and they made it. I think my brother has a Masters and my sister has a Bachelors. And then the next one in the family, um..they didn't go to college, um..he went to the army. My brother is the next one, and then it's me, so..I guess I was the one that failed. But in a way I didn't fail, because I'm—it's not like I'm homeless or anything. But um, my mother, she always wanted everybody to go to college or go to the Reserves or something like that. You know, to make a better life for yourself.

Desiree attributes her own college aspirations to her family's values ("that's how my family was…") and her mother's hopes. She then goes through each of her siblings by birth order, identifying each as successive successes until she gets to herself, who she identifies as having failed. She immediately reframes the conversation, though, through downward comparison ("it's not like I'm homeless") to recoup her personal worth. Such narrative repositioning from "less than" to "not as bad as" is a labor intensive process, revealing another ideological dilemma inherent in the mobility project: while educational credentialing can "better" a person, the hierarchical nature of such credentialing simultaneously downgrades others, inevitably causing friction in many families and representing an affective technology that reproduces class-based friction and conflict. Desiree ends her response with the heavy implication of not having lived up to her mother's wishes and failing to make a better life for herself.

The wall of valor: Attribution, blame, and merit. First generation graduate Nikki describes her parent's pride in her accomplishments and sibling tension as inherently related:

> **April:** When you have tension or conflict in your family, what's it generally about?
>
> **Nikki:** […] it's usually about them feeling like my parents have given me everything, and haven't given them anything, and it's sort of like..well, everybody got offered tuition payment. You know, everybody got offered—like my parents did the same thing with all of us, they went through the process, they—you know, worked on the applications, they worked out what they needed to do to pay tuition, um..so but the—I think .. and what makes it hard is my parents, of course they're proud, so like there's like a wall in the house where's there's all of my diplomas, and all of my pictures and..you know, the kids, don't realize what the problem is, but they'll come in and say, "oh, there's so many pictures of auntie Nikki" and [chuckles] and you know, my parents are proud so they hang the graduation pictures, they hang the diplomas, so..
>
> **April:** And do you have any kind of example where that has come up explicitly?
>
> **Nikki:** um, it mainly comes from my sister in conversation. She'll call these family meetings and she'll say she feels like we've all done her wrong, and you know, that you paid for Nikki to go to school, but you know, but then my father will have to remind her, "well I paid for you to, but you didn't go!" So, you know, so
>
> **April:** And then does it get resolved or it just—
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> **Nikki:** No, it just lays lie until she, you know, comes with—my brother doesn't feel so much…about it as my sister does. My brother actually feels like he has..his path and that's what he does.

Tension in their family is related to the perception that Nikki's parents have disproportionately supported Nikki in her college pursuits over them, and that this imbalance was extreme rather than subtle. Nikki challenges this notion, and works hard to establish an equality of opportunity between herself and her siblings. "What makes it hard," according to Nikki, is that her parents unwittingly, in their extreme pride, highlight rather than downplay the attainment/outcome differences between she and her siblings. Nikki explains that the children in the family "don't realize what the problem is," thus establishing that the disparities in educational attainment, or the explicitness, is indeed a

problem. Like Nikki's parents, Esperanza's parents were also extremely proud of her, similarly displaying her degrees prominently in their home. Also like Nikki, Esperanza describes tension between her and her older sister:

> **Esperanza:** […] I think her and I have just kind of grown apart through this whole process.
>
> **April:** and the process being you going to school or—
>
> **Esperanza:** I think, yeah. I think she feels like that I'm better than her. I don't, I don't, I don't think so. I think our experiences and just .. the opportunities are just different
>
> **April:** Do you think that she feels, like, judged by you?
>
> **Esperanza:** Yeah, I think so, especially since I'm in social work and what I do for a living, like I counsel and I, you know, I counsel kids and then I kinda understand sometimes psychologically what she's going through, but it's just, I can't help my sister in that way, and like, but sometimes even if I try to talk to her, she always feels like I'm trying to psychoanalyze her. And maybe I am at some times, at some points, but.. I think part of that is my own fault, but at the same time I feel like … she ..it's hard for us to communicate anymore. It's just hard, I think just the whole situation—it's hard, because when my dad told me, I don't understand why she's so angry with me, what is it? You know, I didn't say anything, what did I do? It's like, "She's jealous" "Why are you jealous of me?" Oh you know, because right now she's thinking of going back to school and you're already done. And you have your Bachelors" and you know, my degrees like right there in the middle of the living room hanging up and//Wow//yeah. My parents are proud, they're proud, they're proud of the fact that I went away to school.

Here and in the earlier quote heading this chapter, Esperanza describes relational tension between her and her sister that stands in the way of their communicating directly or effectively. Esperanza seems perplexed by her sister's anger and jealousy. She protests that she didn't do or say anything. Then again, she doesn't have to, as everyone else does. Her achievement is celebrated daily by the prominent positioning of her credentials on the walls of the family home, in conspicuous absence of any other degrees. Culturally, we

don't have clear and established ways of recognizing and celebrating successes in arenas outside of an educational model of credentialing. How families celebrate and mark their children's accomplishment, and on the other side, fail to celebrate their other children's non-degreed successes in the same manner, will inevitably impact siblings relationships.

On the other side, educational privilege is also fraught and partial for first-generation graduates, whose successes are often infused with graduate guilt and a sense of loss. Esperanza, a 1st generation American who grew up in public housing with her parents, older brother and sister, discusses what she got out of her degree:

> **April:** What did you hope to get out of your degree?
>
> **Esperanza:** to have a good education, of course. I think for me it was getting out of the ghetto, making a better life for myself and my family [..] It's funny because .. I mean there are some things going on right now in my family where I feel like, kind of like, my education is kind of thrown in my face – not really thrown in my face, but other people feel like I'm throwing it in their faces because like my older sister [..] From what I gather, from what she tells me is that she had the opportunity-- she got a scholarship to go to college and my parents didn't want to let her go. So I think she has some sort of resentment against that and she takes it out on me sometimes—at least that's-- this is how I feel. My sister's 33 right now, and she's just starting to go back to school.

Esperanza was very emotional discussing the current tension between her and her sister, and at times had a difficulty expressing herself. All families have tensions, but in Esperanza's case, conflict was generated by perceived differences in educational opportunity. That their parents allowed Esperanza to go away to college when they did not allow her sister to, must seem incredibly unjust to both sisters. Esperanza was allowed the opportunity for "a better life" "out of the ghetto," while her siblings were not. Esperanza connects her sister's envy to negative treatment from her sister ("takes it out on me"). Envy is not conducive to mutual empathy, self-disclosure and other

interpersonal practices that bond people together. At the same time, Esperanza begins this chapter stating that her sister's jealousy and resentment, "*bothers me ..but at the same time, I kind of understand ..I understand that she's going through a lot right now. It's hard for me to talk about it [tearing up].. because we're really close and uh, I just think this whole experience has kind of changed everybody."* She is both bothered by the response, and she also understands her sister's reactions, and empathizes with her perspective, leaving Esperanza feeling conflicted and unsettled.

Ernie, like almost all of the graduates I spoke with, talked a lot about what he's gotten out of a degree… stating that he would be "miserable" without one. While graduates might not explicitly express guilt (or attempt to avoid that affectively aversive experience), when they describe their lives as so significantly improved by their college experience and degree, a credential and experience which is not available to or denied to their family members, and also narrowly associated with the individual, it seems inevitable that they would have some discomfort with their success.

Imbalanced power dynamics. Esperanza and Ernie are also differentially extended the opportunity to improve the lives of their family members as well. As the following survey items illustrate, a helper/helped relationship is fostered within the families of first-generation graduates by the privileging intervention that a college degree represents:

Table 22: Items related to the graduate as resource

Survey item	% Agree & Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
My education provides a resource for my family members [N=334]	66.8	13.5	19.8
My opinion holds a lot of weight in my family [N=330]	49.1	33.9	17
My family usually comes to me to discuss their big decisions or problems [N=331]	58	22.1	19.9
I usually consult with my family about big decisions or problems [N=329]	43.2	17.6	39.2

Two thirds of respondents believed that their degree represents a resource for their family and roughly half felt that their opinion was especially important within their family. Graduates also felt that their families were more likely to come to them for input on decisions and problems than they were to similarly consult family members.

April: Um, is there—well, do you usually consult your family when you have like a problem or any big decision to make?

Una: Never

April: Never?

Una: Never [chuckles]

April: Who would—you would go to somebody else before you went to your family?

Una: Um, there are various people I consider friends, friends in different area and I would definitely consult for [their experience in the area?]

April: On the other way around, does your family come to you when they have any problems or big decisions?

Una: Usually [chuckles]//yeah?//yeah.

Because of their generally greater material, cultural, and social capital, graduates are disproportionately called upon by their families for help and this helping dynamic

both privileges them, and sets them apart. The power to help demands deference and distance, foments resentments, guilt and shame, ultimately reinforcing within-family domains of power and privilege. In Esperanza's case, her social work degree grants her the power and inclination to "psychoanalyze" her older sister, while her employment as a high school guidance counselor positioned her as an informational gate keeper on higher educational resources for her sister who was newly pursuing a college degree.

> **April:** Did she talk to you about her plans to go back to school?
>
> **Esperanza:** Yeah, we talk about it. I said, you know, I told her, I was like--because I tell her about all different opportunities that are out there, all the resources, you know. She's an older adult going back to school, she might not financially be able to afford it, but you know, like I try to—you know, I was also a college advisor so like I know what's available, I know what she might qualify for, like I try to ..uh..give her that advice, but I think it's hard for her being the little sister, you know, I'm the little sister, she's the big sister and it's kind of like our roles kind of just reversed for a little while, you know.

Esperanza also has more material resources than her siblings. She later discusses downplaying the support she is able to offer her much older brother, who she does not have a close relationship with. [insert quote about her lending him her car, and the shift in power dynamics] Nikki offers another example of the family resource that many first generation graduates become, stating that "a lot of it falls on me":

> **April:** So he [father] really does support//Yeah//Uh huh. What about the other way around, does your family come to you with their problems and big decisions?
>
> **Nikki:** Yeah. Like, my grandmother passed away//I'm sorry to hear that//and um, this is probably 5 years ago now. And I had to get my sister an outfit [laughs], my brother a suit, I had to get the rent a van, and get everybody down to North Carolina for the funeral, so ..it's sort of like ..it falls on—a lot of it falls on me, so

And this issue of being a family resource comes up again later in my interview with Nikki:

April: How do you think your family's life would be different if you had never gone to college?

Nikki: My poor parents would be sad [laughs]

April: They would be sad?

Nikki: because my father always jokes and he says, You know, you know .. he's he's – he might be comfortable now, but there was a period of time in which he felt like, OK, your sister's…forget that, your brother: forget that, and he's like, you know, I'm just ..I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop for you. And I'm like, there's no other shoe to drop, I'm sort of ..I feel like mentally I'm ok, I'm gonna finish what I started, and so I think, I think my parents, at this point, my parents would be sad if I didn't have the ability to help them. Because that's really what it—you know, in the end what it's gonna be about, is I'm going to be the child that has to help them, so

April: And help them in what sense?

Nikki: I think financially, I think navigating systems, you know. Because my brother is scared to read or to deal with people in authority, my sister, depending on the day of the week, can't get out of bed, so it's sort of like, this is it, so

April: It's kind of a lot for you

Nikki: I think I'm used to it [laughs]

April: Oh this? it's nothing [joking]

Nikki: I think I'm actually used to it. I think it bothered me…I think it bothered me before, but I don't think it—like, you know, sort of like, what you do, you know

April: You've accepted it?//Yeah, yeah, so//Um,

The power dynamic between the helper and helped is present in several participating families, but none as explicitly as in Desiree's family. Desiree is always in the subordinate position of needing help, while her credentialed siblings are always in the position to give (or not give) with whatever constraints they want to impose on that giving (e.g., you have to pay it back within a certain amount of time).

April: And so, how would describe your family in terms of like how close you are?

Desiree: Oh, we don't be..like, with each other, like every day, or I don't see them like every week but like if there's a, we have like special occasions and stuff like that, everybody will come together. They love talking, if you need help, they'll help you. Its—I have a pretty close family. My mother raised us pretty good, so..um..if you nee—but usually you have to pay them back, like if you ask them for anything, they'll give it to you, but you have to pay 'em back, and you know, it's pretty…and I'm all the time in need for them, so because I'm..I'm just barely making it.//Yeah?//They'll help me out, but I don't ask them like, if it's like an emergency, I'll ask them, they'll give it to me. My brother, he'll give it to me, but he'll complain and complain, complain. My sister, she'll give it to me, but she wants her money back like within, you know, certain amount of time before, you know. She'll help by mainly by [buying things for her kids] but she don't get it for them now, like when they was a little bit younger. She'll get them a pair of sneakers or, you know, whatever. Like if they need something for school, or use the computer, or whatever – but I have a computer now, so

April: What's that like for you? You know, if you have to ask them for something?

Desiree: For me, I'm a survivor. [chuckles] I have to survive. It's just like—I don't want to lose my apartment, I don't wanna—you know, if I have to ask them for something, I will ask them. I know they'll give it to me, but I have to pay them back. I wouldn't suffer, I wouldn't sit here, if I need something like say if I didn't have any food, or anything like that, I could go to them and ask them if they could loan me maybe $50 to buy some food. And when I get my check or something, I'll pay them back. I wouldn't sit here starve and be selfish, like I don't wanna ask them. But I wish that I had they life but it's just that I don't. You know, the college degree, it did make a difference, it really did.

Within a discussion of how close her family is, the issue that emerges first and strongest is that of family help, specifically material assistance. Inter-familial borrowing of money is always fraught, but especially in families of upwardly mobile individuals (Ross, 1995). As she attempts to establish her family's closeness, supported by the fact that they will help out one another in times of need, she quickly undermines that idea with the clarification that assistance is not freely given, in that it comes with complaints and shaming attached: financial help must be repaid, and comes with time constraints not

unlike those imposed by a bank. While we don't know anything about her "borrowing" history, the worthiness of her need, or accuracy of her depiction of her family, what is evident is Desiree's understanding of her position as recipient, and her degreed siblings' position as givers/providers.

Desiree sees pridefulness as selfishness ("I wouldn't sit here starve and be selfish, like I don't wanna ask them"), but there is also the sense that the selfishness lies with the siblings, who demand their money back. Graduates are asked to help more because they can, and should under an ethics of group concern, of need fulfillment versus personal gain. Her envy for their power to help and shame at having to ask for help is evident, they are emotions that emerge readily in more than one prompt. However, she battles this mightily, beating back these negative representations, and instead, reframes herself as strong, as a survivor, who does whatever she has to in order to maintain her quality of life. Desiree offers a different (family) perspective on the disproportionate call on the graduates during critical events (death in the family) within the working class:

> **April:** Um, most families have conflict in some areas, you know, lots of different areas. Are there particular areas that your family has conflict around? Or tends to have arguments about?
>
> **Desiree:** Uh..it's like money. Like say..um, I could maybe [??] like when my mother passed away. She had insurance and stuff like that, but they always went to like my brother, my sister. They was always the first ones, because they had—I guess cause they had the money. And it's like they—at first, they, they put the money and stuff in, but then..I guess when the insurance policy came back, they wanted they money back, and it's like..you know, they can already see that we don't hardly have anything like, you know, like it's just other people down and especially my younger sister, but the money should have really stayed like in the household. We have nieces and nephews and you know, and stuff like that. They want their money back, they wanted extra money, and yeah, we have conflicts sometimes in the family with money. Yeah

The most educated and older siblings paid up front for expenses related to their mother's passing, but then reimbursed themselves with insurance money, which Desiree and her siblings didn't think was fair, given the limited resources the rest of them had access to, highlighting two very different ethics of distribution in operation, and conflict between the mobility project and family values. Both the closeness of the family and the 'goodness' of the graduates is here seriously called into question (Graeber, 2010).

There are psychological benefits of giving, even more so than receiving. This has implications within first generation families because of the often one-sided giving (and receiving) that occurs when one family member persistently has "more." Una shares a similar helping-relationship with her family members, especially her older brother, who will not likely be in a position to reciprocate. She helps financially (with a wedding in Taiwan), with homework, with knowledge/info, maintaining family relations. Esperanza also disproportionally helps parents and siblings. The giver may feel that they now have a certain 'say' in the personal matters of the receivers. Esperanza relished being able to take care of her parents in their retirement. They similarly made sure that she had exclusive access to their bank accounts, and safe deposit boxes.

Shifting our point of comparison though, contextualizes our understanding of the social and material privilege of first-generation college graduates. While Ernesto and Esperanza have significant privilege within their families of origin, feel tremendous pride in themselves, particularly as Latino/a, their power and privilege in the world is more limited by degree-inflation, by the type of majors and fields they went into, and by the sizable debt incurred along the way (in excess of $50, 000 for Esperanza). Their limited rooting in their college community, and exceptionally difficult transitions to college

(Esperanza describes having an "emotional breakdown" her first year at school), all temper their overall privilege.

Desiree's brother and sister's financial position maybe more precarious than their family understands it to be. While they are economically privileged compared to Desiree and others in their family, in absolute terms, they are not among the elite. Neither attended prestigious universities, are not necessarily wealthy, and are disproportionately called upon by their many siblings to help in times of trouble. Their psychological and emotional experience growing up in their home may not have been as charmed either. From Desiree's description, her brother was responsible for monitoring and maintaining the conduct of his many younger siblings; he likely felt a lot of pressure from his mother to succeed and yet was left to do his work totally on his own, with little emotional support or enthusiasm from his siblings. Her sister was the only one of their many siblings to have a different father. Such difference could very well have been experienced as isolation at times.

Graduates have a greater ability to help and advise, they are called on more, and their accomplishments also more valued within the family. This effects family relations by setting up a preferred status of graduates with parents in relation to their siblings; they fulfill their filial duty while siblings are disappointments; also when success is defined primarily in terms of higher educational success, the family support and accomplishments of siblings can be ignored and unseen.

The general public understands higher education, especially for working-class and students of color as a means of "bettering" themselves. What's the difference between doing better than the last generation (a tenet of upward mobility) and *being* better than?

And how are family members to understand themselves within this discourse of betterment that they are likely to challenge and also agree with? Conley points out that when it comes to our siblings, we use individual and characterological explanations for both their success and failures (p.7), which is also supported by the findings from Open Ended Item 1 demonstrating that graduates tend to hold siblings more accountable for a lack of educational success.

> **Esperanza:** [..] Like I know she's going through a lot, but like, I try to talk to her and all we do is fight, and like, just the past, the last argument we had, it came up, "Oh, you think you're better than me because you went away to college" and you know, and I'm like, "What do you mean? I don't think I'm--" you know what I mean, it's just sometimes I think she, it's like she has such ..uhhhhgg! so much resentment against the, against the whole school and it's funny because you would never think this, I would have never thought that this would be an issue in my family [..] I think her and I have just kind of grown apart through this whole process.

She seemed torn about who was at fault, did not want her sister to be upset, but at the same time, did recognize precisely why she might have reason to be. Esperanza tries to connect with her sister through care-giving behaviors, rather than explicitly talking about the unfairness of her opportunities in relation to her sister's opportunities. She tries to use her experiences to "help" but those overtures are understood as attempts to 'psychologize' (pathologize) her sister and only further emphasize the power differences between them. For Esperanza's sister, these injuries of class have come closer to home, threatening what were previously seen as strong relationships.

Desiree connects her brother and sister's pride with being "uppity," and better than:

> **April:** What do you think um, your brother and sister's life would be like if they never went to college?

> **Desiree:** Miserable. [chuckles]
>
> **April:** You think?
>
> **Desiree:** I think that they would probably be miserable. I don't know//Why do you—//Because—not really miserable—because they wouldn't have the life that they have, and they so..proud of themselves, and they just like—I'm not saying they uppity, but they, they proud of themselves. They..they happy for they life. My brother, he has a house, a car, you know, he gets good money. He's, you know—and my sister, she works for the [City Agency]. She's a supervisor there, so she has a decent job too. She lives like [midtown], nice building. You know, [celebrities] live in her building//Wow!

"The most helpful thing a therapist can do is to identify, when appropriate, the social class basis for family tensions. This identification is essential, as it gives a name, a label, to that which people often are afraid to acknowledge because of embarrassment or shame. In our culture, people may feel personally responsible for being lower class. On the other hand, if they have been upwardly mobile and acknowledge it, they risk being labeled a snob. Naming the issue and helping people to compromise can alleviate many social tensions within families" (Ross, 1995; 348).

Higher educational experiences and credentialing have a lasting impact on working-class family relationships

Table 23: Graduates' sense of social mobility

Survey item	**Agree & Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree & Strongly Disagree**
I belong to the same social class as my family of origin [N=336]	36%	16.7	47.3%
I have changed social classes from the social class I grew up in [N=330]	58.8%	13	28.2

Graduates have detailed in their responses to OE2[36] the specific ways that higher education has contributed to differences developing between them and their families. The majority of graduates also feel that they are now in a different social class than their family of origin, with close to 59% indicating that they (and not their family members) have changed social class. Such upward mobility through higher education has a lasting impact on many relationships within the working class family that we wouldn't expect to see within middle-classed or more educated families.

For example, Esperanza's educational successes had a very different impact on her relationship with her parents – which became even more intimate and interconnected -- than it did on her relationship with her sister. Although Esperanza's educational attainment were a source of pride for her parents, and improved the lot of her family as a whole, her success also constituted a threat to overall family connectedness by undermining Esperanza's relationship with her siblings, and her siblings' relationship with their parents. A similar dynamic was described by Nikki, who has been able to fulfill her parents' desires, whereas her siblings haven't been able to.

> **April:** […] So why do you think you were the first in your family to get a degree?
>
> **Nikki:** (…) I think I'm the only one my parents-- the plan worked for my parents. I think, I think they tried the same thing with all of us, but I I think I'm probably the only one who kind of, you know, carried it though and then after the..after I saw how [laughs] things were going on the other end, it's sort of like – and my parents saw how things were going on the other end, they sort of re..vamped their resources, you know like, we better put our resources over here [chuckles] because it seems to be.. you know, happening, so I think that made a..that made a huge difference

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[36] Open-Ended item 2: *"Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently than the rest of their family [politics, likes/dislikes, culture, religion]. How true is this in your family?" Please explain or give an example.*

Earning a college degree and beyond fulfills both personal as well as family dreams and aspirations, just as failing to do so represents both an individual and group failure. Naturally, this would affect family relationships differently depending on the specific relationship within the family. Nikki described maintaining an especially close relationship with her parents, but had more distant (with her brother) and tenuous (with her sister) relationships with her siblings. Where once Esperanza and her sister were exceptionally close, there was now considerable distance between them. Esperanza tells me that she and her sister, "have just kind of grown apart through this whole process" and her educational trajectory has changed their whole family. Kenneth narrates something similar:

> **April:** When you were in college, what was your relationship with your family?
>
> **Kenneth:** I kept in-- Well when I was in prep school, I wrote a lot, I called every week. When I got in college, I called once a month. Didn't call write much at all. Started—the ties—the family ties started—it wasn't separating, but ..I was breaking off. I wasn't as dependent emotionally. That was ..tough on mom because she got a kick out of the letters and calls, sisters got a kick out of hearing from me. I didn't recognize that, that was selfish, yeah, a more "me" type attitude.

While separating is an expected and "healthy" aspect of adulthood, this separation is exacerbated for first-generation college graduates. The educative process is often a distancing one for working class families, undermining intimacy and facilitating relational tension -- a distance that one cannot easily come back from. The college experience also seems to specifically increase distance between non-degreed individuals and first-generation graduates (e.g., Ernie and his oldest sister, Desiree and brother), while drawing family members with similar educational levels closer together (e.g., Ernie and Angelica, Denise and Noah, Wendy and her brother).

The current data reveal a cultural and emotional gulf separating graduates from their families of origin. For example, family members typically knew very little about the college experience of their children or siblings, including such details as what their family member majored in, the type of degree they earned, awards conferred, or details of their employment. Survey data (e.g., the item above and OE2) reveal that many respondents feel that they occupy a different cultural landscape than their families as well, which they attribute to their higher education experiences. The interview data provide a focused analysis into the contours of specific family relationships. Una, for instance, describes a disconnection between she and her family around what constitutes valid problems or concerns that she attributes to differences in perception:

> **April:** Are there things that you don't talk to your family about, but wish that you could?
>
> **Una:** Lots. I think lots, because when I was ..first moved here, I watched a lot of TV. Didn't have friends, so I watched a lot of TV, and um Cosby show, and there's all these sitcoms about great family, great relationship they enjoy and how they can talk to, talk to their family about anything, and I, I wish I had that. And a good topic that could range from anything, everything I think, but..because they don't understand, talking to them, I actually get more, um..get into..more—I have to explain to begin with, and then I have to..I have to get them to understand my issue, my problem and end up being told that, you know, I am too spoiled, or just because I have all these great..great..degree and work experience, I shouldn't be so..um—basically I will be told that I am annoying because those are not issues, those are not problems, and why am I bothering them with..I think, if I [do] try [small laugh]

Una wishes that she and her family were closer, and that they talked more frequently and openly. Her description of her family's reaction to her attempts to explain and share the concerns of her life with them, centers around her experiences of feeling rebuffed, shamed and invalidated – specifically because of her college and work successes.

Some graduates, like Kevin below, describe not being able to connect deeply with their family, not talking about things that are important to them, and not talking to them about things that they think might have a distancing effect on their relationship with family; e.g., like avoiding discussing work or schooling, travel, politics, even expressing opinions -- in an effort to maintain connection.

> **Kevin:** definitely. Um I guess it's created some kind of a gap. I still feel very close to my brother and he still has—he has a college education and we're able to communicate pretty well, and we have conversations and..that are above and beyond what I would talk to my parents about, they're more [sighs] they're more, you know, intellectual. But aside from him…I don't know, I wind up talking about ..yeah, the weather.//uh huh//[laughs] and this is my own family, so I feel kind of bad about that I guess.
>
> **April:** Do you think that they notice it at all?
>
> **Kevin:** [..] I don't see how they couldn't. I'm sure they do, I guess we just don't say anything about it.//uh huh// or maybe they don't, I don't know. I think that they probably do. I should ask 'em. I should ask my parents that.

The paradox of graduates and family members keeping parts of themselves and their lives separate/disconnected in order to stay connected with one another is not exclusive to the mobility project specifically within working-class relationships, but exists more broadly within interpersonal relationships, particularly for women (Miller & Stiver, 1991; 2-3). However, this paradox is heightened in family relationship dynamics of first-generation graduates, in part because through the schooling process, they come to see the world and each other so differently.

Survey item	**Extremely & Fairly true**	**Neither true nor Untrue**	**Somewhat true & Not true**

Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently than the rest of their family (politics, likes/dislikes, culture, religion). How true is this in your family? [N=336]	67.7	17.7	14.7

For Desiree, her siblings' completion of a degree negatively correlated with her perceived closeness to her siblings. She was in closer contact with her non-degreed siblings, while describing conflicted relationships with her two college-educated siblings. She was clear that she didn't particularly like her brother, and described her sister as "uppity" and yet, longed to be closer to them and see them more frequently.
Her sister lives nearby, but feels a world away from her ("[Celebrities] live in her building").

> **April:** Uh huh. Is there anything that you would change about your relationship with them?
>
> **Desiree:** Yeah, I was saying that too, that's funny. I was saying that the other day, that I wish I could have a better relationship with her, but I guess it will always be the same, because sometimes when I do talk to her, she talks to me, you know, every day chit chatting, she's nice and then—one time I might call her house, and she doesn't want to speak to me. So I don't know, she's just a up and down person, I'm not going to be kissing her butt or something [chuckles] like that. I'm not going to be um…trying to kill myself to speak to her//Um hmm// Sometimes she'll talk to me, sometimes she don't. Sometimes she want to be bothered and sometimes, she don't. She's like, more like a uppity person. She thinks she's better than me I guess.

When asked how their degree has affected their parents, graduates point to the sense of pride that their degree brings to them. That one sibling and not another, contributes this powerful source of parental pride, has the potential to introduce conflict between siblings, and between parents and non-degreed siblings, as in the case of Esperanza's family. The effect of the specious notion of sibling equality is fairly positive,

if the rivalry and competition between siblings is benevolent and exists within a close knit family who incorporates the degree attainment of one person into the identity of their family, as in Ernie's and Angelica's family. When the pride can be shared among siblings (i.e., more than one sibling has earned a degree or experiences professional success), then the family narrative is more likely to move toward one of communal success and pride, and away from one of individual heroism.

The effect is less positive if the family understands degree attainment the way the world does: as an individual achievement within an environment of abundant opportunity. The degree can in fact be a distancing mechanism, pulling apart close families like Esperanza's and increasing distance and tension in families (e.g., Desiree, Roz) or relationships (e.g., between Sharon and her husband) that aren't close to begin with. It can function to align similarly degreed family members, or bring favor with parents. Consequently, the extent to which the educational process strengthens the group/the working class family is uncertain, contested and even subtractive for some families.

Mother and daughter, Cora and Noreen, offer a counter-story to the narrative of relational distance in first-generation college graduate families, in part because there is a strong narrative of Noreen having always been different from her family, particularly in her interest in books and schooling, and her solitary preferences (i.e., wanting to be alone).

> **April:** Do you think that earning a degree has affected Noreen's life?
>
> **Cora:** […] not really. But she's always been smart. She knows how to, you know, make it through, so

> **April:** So you think that, you know, college was—she was—that's just, part of her personality is that she likes to read, and likes to study, and it doesn't really matter that she earned a degree?
>
> **Cora:** Oh, I think—it matters to her, yes//it matters?//uh huh, but, you know, like I said, she's *always, always* been smart. You know, she'll always have that..uh, I don't know how you can say it..[loud sigh] I'm not trying to be prejudice or anything, but she always had that um…that..not that she's better than me, but she always had that ..*White* in her, you know. And she always had the talkin', the special words, the things—you know, it's[..] it's-- I'm very proud of her.

Cora had a hard time expressing herself to me (and I, to her), perhaps because I asked abstract questions requiring a certain discursive facility and "special words" about issues that may not have been especially important to her. She sighs loudly while answering…which could be about her answer, the question, or both. Cora explicitly equates schooling with Whiteness; Whiteness as a way of talking and culture, and school as raced/classed culture. She is expressing her sense of her daughter being different from her and the rest of their family. Noreen excels at talking and writing, things that she herself never liked about school. She's proud of her whether or not she personally values such (raced/classed) attributes.

Cora qualifies her statement about her daughter and race (it's not prejudice); Noreen has some White 'in' her but isn't White. Although Cora describes Noreen as inherently and historically smart, she also portrays her early on in our interview as hard-working, determined and practical – qualities very much associated with working class values. Cora also clarifies that her daughter isn't "better than" her, yet her statement implies/suggests that she might be in the minds of others. However, Cora's tone was neutral and non-defensive. Cora also feels that she and Noreen belong to different social classes:

> **April:** [..] Um, would you describe your social class as the same as Noreen's?

Cora: um, No. [chuckles]

April: No. you think she's in a different class?

Cora: Yes, I think she *is*. She goes out with people that can talk, you know, her level and about things that she's interested in. like she writes a newspaper and she knows how to talk about it. Me, when I go out, I just go out and have fun and talk about my things. I don't talk about what's going on, we either talk about the job, you know, we married, talk about our home life, and something like that

April: uh huh. And she has different conversations?

Cora: Yes. First of all, Noreen is not married, and so she, you know, she—her and her friends, they talk different. They're not married, they're, you know, they..they have different discussions. I have set there and watched them, and I just shook my head. I didn't even listen any more, I just—I couldn't keep up with 'em, just say it like that, I could not keep up with them.

April: And how did that make you feel?

Cora: that was no problem, they can talk among themselves, you know. As long as they don't bring me into the conversation

We might ask why Cora doesn't want them to bring her into their conversation, since she clearly enjoys talking, but it seems to come down to the fact that they like to talk in different ways about different things. Cora doesn't want to be a part of their conversations because for her, "having fun" with her friends involves talking about her day to day experiences, rather than abstract or philosophical (Noreen's major) matters. Cora is referencing what she sees as historical and idiosyncratic differences between her and Noreen. These are and are not impediments to connection within their family. And both Cora and Noreen describe many ways in which they are close and connected; Noreen spends a lot of time at her parent's home -- keeps a garden at her parents place – and they have dinner together at least once a week. The fact that Cora didn't necessarily know details about her academic achievements could be attributed to Noreen's reticent

and solitary nature, as much as to a lack of family interest. And the perceived differences between her and her family, were not expressed as the source of relational tension.

Interestingly, when asked whether she and her family were in the same social class, Noreen responded, “Yeah. [laughs] and that pisses me off! I should be in higher social class because I have a degree//that’s funny//ok, but..there are other factors that the degree cannot solve.” She identifies those other factors to be race and gender. Noreen and her mother narrate different understandings of social class in their responses to this question, with Noreen emphasizing the economic aspects and Cora focusing on cultural aspects. We hear a similar understanding of their personal and cultural (educational and class-based) differences from Noreen’s perspective (below). I had asked Noreen to describe the circumstances under which conflict emerged between her and her family:

> **April:** What might they [your family] be mad at you for?
>
> **Noreen:** Uh, because maybe I don’t do enough around the house, but I don’t live with them no more, so that doesn’t come up anymore. Um..what have they been mad at me about lately? They haven’t been mad at me about anything lately. Um, I’m usually a little distant. They don’t like that sometimes. My father’s care. You know, my sister picks up a lot of the burden from it. So she gets stressed out so, you know, that might be an issue.
>
> **April:** Yeah. So do you feel like you’re distant from them?
>
> **Noreen:** Uh, sometimes, yeah.
>
> **April:** Is that a conscious thing, or it just happens?
>
> **Noreen:** I think that’s just the way I’ve always been. I’m just slightly..my mother says I’m a loner sometimes. You know, so I tend to be a little distant. I’m also a little different from my family, so
>
> **April:** Yeah, in what way?

> **Noreen:** I think a little differently, you know, I have different interests, you know. I'm a philosopher, my family isn't. Therein lies an issue [laughs]. You know, so they don't want to talk about..**dumb stuff that I might talk about** [emphasis added], you know.
>
> **April:** Uh huh. Well, um some first-generation college grads have said that because of their education they see the world differently than the rest of their family, in terms of like politics or culture, or religion. Do you think that's true for you and your family at all?
>
> **Noreen:** Um…I see the world differently, but I don't think that's any better or worse than they do. You know, I think that..you can kind of get caught up in your intellect, and think, Oh I went to school and learned this and lalalalalal. You know, but just because someone didn't go to school doesn't mean they don't have that same level. You know, as a philosopher I get involved in a lot of political..you know, things and you know, issues of social justice or whatever, and I do have a set pattern and a thought process that I bring to those, but I can sit there and talk to my sister, and she'll have, she can get to similar conclusions as me, so..you just—I think you just have to give people a chance. For me personally, as a philosopher, I believe everyone has their own philosophy in them, so. [comments to herself about her cabinets]
>
> **April:** and do you feel like um, it sounds like, but let me just ask you if you feel like the differences between you and your family were there, um, before your education, or not—you don't attribute them to your education?
>
> **Noreen:** Some..I think they were there before the education. Do I attribute them—I mean…[sighs] I'm not saying education hasn't changed me, but I've had an emotional education as well as an academic education, so those two things together makes me a little different from my family. Um, I don't think that's a bad thing though.

What stands out in her description of the potential sources of conflict within her family is that her education and her differentness comes up only peripherally. But even more striking is that she designates her philosophical interests as the "dumb stuff" she might want to discuss, in relation to the interests of her family. Noreen is aware of, but doesn't subscribe to, the notion of educated superiority. She concedes that her education – for her it's also the pursuit of that education – has changed her, but makes clear that it's

not the only thing that has affected her, and may not even be the most important influence on her.

Discussion

Patricia Mann argues that “only by reclassifying the family as a socially contingent set of relationships” from the historical understanding of families as “sites of natural and necessary affective bonds,” can social scientists interrogate and “effectively critique patterns of domestic injustice in terms of categories of individual rights and social justice” (Mann, 1994; 35). In the assumptions that she lays out in her analysis of agency and micropolitics, Mann identifies the family as “a philosophically interesting site” (ibid), arguing that:

> “It is no longer plausible to think of the family as a site of natural and necessary roles and relationships of men and women. Kinship relationships now involve each individual in a broad spectrum of daily choices. These individual choices are clearly subject to normative social evaluations, as we scramble to articulate our preferred conceptions of ‘family values.’ And conflict-ridden relationships between men and women within the family now invite evaluation in terms of categories such as justice and injustice.” (Mann, 1994, 35).

Mann was talking about the micropolitics of gendered injustice within the private sphere (e.g. division of labor), dynamically informed by other identity categories, but her entreaty can (and should) also productively be applied to similarly “conflict-ridden” issues around educational privilege, classed power relations, and in/justice within first-generation families as well.

This work is not a rallying cry against higher education for working class individuals; the opposite, it’s a cry for a broader understanding of public education to see and educate the person within their social and relational context. The notion of education

as an individual intervention must be contested in order to embrace a relational model of outcomes, because a nation of individual successes is not the same as a successful nation.

Ideological Dilemmas: Fissures of Possibility

RQ3: What are the ideological dilemmas of families of first-generation college graduates and how are these dilemmas negotiated by graduates and families? How might such strategies inform an agenda of social change?

This chapter is an exploration and discussion of the ideological dilemmas introduced within working-class families by disparate educational outcomes between family members, and the ways in which such differences are negotiated by individuals. These relational dilemmas mirror larger socio-political dilemmas, informing our relationships with/to social institutions, and structuring our relationships within families and groups. The contrary themes within and between ideologies, both theoretical and lived, provide the basis of deliberation (Billig, et al., 1988), and afford opportunities for challenging and interrupting mechanisms of stratification. This research also provides the rare opportunity for working class families, motivated by love and caring, to educate social science on productive means of connection, not just across, but through, difference.

States of Dilemma

The idea of meritocracy and equality within a society stratified by race and class, a stratification primarily achieved through its educational system, will necessarily be fraught with ideological tensions and dilemmas (see Billig, et al., 1988). Ideological dilemmas are not decisions to be made or moral dilemmas, per se. They are two incompatible ideological paths, the jagged spaces between which represent unique and productive sites of analysis. Stanley & Billig (2004) write, “In an ideological dilemma,

two sets of commonly shared values will appear to be in rhetorical conflict with each other. However, speakers will try to manage both sets rather than siding with one or the other. (..) When narrating past events, people can be attempting to negotiate such dilemmas of ideology" (p. 160). However, ideologies are neither inherently coherent nor consistent, so dilemmas emerge within specific ideologies as well as between them (Billig et al., 1988; p. 34). Accounting for one's individual success within the working class family, then, will be psychologically, socially, and most relevant to this work, relationally fraught. This is especially the case as primal/primary and psychically constitutional relationships (i.e., with one's parents and siblings) are at stake.

Five dilemmas were identified from the interview and open-ended survey data, and informed by the first level research findings. The specific discursive circumstances under which ambivalent feelings or experiences were described or expressed were also analyzed. Data were then further examined for possible ways that individuals negotiate such dilemmas through an examination of participants' positioning practices (Harré & Langenhove, 1998), and the application of a hermeneutics of demystification (Josselson, 2004). The connection then between these interpersonal dilemmas and larger sociopolitical and cultural dilemmas was theorized, as was the potential for such dilemmas to inform a social change agenda. These ambivalences are discussed/organized from the more specific *lived* dilemmas to the more *theoretical* ideological dilemmas: 1) *Learning one's place within a class hierarchy*, 2) *Family ambivalence about college-going*, 3) *Equality of opportunity versus unequal family outcomes, 4) Higher education as beneficial versus harmful to the working class family*, and 5) *Education as critical interruption of inequality versus primary mechanism of social reproduction*.

1) Learning One's Place: Lessons in Stratification

Learning one's place within (a raced, classed, educational, gendered) hierarchy means learning to stratify. For first generation college graduates, this often includes the realization that gains in status mean that some people are necessarily "better than" others and that those others might just be your kin. Learning one's place is also about learning to 'place' one's parents; acknowledging the desire to NOT be like ones parents, and go 'beyond' them in key ways, like education and social class. During college, many graduates (e.g., Esperanza, Ernesto and Kenneth) became more aware of classed and raced distinctions and then located themselves both vertically "higher" than their family/communities of origin, and also significantly "lower" than their new set of peers. Esperanza (below) describes the relative advantage she associates with her college experience:

> **Esperanza:** […] I don't want to say because I'm a minority I was given more opportunities, but I think because the situation I was in, the school that I was in, I think there was more opportunities for me to grow—like, I went *abroad*, I went away *twice*. I went to Spain, I went to the Dominican Republic, so like I got to do things that I probably would have never had the opportunity to do otherwise if I was still living at home, you know. I grew up in public housing, who gets—growing up in public housing, who gets to go away to college and you know, go visit all these different European countries? I *never* thought I would have had the opportunity to do all of that [..]

Although she questions whether they were due to her race/ethnicity, Esperanza is still in wonder over the opportunities she has had, and is keenly aware of how her experience differs from similar others in her community("who gets to go away to college…?"). This is especially clear in her discussions of her relationships with her older siblings, particularly her sister. At the same time, graduates, like Esperanza, often experienced multiple shifts in their level of social inclusion/exclusion: for example, a

shift from a context of social inclusion (within their family, high school and/or communities) to a university context where they simultaneously experienced a new, though precarious, sense of social inclusion within a White and middle classed mainstream, and an unsettling marginalization attributed to one's racial/ethnic and class identities:

> **April:** So was race and class talked about at your school?
>
> **Esperanza:** oh yeah. Oh yeah! We had like—there was like the Smitties, the rich white girls, you know, they used to wear the JCrew and the preppy AberCrombie and Fitch. I mean, there was this one—the eating area. [..] They had um, they had like the areas divided into like little continents//Ohhh//Africa here, Asia over here//Wow//yeah, it was crazy. Yeah, so there was definitely I think when I went to college, that was something that really like, I didn't think about it in high school. You know, I didn't think, like—for me, my race and my color didn't really—I didn't really, you know, I didn't really—it was interesting, I didn't really think about it too much until I went away to school. That was when I was kind of like, Wow, I'm really—I really am different, you know.
>
> **April:** What was that like, to realize that you were different, and that there is a different experience for students of color who are in other settings?
>
> **Esperanza:** Look, I don't want to make it a..a situation where, like I'm playing the victim. I'm not, but..it's like..I don't know, it's definitely different. In what ways? Class. Just culturally um..
>
> **April:** Also, more like what was it like for you, like that realization? Was it like—was it just something you just never thought of? Was it traumatic? Or was it just like you suspected it, or--
>
> **Esperanza:** I really didn't think about it. Was it traumatic? I think my first semester..traumatic-- it sounds too strong. I think it was more like…I don't want to say scary either, but (laughs, then sighs loudly)… I just—I didn't know what to expect and it was kind of like, uh, it was depressing, because I was away from my family. I felt alone. […] and then just the attention on me. Everybody else was different from me. I mean, everybody, but there's like…it's just something I really never thought about. I think for me just getting used to it. And then trying to fit in. like I remember coming back home and like I sounded different. "Oh my god, you sound white!" "What? What do you mean I sound White? You know, it was just like the education also kinda made me different because I was able to see things differently from like-- when I would come back home during summer

> breaks or during Thanksgiving, and "Esperanza, you know, why are you talking like that?" "What do you mean, why am I talking like that?" you know.

Esperanza struggled to describe her experience, but it is clear that her race/ethnicity and social class (here discussed in tandem) wasn't something that she actively thought much about in her small progressive and mostly Black and Latino high school. The primarily White and upper classed university setting established to a new degree, her marginal social positionality, the result of which was both a sense of isolation and hypervisibility. She realized to a new degree how "different" she was from her peers in college, and over time got "used to" standing out, and then worked to adapt/assimilate to her new (upper/middle) classed and raced (White) environment.[37]

While Esperanza marveled at her new access to middle-class privilege, she also encountered a new sense of alienation from some of her family as a result of her adaptation to the university setting. In the excerpt below, Esperanza describes a scene in which her connection with her sister collides with her hybridized identity (Walkerdine, et al) as a would-be college graduate. I included Esperanza's full response to show her awareness of her relative (egoistic) advantage (Runcimann, 1966) in relation to her older sister, as evident in her discussion of power differences and reversals within that relationship:

> **April:** Did she [sister] talk to you about her plans to go back to school?
>
> **Esperanza:** Yeah, we talk about it. I said, you know, I told her, "M," I was like, because I tell her about all different opportunities that are out there, all the resources, you know. She's an older adult going back to school, she might not financially be able to afford it, but you know, like I try to—you know, I was also a college advisor so like **I know** what's available, **I know** what she might qualify for, like I try to ..uh..**give her that advice**, but I think it's hard for her being the

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[37] All of these graduates of color mentioned being called "White" by family or friends during their college years.

> little sister, you know, I'm the little sister, she's the big sister and it's kind of like our roles kind of just reversed for a little while, you know//Right//[tearing up] Because she *did* help me a lot during my whole college process, she helped me with my essay—you know, like she was involved, a lot and I think vicariously she was kind of living through me, I mean she—I remember her coming up to visit me, and this was my um sophomore year of college, and her and her friend came up—I was like what, 22, she must have been like 27—and her and her friend they drove all the way up to school and they come in with like 2 big 6 packs of beer and we're like sitting in my room .. and were just hanging out, and that just—I wasn't into that [laughing], I just wasn't, you know, and I guess for her that was the whole college thing, you know, driving through the fraternities, and like wanted to go to the parties. I just wasn't into that like, that wasn't me.

Esperanza says that because of her education, their roles "just kind of reversed for a little while" but this reversal is likely not short-term, as she may hope it to be, but rather heralds a long term reversal of power. The traditional family hierarchy of age is upended by the college opportunity, and the help that Esperanza is now able to offer is in the form of middle-class advisement. Esperanza emphasizes her "knowing" in relation to her older sister – and she is a true resource to her family, but this assertion of knowledge and expertise represents a form of interclass communication, or way of relating, that working class people associate with the educated elite and dislike (Frank, 2004). As a college counselor with a social work degree, Esperanza at times relates to her sister on a level of remediation and pathology that her sister, in fact, bristles over, asking Esperanza, "why are you always trying to psychoanalyze me?!"

There are many possible reasons for Esperanza's tears, but they seem related to a sense of helplessness. Despite her gains in status, resources, and social/cultural capital, Esperanza's ability to change the circumstances of M's life are still very limited, illustrating a painfully *lived* ideological dilemma. This reversal of power dynamic also emphasizes the opportunities that Esperanza has enjoyed and that her sister wanted so

much but was denied. Her tears may then also be related to the profound unfairness (and dilemmatic aspect) of the situation. Their parents, more than the world, denied M access to college – or at least it would seem: M had an opportunity (in the form of a scholarship) to go to college, but their parents did not permit her to go. Of course, this can't be totally laid at the feet of their parents, who had legitimate fears about the distancing role that higher education might play in their relationship with their child. Indeed, they attribute the emotional distance between their son and the rest of the family to his boarding school experience[38]. The fact remains that M was offered one, and only one, highly contingent (sports scholarship) opportunity to access higher education.

There are very limited ways to actually 'share' the individualized opportunity that attending college represents, especially the opportunity to go away to school. M contributed to Esperanza's success and yet, she can't share in her younger sister's success in the same way that their parents can. Esperanza and her sister face each other in a dorm room that both wanted, but belongs to only one of them, and yet is the result of many contributions. M invested time and energy and probably money to visit her sister in this setting, attempting to be a part of it (to "vicariously" live through Esperanza), and it's just not available to her. Esperanza doesn't identity with the perhaps naïve stereotype of college life that her sister wants to partake in, or her sister's desire to party ("that wasn't me"). Within this data set, graduates often describe themselves in diametrically opposed terms to their families of origin, and of having successfully avoided being like their family members. The majority of graduates agree that they now occupy a different social class than their family. They understand the differences between them and their family members to be evidence of their improvement or bettering.

[38] Esperanza's brother attended boarding school on scholarship

M's version of this visit would tell us a lot more about what seems like an experience of exclusion/contingent inclusion, and a failed attempt to connect across growing privilege and difference, while family perspectives would also help illuminate the extent to which graduate's opportunities and achievements foster a heightened sense of relative deprivation for family members. These last points illustrate the larger ideological dilemmas within the notion of merit, discussed later in this chapter.

A sense of fraternal relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966) was also often heightened during college for this group of first-generation graduates. For Kenneth, who left home for a private boarding school during high school, this sense of deprivation started much earlier than college, and followed him to college. Kenneth describes his initial experiences at prep school by telling me about his first roommate:

> **Kenneth:** He was more academically, and socially, and mentally *prepared* for the situation than I. He was rich***er*** than I, so you know, I tend to tell my friends that, you know, when the Kennedy's and the [celebrity students] landed on the football field, and those that were chauffeured in, and then there was Kenneth Washington getting off the greyhound bus with his duffle bag. So it was really an eye-opening experience; his big stereo in the room, parents came by once a month brought him care packages, laid some cash on him. For me, that didn't exist. Whenever my grandma or my mom were *able* to, they would send me things. So I think what I am getting at, was there was, in the very—it didn't take long for the feelings of less than, "why me?" and the "poor me's" to set in. it took really.. for me to – it took a while, it took a long time, I don't know if the feelings of less than EVER passed away. I knew that I wasn't comfortable with *my* situation and I wanted what they had.

Kenneth's entry into prep school shifted his reference group to include his new wealthy and White peers. Although both experiences were explicit in his interview, Kenneth's increased sense of deprivation felt much more salient than did his sense of advantage as compared to his family and Harlem community – a sense of deprivation that he says never left him, although his sense of privilege in relation to his family has waned

over time. For Gena, college also reinforced her sense of place in a raced/classed hierarchy. She began her studies in a Catholic elementary school where she was sometimes sent home for falling behind on tuition, which was a traumatic experience for her, one that she says was the catalyst for her push toward higher education. She moved on to a small progressive public high school, which became an emotional and intellectual haven from her earlier experiences in primary school and her later experience at an elite private university, both contexts which underscored her disadvantaged position in a raced/classed hierarchy:

> **April:** Do you feel like your college experience affected how you see your class identity?
>
> **Gena:** I think it does. Because whenever, whenever —now that I'm an alumni—when I was in college..you know, I remember, you know, you're just on campus, and you see all these types of people, and I remember, you know, girls talking about..you know, their, you know, their Fendi this, Louie Vuitton that, their shoes. I remember those conversations, and I would always…I would always tune it out because I knew that that wasn't—that I couldn't really engage in that type of conversation, umm…umm…so I remember that while I was there. When I graduated, I remember going back to campus, and now being a part of this group of women who..if not, if they weren't trend setters, they made history somehow, or they broke some kind of record or, just phenomenal women achieving great things and it basically infuses you with a sense of purpose, the sense of it's only a matter of time before I reach my full potential, um..so it's a very good feeling to go back..and I guess, you project yourself. Like, in my mind..I know, I know, I know where I came from, but I know where I am going, right. I don't think that social class is something that's permanent um, for *me* at least. I know some people it *is* permanent, they'll always be there because they don't see beyond, they don't dream beyond, and they don't, you know, push themselves. Nothing, you know, nothing comes easy in this world. You gotta work hard for it
>
> **April:** Uh huh. So how—when you were talking about the people, the other women discussing in college about their Fendi bag, or whatever, do you think that had to do with the kind of college [elite] that you went to?
>
> **Gena:** Yeah, I knew that. I knew that. I knew that that's what that was a part of, and I knew that ..you know, there was a few of us who were smart enough to be there, you know, just not wealthy enough to be there. Well, we didn't have no resources to pay for it on our own. We were worthy of being there, we just didn't

> have the money to pay for it, so somebody had to pay for it. Somebody had to do it, which was nice.
>
> **April:** So how did you feel during those like, interactions, like how'd that make you feel?
>
> **Gena:** umm..Like, it was a conversation that I couldn't really participate in, I mean, probably some sense of, you know, some sense of like unworthiness or like inadequacy. Um…there was some of that

An intense and distinct merit discourse is apparent in Gena's response. She believes that social class is mutable, and that her entry into college was earned (which I am not arguing against). Gena is succeeding, rocking the boot straps she is yanking up, and moving toward her full potential. She may have had less materially in college, but she returns as a part of a group of "phenomenal women achieving great things." Her understanding of justice centers around merit and deservingness: she was smart enough to be there, so someone had to pay for it -- suggesting equal educational access regardless of ability to pay, as long as significant effort is put forth. But there are contradictory values within her renderings of merit: on the one hand, if you work hard, you can expect success, no matter where you come from – unless, of course, you come from money, then you don't need to work as hard or as much as others. Past/historical success (e.g., having college-educated parents) is still disproportionately associated with the future success of offspring.

There are also contradictions between ideologies of merit and family (or kinship) values (as based on care and support, mutuality and need fulfillment versus equity and quid pro quo). In terms of a lived dilemma, Gena's own success is not solely based on her hard work, but also attributable to other contributing factors, like the advocacy and sacrifice of her older sisters. To accept the legitimacy of merit, we have to then

understand our families as having chosen educational, maybe even professional failure, by "choosing" not to successfully pursue a college degree, even in the face of a desire to earn a degree (e.g. Esperanza's sister). Gena refers to those who are stuck in their working class position as failing to work hard, not "dreaming." And yet, many of her family members would fall into this category, violating the obligation to favorably evaluate family/in-group members against others. And in fact, Gena had a lot of guilt about the sacrifice of her older sisters, while the undeserving yet wealthy college students still made her feel inadequate despite their illegitimate/unearned presence.

Graduates like Esperanza, Gena and Kenneth, simultaneously gain a sense of relative deprivation during college (via upward comparisons with college peers), and a sense of relative advantage (via downward comparisons with family members), leaving them with both a sense of better, and less than. Deutsch & Steil (1988) identify upward comparisons as a potential means of awakening a sense of injustice. In Gena's case, it seems that both a sense of injustice (or at least unfairness) and a strong discourse of merit is awakened or generated. Gena tells me, "Like, in my mind..I know, I know, I know where I came from, **but** I know where I am going." (Emphasis added). She doesn't use the conjunction "and," to connect her past to her future, but instead uses "but," a qualifier, signaling a class redemption or remediation rather than coexistence of a past and future versions of self. While the merit discourse is much louder than any structural critique, the oscillation between the two lived ambivalences, as the basis of deliberative thought, nevertheless represents an opportunity for the consideration of alternatives and thus the potential for change.

Cracks, discursive or otherwise, can lead to other fissures. But cracks also demand repair. The prevalence of the merit discourse in many of the graduate interviews might well be indicative of deep fissures in the acceptance of that discourse for first generation graduates like Gena. Perhaps her assertions of her intrinsic worth and deservingness of her successes are an indication of the need to continuously maintain and repair that worth/value, as it is under threat. Graduates also confront different value systems and standards of worth when they move within and between multiple class(ed) perspectives. When you are the first in your family to earn a 4 year college degree or beyond, you move across and between different cultural contexts requiring not just linguistic 'code switching,' but a switch in value systems, and sometimes a reversal in conceptions of right and wrong, fair and unfair. From a middle class perspective, having (or achieving) more, always makes you more – that is, intrinsically better. But from the perspective of those struggling within the working or poverty classes, it can also make you less, especially if one is seen as "showing off" or being too "proud" of their achievements (see chapter on better than and contingent pride).

The first-generation graduate may also become associated or identified with a privileged social group (e.g., the middle class; managers/supervisors or professionals) that is viewed as exploitive, and sometimes ruthlessly ambitious, and seen as the source of social injury (Sennett and Cobb). These lived dilemmas illustrate larger societal dilemmas around hierarchical success: On one level, gaining 'place' requires accepting hierarchy and inequality; society both reveres exceptional success, but also reviles certain expressions of differential success at the same time. So while notions of merit can be

subverted and undermined, you still cannot 'earn' your way out of the constraints of meritocracy.

The top of the bottom. The relative inclusion that first-generation graduates experience within privileged middle-classed institutions, which are constituted on the basis of exclusion, represents one way this ideological dilemma gets instantiated in the lives of participants. The prominence of the 'better than' sentiment within the data, a charge leveled at, experienced and narrated by first generation graduates, coupled with a deeper awareness of the social and cultural gaps separating them from their college educated peers, left many graduates[39] unable to revel in their success or claim class or family solidarity. As Walkerdine et al (2001) write, "there are no easy hybrids. Hybridity may be a cultural and social fact, but it is never lived easily in a psychic economy" (163). The affective poles of both education-related 'better than' as well as 'less than' represent forms of internalized classism, and is often a source of emotional as well as ideological dilemmas. As such, they offer opportunities to interrogate and challenge -- on the lived level -- those ideologies that support income and educational inequality.

2) Family Ambivalence About the College-going of Graduates

Working class individuals value higher education but not necessarily to the same degree that middle class(ed) and credentialed people do. They may respect their family member's degree(s) and be curious, perhaps even envious of some of their experiences, knowledge and privileges, but not necessarily wholesale or without critique. There is

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[39] These graduates – Esperanza, Gena and Kenneth -- as well as Ernie, Nikki and Wendy, all attended selective universities, so their experiences do not represent those who took different paths to their first degree, like Noreen who took many years or CUNY grads Noah and Una, or sibling participants, Sharon and Angelica.

evidence of ambivalence surrounding the college pursuits of graduates within their families of origin (e.g., the simultaneous encouragement of college going and the communication of negative feelings about the pursuit of college, critique of the college educated and/or suspicion regarding the value of a college degree). Lucas (2011) studied the messages about higher education and social mobility that working class participants received from their families, and found that they received mixed messages in general and also regarding their paths in particular.

> "*Family-based messages that socialized or attempted to socialize children and adolescents for their upcoming careers, were not recalled as simple, unequivocal messages that pointed one direction or another. Instead, participants received a mix of often contradictory messages that encouraged social mobility (e.g., go to college, don't work in mines) and social reproduction (e.g., college isn't necessary, pursue a working-class job)*" (Lucas, 2011; 116).

Similar experiences and perceptions were shared by graduates in the current project, as the survey items and open-ended responses below illustrate:

Table 24: Family support for college going

Survey item	% Agree & Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
a) My family is proud of my educational achievements N=335	87.8	9.8	2.4
b) My parents supported my decision to attend college N=335	74	13.4	12.5
c) In general, my siblings supported my decision to attend college N=326	57.8	33.3	8.8
d) In general, my extended family supported my decision to attend college N=329	62.9	26.4	10.6
e) I wish my family would have been more supportive of my pursuit of a college degree N=332	33.1	17.5	49.4
Survey item	**% Extremely True & Fairly True**	**Neither True nor Untrue**	**Somewhat True & Not True**
Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family? N=330	29.4	24.2	46.4

It's clear from the survey items above that graduates felt support from their families for their college pursuits (items b, c, and d), and yet, close to a third also expressed the wish that their families were *more* supportive (item e). Again, there is a notable decline in support for college between parents (b) and siblings (c) who were perceived to be more neutral. Close to thirty percent also reported family ambivalence about college going and/or the college educated.

Very few (2.4%) graduates disagreed that their families were proud of their educational achievements (a). Although the majority felt that their families were proud, this pride was described in the open-ended follow up item (analyzed in the first level analysis) and interview data, as more textured and mixed, revealing ambivalence in the pride across circumstance (being a 'know it all,' or downplaying difference), and individuals (siblings, parents, extended family).

Part of the family ambivalence regarding the college pursuit seems to be around its potential to explicitly introduce, increase, or reconfigure hierarchy within the family. Echoing Esperanza's experience, several graduates mentioned their families' fears/anxiety regarding a potential shift or reconfiguration of status they associated with greater educational attainment. For example, Graduate #35 (Female, White, MA, 1995) stated that *"my dad did not want me to surpass him by going to college,"* suggesting her father's fear that a degree would eclipse the power afforded him by his age, gender and parental role. The following graduate response references her father's support post-degree, but not pre-college, for higher education:

> *"One the one hand my family speaks highly of my education to extended family or friends, for example, my father has repeatedly said to his sister during an argument in his defense that he must have done something right as a parent because of all that I have achieved. However, one the other hand, my father went out of his way to make my success as difficult as possible for me while I was trying to earn my degree."* – Graduate #291 (White, Female, MA 2008)

Her academic success holds defensive as well as redemptive power for her father, and yet, she tells us that he fought her pursuit of a degree, perhaps because it similarly distinguishes her from her father. Ambivalence about the college enterprise was also

evident in graduates' descriptions of family disparagement of the worth and value of the degree:

> *"Many family members will turn to my siblings and I for help with legal and other matters, but often will still often exclaim how it is not necessary to earn a college degree to be successful."* – Graduate #285 (Female, BA, Brooklyn College, 1990)

> *"My parents asked me if I wanted to go to college, I said yes. When I would argue with them over "worldly" issues, they would state that I was being pretentious and getting it from school. When I don't know the answer to something, the response is "I guess that degree really paid off." So, it's a no-win situation."* – Graduate #209 (White, Female, BA, 2006)

Families rely on graduates for the support that they are able to offer, mainly by virtue of their college experiences, and yet they undermine the value and worth of higher education[40]. Graduate #285's family may be rejecting the equation of a degree with success (and lack of a college degree with failure), and working to protect their own "successful" but non-credentialed identity, while also accepting benefits from their family member's education that are expected within kinship relations. For graduate #209, college was offered as a choice but one that has been met with mixed emotions and feedback. She feels damned either way, illustrating the cobbled path graduates traverse between their families' mixed feelings around attainment and the cultural imperative to pursue post-secondary schooling.

Graduates' examples of their family's disparagement of higher education or the college-educated, were often described as being in response to, or coupled with, some exercise of power by the graduate or afforded the graduate (as knowledge, expertise,

[40] The (direct or indirect) disparagement of the graduate coupled with the disproportionate shouldering of responsibility for the welfare of their family was addressed in the previous chapter on family power relations.

beneficence; e.g., #285, #209). It was almost as if some family members were waiting for an opportunity to highlight the failure of the degree (or graduate) to deliver in some capacity, or in some way tarnish the perceived shine of the degree. Might the families' disparagement of the college-educated be a defensive position, the rejection of a hierarchy which places them at the bottom? Families sense that they are being judged, and that they will always come up short in such evaluations but they are also suspicious of the basis of that evaluation. Disparagement of graduate or degree can be an equalizing measure in graduate-family relations, especially between them and graduates who often have more responsibility and a greater say within family affairs, who are more valued socially and culturally, and who are seen as having more choices in life. In this sense, upwardly mobile children of working class families have to answer for society's tendency to arbitrarily punish and reward people through and by social class.

Ambivalence/dilemma over who to send to college. Within this work, men entered college because of family support (e.g., Ernie, Kenneth, Noah, Una's brother, Desiree's brother) whereas women got there in spite of a dearth of family support (e.g., Una, Angelica, Rosalyn, even Noreen as her family was utterly neutral about her going). Ernie has well described the support for college going he differentially had access to, while Kenneth described the focus on schooling that his mother enforced. Noah told me that he was sent to college because he graduated high school at a young age and his parents insisted he "do something." All three of these men (Latino, Black, and White respectively) had older sisters who went to college only after they had first gone and completed their degrees and after their sisters had already became parents themselves.

On the other end of the spectrum, several female respondents describe overcoming significant hurdles presented by their families of origin, in their path to a college education. Una's family thought she was mentally ill and "out of her place" for pursuing school, Esperanza's parents wouldn't allow their eldest daughter to go to college, though they pushed their next son to go to boarding school (he ultimately decided against pursuing a college degree), and finally allowed their youngest daughter to go to college. Rosalyn went to college completely on her own and utterly against the wishes of her mother, while Noreen's family saw her decision to pursue college as an individual choice and were neither actively supportive or against it. Desiree detailed the many ways that her brother's education was supported the most, almost exclusively, within her family.

While bivariate analysis of factor scores suggested more family support for college going for males than females, the interview data more clearly demonstrate greater family support for college offered to male family members than female family. Who is supported/allowed to go to college has reverberating effects throughout the family of origin, notably for sibling relationships both between siblings (particularly with the graduate) and between offspring and parents. There were notable exceptions, for example Nikki and Noreen. Noreen did not have any brothers and Nikki explained that she and her siblings were all supported in their higher education efforts, but that only she chose to seriously pursue it.

Ambivalence regarding the college path was also evident for the graduates themselves, in terms of the benefits associated with a degree, the sacrifices it required and the hybrid identity associated with first generation status. Graduates were clear that the

BA was just the "basic" credential, and didn't actually constitute "success," so much as the first step towards it. For some (female) graduates, pursuing higher education meant delaying or foregoing starting one's own family (e.g., Una), or limiting the time and energy available for their family. Sharon for example, talked a lot about the intense guilt she felt while pursuing her accelerated degree program, in terms of the extreme emotional, intellectual, and time demands that her studies required. In our interview, Angelica expressed ambivalence about the impending birth of her 2nd child and what it would mean for her professional and graduate school aspirations.

3) Equality of Opportunity Within the Context of Unequal Educational Outcomes

Equality of opportunity in the context of differential/unequal outcomes between family members reveals cracks within the discourse of merit as well as between contradictory ideologies of family/kinship and of merit realized through higher education. The college degree is presented as a universally available, equalizing mechanism (the great equalizer), and yet not everyone is afforded the opportunity to pursue a degree and our system of higher education continues to reproduce extremely unequal outcomes across social categories. These meritocratic dilemmas become clearer in graduates' explanations for different levels of attainment -- explanations which undermine the notion of equal opportunity and merit. The contradiction posed by one's meritocratic beliefs and a families' lack of academic and professional success present graduates with an occasion to either critique merit ideology, or their families.

As we have seen in the earlier findings (i.e., first-level analysis), many graduates endorsed multiple attributions for differential levels of educational attainment,

referencing both situational and dispositional contributors. In looking at the types of attributions that graduates make, I found that they often attribute their success to both their own personal qualities and/or hard work, as well as to favorable circumstances (luck, available opportunities). This strategy of multiple attributions, with an emphasis on desire and choice, would seem to successfully offer a way for graduates to feel positive about ones' achievement and self, maintain positive relationships with family, while supporting the notion of meritocracy (that is, social reproduction). However, given that ideologies are not pure, but inherently contradictory, they remain fundamentally irresolvable.

The path taken toward ideological resolution seems to be influenced by the type of relationship with the graduate (i.e., as a sibling or parent). Siblings are typically seen as having chosen -- through bad choices, a lack of effort or interest -- to forgo a college degree, while parents are seen as having been constrained by circumstances or luck. Type of attribution (dispositional vs. situational) has been associated with political position (Furnam, 1982; Skitka, 1999) and are thus suggestive of ideological commitments; for example, dispositional attributions for a lack of economic success are associated with political positions hostile to the poor and unemployed, while those offering situational explanations tend to be more supportive of programs benefitting the poor and unemployed. Therefore, type of attribution may have an impact on specific family relationships.

The figure of the first-generation college graduate reinforces the possibility, viability and desirability of upward mobility, by demonstrating the typical rather than exceptional nature of upward mobility through higher education. While graduates deny or

downplay their exceptionalism, the fact of their (relative) educational success foregrounds the opposite, namely that if desired, success in the form of a college degree is possible, and an expected outcome provided that one chooses to pursue it, takes advantage of available opportunities, or (in the strongest meritocratic faith), makes opportunities for one's self.

Given that this accounting strategy hinges on the notion of personal desire and choice, can we respect the perceived decision by family to forego higher education, given what seem like clear benefits of a college degree, even if such a "decision" is understandable and contextualized? Even if we accept the existence of a "choice" to pursue/not pursue a college degree, it is much harder to accept an active decision to be subordinate to those with degrees, or a willingness to face significantly diminished access to social, cultural and material resources for the duration of one's life. Some graduates (e.g., Gena) attempted to deal with this dilemma by emphasizing those family members who have "chosen" not to pursue a degree and who were doing well, having reached a place of stability and satisfaction in life. This practice was actually infrequent and not sustained.

Siblings also critique or blame themselves for failing to earn a degree, but don't see it as an active choice, so much as the result of unfavorable circumstances and their own immaturity. From the perspective of a first-generation family member, Desiree, the middle sibling in a large family, illustrates what it means to be caught between conflicting ideologies of meritocratic opportunity and inequitable outcomes, a tension that doesn't actually go away even in those cases when a degree is later earned (e.g.,

Angelica). Desiree discusses her educational path [emphasis added], and why she wasn't able to complete the Associates degree program she started:

> **April:** […] and then so how long did you stay at [CUNY Community College]?
>
> **Desiree:** Well, almost a year and a half. I **could have** finished but it was—financial aid too in some ways, and then **I wasn't motivated** like after to, to go back to college, I don't know, I just found a job and I just started working. And because when I was in school, I was working part time, and **I was struggling**. Maybe that's, that's probably could have been a part of it too. I couldn't hardly pay my bills and stuff, so I had to really get a full time job. And then I was trying to get the classes where I don't have to—just go maybe twice or 3 times a week, but **then the financial aid messed up**, and it just, it just—I guess **it just wasn't meant for me**. I guess so..I could always go back though
>
> **April:** Uh huh, sure. Um, I was just—were you living on your own?
>
> **Desiree:** Yeah, I was living on my own. I had one son at that time, and I was pregnant again..with the other child (emphasis added)

Desiree first asserts that the possibility for completion of the program existed ("I could have finished"), and then begins her explanation for a lack of success with a situational reason (financial aid), which imperils the notions of equal opportunity that she had just asserted. She then quickly moves to an internal attribution ("I wasn't motivated"), which likely threatens her self-concept, so she must then make the case for her industriousness (I found a job and started working). She takes us to the point where so many college students – under prepared and under supported -- find themselves: caught between two competing areas of need: the need to work (i.e., earn) more, and the need to work less (i.e., study more), in order to secure a degree. This is complicated when the college student is also a parent, as earning a degree is seen as the best/only way to

prepare for a career and support a family, and yet the working class family is oppositionally positioned to higher education.

The resolution to this dilemma between parenting and attainment lies in a requisite path to the milestone: one first goes to college and earns a degree; then become partnered and then parents. Other configurations and paths to a degree in conjunction with parenthood are not supported, though they are sometimes forged by dogged crusades to do so. Desiree concludes fatalistically (another type of attribution) that college wasn't meant for her, and yet, incredibly follows up that point with an assertion that the successful completion of the AA degree is still a possibility. This back and forth represents a continual threatening and then repair of both her self-concept and the equal opportunity ideology, which must then be repaired, only to be temporarily resolved in the notion of her 'choice' – that is, on the backs of those the worst off, while the figures of Angelica and Sharon (who went back to school to earn their degrees long after their younger sibling did) forever "prove" or become evidence that it is indeed possible, no matter what obstacles stand in the way.

The overwhelming presence of merit discourse within the data illustrates its ubiquitous nature, constant availability, and ideological dominance. The lack of political will around college access initiatives, and the glaring neglect of the educational needs of working class and minority students at the city, state and federal levels is justified by the fact that opportunities are found or created by those the most dedicated, or the luckiest. Psychologically it means that first-generation graduates and family members incorporate and take up such narratives of merit and deserving about themselves in relation to one another, adopting the discourse of meritocracy as a way of interacting with one another.

This often leaves the working class family and graduates in conflicted relationship with one another, suspicious that those who don't achieve similar levels of success are responsible for their disadvantage, or that they are being critically judged, particularly by family, for failing to earn a degree or for having done so thanks to undue advantage. Graduates also though respond to and defend their families against unspoken, but assumed dispositional attributions for their families lack of school-based success, while defending themselves against charges of undue advantage.

4) Dilemmas Regarding the Kind and Quality of Intervention That a College Degree Represents

One ideological dilemma identified in the literature previously presented, concerns the outcomes associated with higher education for first-generation college graduates. Much psychological research emphasizes the emotional turmoil and relational conflict that first-generation college graduates often experience, due to their differential social and material advancement. On the other hand, educational and sociological literatures focus primarily on the fiscal outcomes of attainment for working class graduates, which tend to emphasize the positive gains of higher education. Within this mix of gains and losses, there are many ideological dilemmas surrounding the kind of intervention that higher education represents for working class families.

To discuss this dilemma, a distinction needs to be made between those outcomes associated with the intervention of the college experience -- of having successfully navigated an intellectually, emotionally and psychologically trying (as well as enriching) terrain of higher education -- and those outcomes associated with the introduction of

disparities, specifically in attainment, within the family of origin. In the context of family tensions and a reduced sense of intimacy within the family that she attributed to her higher education, Esperanza told me that "this whole experience has kind of changed everybody." She was talking more about the introduction of disparities, and the resulting tension between her and her older sister, than the effect of her college experiences per se.

As primarily an individual accomplishment associated most with changes in the life of the graduate, the degree typically translates into increasing disparities between the graduate and other members of the family of origin, not just in terms of attainment, but also in the material resources that a degree is associated with, such as professional opportunities, quality of life (i.e., access to health care, housing, social cultural capital). These graduate-family disparities are commonly seen as sources of tension, conflict and relational distance within families. Expressions of envy and relative deprivation did emerge in participant narratives of their family dynamics, especially in regards to graduates' relationships with siblings. Parents were able to (mostly) live vicariously through their children, and even if they didn't always or explicitly encourage or support their efforts, they were still very proud of their graduate children in a non-competitive way.

The 4-year college degree, increasingly a measure of class status, is also the justification or accounting, for differential outcomes. The introduction of disparities in educational attainment could exacerbate competitive relations within the family, especially if higher education is seen as a scarce resource[41]. Deutsch (2006) lays out

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[41] "Thus, in most social media and social contexts, "perceived similarity in basic values" is highly suggestive of the possibility of a positive linkage between oneself and the other. However, we are likely to see ourselves as negatively linked in a context that leads each of us to recognize that

differences in cooperative versus competitive relations: "Thus, cooperation induces and is induced by perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes, readiness to be helpful, openness in communication, trusting and friendly attitudes, sensitivity to common interests and de-emphasis of opposed interests, orientation toward enhancing mutual power rather than power differences, and so on" (p30). Many of the participants have described the reverse, that is, characteristics of competitive relations within their families, like poor or limited communication, lack of common interests and core values, and highlight their differences (e.g., describing themselves as diametrical opposites).

Within families, as in our society, social class status can become a basis of moral exclusion. Competing discourses of moral exclusion are deployed by both graduate and family, with graduates positioning their families as less capable, less intelligent, falsely conscious, generally prejudiced (especially racist), dysfunctional, uninformed, and apolitical; and with families pushing back or initiating the exclusion in the face of radical transformation of one of their own, with even more dogmatic conservative beliefs, critique of the more credentialed, degrading the pursuit and value of a degree, etc.

This would seem to over-determine the probability or likelihood of feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy within some individuals, and pride and efficacy within others. The social stratification of emotions (Turner, 2010) is the inevitable result of unequal opportunity for social mobility, within a context of abundant hope, aspiration, intense desire – expectation even, to rise above one's current position. Turner (2010) argues that "emotions are also distributed unequally; and the unequal distribution of negative emotions (often combined with positive emotions) can become a

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similarities in values impel seeking something that is in scarce supply and available for only one of us" (Deutsch, 2006; 31).

high octane fuel behind social movements and other forms of restive collective action" (p195).

It is of course more complicated than a dilemma of individual versus group gain, where the graduate benefits the most. Envy, for example, is not always a negative outcome. If the object of envy is understood to be earned, then this "benign" envy is associated with the inspiration (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997) and motivation of others, as in Angelica's case, rather than when the basis of envy is viewed as unearned, which results in "malicious" envy (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2009) (e.g., Esperanza's sister and Desiree). These two categories of effects/outcomes are also not entirely distinct, but dynamically interrelated. Both attending college and disparities in attainment often have an effect on the interdependence of the family; there is a shift from a family's dependence on parents and older siblings, toward the graduate as a primary family resource; while at the same time, the graduate has had to develop self-reliance, and depend on support from outside of the family to successfully navigate the college setting.

The college experience is associated with a shift in world view and growing differences between the graduate and the family of origin. Through their higher education experiences, graduates questioned previously held beliefs and values like religion, political affiliation, social mores, and cultural preferences. Ernesto talked in our interview about the role that college played in the evolution of his views about gender relations and sexuality. He reported growing up in a very machismo culture and indicated that as the first male child in his family, he occupied a place of particular privilege. He described being "waited on hand and foot" by his mother and sisters. His view of gender relations was challenged in the college setting, and he left university with a more critical view of

his ethnic culture as well as of his upbringing. He also indicated that he was more or less "homophobic" upon entering college, until he became close to queer-identified people at school.

Ernesto also reported leaving college much less religious than when he entered school. However, several members of his family remain very involved in their church. He felt that the religiosity of some of his relatives prevented him from speaking more often and more openly with them about all aspects of his life. He identified his sister, Angelica who also after many years earned a 4-year degree, as the family member he felt closest to. Interestingly, Ernesto identified the religiosity of some of his family members as the explanation for the distance between them, although it was his beliefs rather than theirs that had changed the most dramatically. This causal framing of the lack of closeness between him and others in his family because of perceive differences, suggests a shift toward more middle-classed values characterized by liberalized views.

Liberalization of cultural and political views through the schooling process (e.g., religion, relativism, entitlement, questioning of authority) introduces distance and limits common interests between the graduate and family. This shift to more middle class values was associated by family with a sense of graduate elitism: graduates believed or worried that their families thought that the graduate saw themselves as more evolved and of a higher caliber than the rest of their family – and there is evidence that many graduates, like the public in general, do accept notions of graduate superiority. At the same time though, the broadened perspective gained in college supported graduates' ability to contextualize their families' social position, and recognize the situational limits facing their parents and siblings as well.

All participants represented the college degree as a positive intervention in their lives and the lives of their families. Graduates, like Esperanza, describe the tremendous personal impact of a college education on the quality of their life – in fact, several graduates stated that their lives would be “miserable” without a degree. Overall, though, her earning a college degree constituted a positive intervention for Esperanza and her family, including her older sister who she specifically had conflict with. The exception might be Desiree, who gained only very minimally economically, and experienced a lot of negative dissonance about her own lack of educational success, and perceived degradation in her relationships with her degreed siblings. On the ideological level, the theoretical dilemma around what kind of intervention a college education constitutes, lies between higher education as an intervention promoting personal, social and broad economic growth; and higher education as for-profit enterprise that undermines family bonds in its production of corporate success through inconsistent and uneven individual successes.

5) Dilemmas Regarding The Role That Higher Education Plays in Social Reproduction: College as The Great Equalizer?

Our dominant meritocratic ethos is characterized by dilemmas about who is (and should be) served by higher education, and the extent to which education acts as a critical interruption of inequality, or as a primary mechanism of social reproduction. A recent front page story in the New York Times[42] profiling the thwarted college dreams of three working class young women – and the close to 1300 reader responses it garnered – offer explicit evidence of our cultural grappling with this specific dilemma. In the US, we have

[42] Deparle, J. (2012, December 23). Poor Students Struggle as Class Plays a Greater Role in Success. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/education/poor-students-struggle-as-class-plays-a-greater-role-in-success.html

a well (over) developed capacity to aspire, and an underdeveloped ability to aspire beyond (or question) economic mobility. College for first-generation graduates bolsters a culture of aspiration for working class families, and yet, the real supports that might allow others in one's family, or community, to earn/secure similar levels of attainment are crushingly restricted. Bullock & Limbert (2009) point out that only a third of young people are upwardly mobile relative to their parents (and people in Canada and many European countries), and yet, "more people in the USA today than 20 years ago believe in the possibility of upward mobility" (221). Perhaps our increased faith in social mobility is evidence of the diminished chance of achieving it -- We are even more in need of the hope that comes with it.

There is an abundance of evidence and examples of the ways that higher education functions to maintain stratification by race and social class (e.g., high stakes testing, tracking, privatization of academic supports, cost). Given the significant differences in power and social position associated with the college degree -- even while such benefits remain uneven and are diminishing -- socially justice minded citizens must ask whether higher education in its current capacity is, or could ever be, an appropriate or effective vehicle for working class liberation.

Progressive educators frame education as a potential vehicle toward personal and social liberation (e.g., Freire), typically though, this "conscientization," demands a certain kind of education, education that is critical and a component of an ongoing social justice practice. But this type of education is not easily accessible or generally sought, at least not to the same degree as is education for social mobility (see Schnee, 2009). A relevant and related dilemma was identified by Lehman (2009) in his study of first-generation

college students in Canada. He found that when discussing their early experiences in college, working class students often referenced attributes about themselves that they associated with their working-class positionality (e.g., being hard-working, loyal), establishing their moral superiority over upper class peers and both justifying their place in higher education as well as legitimating their pursuit of upward mobility. Several participating graduates (like Gena, Esperanza) similarly wrestled with the conflict between their sense of moral superiority over upper classed college peers, and their desire and deservingness to also be in the college setting.

Social mobility may constitute an interruption of one's personal inequity, but doesn't necessarily translate into a more general reduction of inequality of the family or community within the larger society. Overall while a degree can facilitate a broader, if not more critical perspective, it also indoctrinates graduates within the language of capital, individualism, hierarchy and middle-classed culture and values. I asked in the literature review, how the middle-class social inclusion of one family member might affect other family members' sense of justice, whether exhibited as a belief in a just world or as critical consciousness around class arrangements. This work illustrates that graduates' success does provide evidence of merit, strengthening support for the ideology of equal opportunity and yet, the disparity in educational attainment across siblings also demonstrates the limits of meritocratic ideology as well.

> *Tell people they are inferior, they are unlikely to be pleased, but this surprisingly rarely leads to armed revolt. Tell people that they are potential equals who have failed, and that therefore, even what they do have they do not deserve, that it isn't rightly theirs, and you are much more likely to inspire rage"* (Graeber, 2010; 8).

Graeber's statement could be applied to both un-credentialed family members as well as to first-generation college graduates, those college graduates who have sacrificed much to find themselves with fewer options than anticipated, reduced likelihood of moving into a higher social class than their parents; graduates who grew up believing that a college degree is the "great equalizer" who instead find themselves on the losing end of a crush of similarly degreed individuals fighting over fewer jobs. A sense of injustice and righteousness are resources that can potentially motivate action for change (Deutsch, 2002). And a sense of injustice seems to be more created for family members of graduates, who come to have in their sibling an especially "similar other" to compare their quality of life to, than it is for graduates, who are grateful for their opportunity and successes and often feel incredibly lucky.

However, the career paths that these graduates have taken on are not necessarily radical (though some would qualify as such), but helping ones, like social work (Esperanza, Noah), advocacy (Gena, Una, Wendy,), education (Nikki, Frank), organizing for social justice (Wendy, Roz) or a combination (Ernie)[43], that could be argued to both undermine as well as further social reproduction. Still, these jobs are positions of social/personal care operating (mostly) outside the corporate sector.

Higher education creates disciples who are also reformers, agitators as well as promoters of the American dream, who support the college path as an imperfect, unequal, but ultimately available path (for a lucky few). Yet, it is precisely a diffuse assembly of disillusioned and overwhelmingly college educated citizens who spawned the OWS movement, demanding "the occupation of our educational system so that young people do not

[43] Una began her career in the corporate sector, but moved on to a advocacy position in a non-profit, Sharon hoped to leave her administrative position to be a school psychologist. Noreen and Kenneth were employed outside these fields at the time of interview.

exchange formal education for debtor status in an economy that is failing through no fault of their own" (Watkins, 2012; p3). Consider the rage of this "99% ," whose expressions of anger at what they perceived to be a broken social contract, have become sparks, waves, communities of protest and unrest. This group of largely college-degree holding dissenters demonstrates that neither higher education nor hard work will necessarily protect or guarantee a standard of living above poverty, stable employment or afford the chance for social mobility.

Consider also though the desperate hope of the 53% movement, a group critical of the OWS movement, who insist that the American dream of equal opportunity is alive and strong, while the protesters represent lazy detractors. These seemingly distinct positions exist in tension, each side connecting notions of higher education to notions of social class as something solid, and weight-bearing. The tension between these two social movements seems to represent different sides of a larger ideological dilemma around the contested morality of the working class with the simultaneous desire for upper and middle classed outcomes, as well as the accepted moral mandate for social mobility.

While class mobility is possible and available to some first generation college students through the pursuit of higher education; the opposite, revolt or rejection of this stratifying regime, simply isn't yet viable; critique in this project is heard only from the very bottom (e.g., Desiree and other working poor who are critical of the college educated, and suspicious of its pursuit), and as of yet, there are few viable alternatives to college for class mobility, higher education for reasons other than credentialing (See Schnee for an exception), or alternatives to class mobility itself. A diverse public has demanded and gained access to higher education, while the upper and middle classes have responded with increasing credentialism and privatized supports.

To be seen as an avenue toward social equality, our system of higher education must work to illuminate and make explicit the hidden and inherent contradictions in the American Dream mythos. The questions that we ask, debate and deliberate, the dilemmas that we expose and interrogate, may one day be met with institutional adaption and change. This change may not be necessarily liberative, but it may perhaps be a competing model of education with an ethos grounded in inclusions rather than exclusion, horizontal rather than vertical growth, mutuality and a concern with strengthening relational bonds rather than the bolstering of one's individual chances/resources.

Discussion

"*As long as social change fails to bring about equality for all – as long as upward mobility is an individual phenomenon – these upwardly-mobile working-class authors must chronicle the psychological costs of that mobility*" (Christopher, 2002; p. 81).

I agree with author and scholar, Renny Christopher's entreaty for working class authors to, "chronicle the psychological costs" of their mobility and yet her analysis of the "suicidal" socially mobile protagonists within American literature (and social psychology's rendering of the upwardly mobile[44]) cannot be made about the participants in this project, illustrating the need for researchers of social class, subjectivity and education to more critically evaluate both the benefits as well as the losses associated with high levels of educational attainment within the working class. This investigation attempts to move us -- as a discipline in general and educational research in particular -- toward a more comprehensive accounting of the impact of the college degree for working class families. A full accounting is imperative, given the importance/power that is granted to the college enterprise as a great equalizing mechanism -- of individuals, communities, and nations.

To do a true accounting, we must consider the non-economic "returns" of degree attainment to include social, psychological, and relational variables, and to also expand our unit of analysis beyond the individual graduate, to include families of origin, created and claimed families, and communities of affiliation. Although the compelling dynamic of loss and tension are presented here as well, this project identifies some of the diffuse social psychological gains of a college degree within working class families that go beyond fiscal returns; including gains in graduates' quality of life, an expansion of

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[44] See my review of literature

educational aspirations and outcomes of family members, personal and family pride, an increased sense of self efficacy, and the gained ability to act as a resource to one's family of origin.

This project is also about what happens when intra-group relations shift to inter-group relations with the introduction of additional and explicit forms of hierarchy (e.g., educational attainment), specifically within working class families. I asked (imperfectly and incompletely) what role higher education plays in this shift from inter to intra, and how this reconfigured relationship (or dynamic) is understood and negotiated by graduates and more limitedly, by their families. This relational analysis assumes that even those who don't experience an explicit 'intervention,' so to speak, are never the less affected by the experiences, outcomes, and positionality of important others who do.

This framing of educational attainment of first-generation college graduates as a form of family (and not just individual) intervention, challenges our understanding of the function, aims and value of a college degree -- from an intervention focused on improving the life of the individual, to a consideration of a whole new set of questions with the potential to actually raise a family, a community, and a nation – and not just in a limited economic sense. It also informs our understanding of the kind of support educational institutions need to offer working class families if they are to truly include them in higher education initiatives. For example, these findings suggest that certain families (e.g., those with more than one child, those with disparate higher education experiences across siblings), may be more likely to experience education-related tension, and conflict within the family given the current climate of high college aspirations and

attainment–attributed benefits, with the growing gap in attainment rates between low-income and non-low income groups.

Extending the Literature …

Conceptually: This dissertation uses ideological dilemmas as a productive site of inquiry, not to expose contradictions within responses, or participants, as these are an inherent aspect of human response, but to empirically analyze the cracks within the ideologies that we understand to be common sense (e.g., merit, family, fairness, achievement, mobility) – these nested dilemmas (lived, relational, institutional and ideological) are the basis of social deliberation, and consequently support the consideration of alternatives (Billig, et al).

Billig, et al. (1988) identify and analyze the contradictions that exist (e.g., indoctrination versus elicitation, p.62; or authority versus democratic equality) within and between foundational ideologies (e.g., education, democracy), and address the ways in which individuals confront such dilemmas. I extend this analysis of dilemmas to also analyze the ways in which people confront ideological dilemmas encountered within relationships; i.e., within dyads and families. This conceptual approach is distinct in that it investigates the lived experience of ideological dissonance and affective dilemmas, inviting a look into the ways that people negotiate such ambivalences relationally.

Moreover, this dissertation specifically frames the working-class family, particularly those including a college graduate, as an important real world relational context for the negotiation of social power, privilege and educational/class difference – and as such, presents researchers with a previously neglected but potentially productive site for engaging social justice research and collaborative analysis.

Interclass sibling relationships present an important research context that is different from the class relations with one's parents. Parents often hope that their child goes beyond them in social class in a way that siblings – our first set of peers – don't necessarily. If we are marrying across social class only rarely, and the rate of social mobility is dramatically reduced from past levels, then inter-class sibling relationships may in fact be the most significant cross-class interactions many Americans will have. These relationships thus can productively inform scholarship on interclass relationships outside of the family as well.

Methodologically: Methodologically, this project contributes to the social psychological literature by connecting social level phenomena (i.e., the discursive and the ideological) to the relational and psychological, through the use of a mixed method design. By asking questions of "variance" as well as "process" questions (Maxwell, 2010), I have brought disparate theoretical stances, data and findings into dialectical conversation with one another to offer an integrative look at how disparate levels of educational attainment operates within nested units of analysis (individuals, within families, within social/identity groups, within institutions,[45] within ideologies).

The diversity of participants (i.e., by race/ethnicity, gender, college type, and year of first degree) also addresses sampling limitations of earlier research while the relational inclusion of family perspectives and focus on post-college, rather than current or recent college experience, also extends previous research designs.

[45] I only minimally address institutional dilemmas; see Ayala (2005) for an investigation of institutional dilemmas

Policy Implications

Within this project, disparities in educational attainment are associated with increased cultural differences, and relational distance between first-generation graduates and their families and communities of origin. At the cultural level, Americans are currently more likely to marry outside their race or religion, than across educational levels (Lewin, 2005). Economically, the college credential has taken a hit in terms of "return on investment" (i.e., increasing unemployment rates for degree holders at all levels, over-qualification of the job market, soaring student debt) as we find ourselves in the midst of what some pundits fear is a student loan "bubble" not unlike the housing bubble. All of these circumstances more significantly (and negatively) impact first generation college students and graduates, demanding that we pause before jumping into a national push to raise the number of college graduates[46], and come up with some alternatives – not only to mobility through higher ed., but to social mobility itself.

Together, the findings herein suggest at least three policy priorities with the potential to reduce interclass disparities: 1) specifically extend the privilege of higher education backward across generations, especially given that the college aspirations of older siblings (perhaps even for some parents) often remain intact within many families, and heightened by the achievement of the first degree; 2) establish multiple pathways to the positive outcomes currently most associated with a college education -- that is, meaningful/meaningfully compensated employment, access to full social and political participation and valued social status; and 3) the need to reduce the disarticulation

[46] http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress/

between the working class graduate and family that the college experience often introduces.

Extending the privilege of higher education to previous generations. Extending the privilege of higher education to earlier generations is especially important as college aspirations live on within many family members (e.g., older siblings, and perhaps even for some parents) beyond traditional college age, while the supports for non-traditional college students remain extremely constricted. Both older and younger siblings of graduates in this study expressed the desire to continue their education. Parents expressed their desires for college in the past tense, as graduates indicated that college was something that their parents would have liked to pursue when they were younger. But perhaps this aspiration or desire is placed in the past only because the material supports for the pursuit of college as parents or older adults simply do not exist. Making college accessible across a range of generations rather than limited to a narrow age/developmental range, and widening the supports to do so, would specifically benefit the working class, who tend to enter the workforce and start families earlier than do upper classed groups, who may need more time or prep to become college-ready, or may need/desire to complete a degree over time, or in accelerated programs. The traditional but arbitrary trajectory of college going is most suited to upper and middle classes.

The structure of university and degree requirements also privileges single individuals (“Bachelors”) over parents, particularly mothers. Participants in this project established over and over again the inherent incompatibility of motherhood and the pursuit of a college degree. An instance of becoming pregnant or having a child was sufficient reason to explain – without any elaboration --why a woman (a relative or self)

didn't go further in school; illustrating the oppositional relationship between education/scholarship and family.

There are many policy innovations that could come from reframing the parameters of a legitimate college student to focus more broadly on sending working families rather than just select individuals. Examples might include family-based recruitment strategies, family-based tuition rates so that parents and siblings of differing ages could simultaneously enroll at a discount (see Schnee, 2009), worker education initiatives, and a commitment to open admissions.

The need for multiple pathways to upward mobility. College access initiatives for working and poverty class youth are desperately needed, but college shouldn't be the one and only means of securing meaningful, and adequately compensated employment, nor the singular entry point to sociopolitical participation and social status. Affordable and accessible degree programs are increasingly rare (with the much discussed shift from state funded to tuition funded schools, deep reductions in federal grants for students, remarkable debt burdens of even the "average" college graduate, and the reduction of need-blind admission policies); projected job growth is primarily in positions that will not require a 4 year degree, and there is currently exceptionally high unemployment rates for recent graduates (Washington, AP; April 23, 2012). While the BA/BS degree is now a necessary but not sufficient credential to secure quality employment or establish a career, there are few real alternative routes to any economic security open to the working and poverty classes.

Current policy efforts are focused on extending the college opportunity as a means of broadly distributing those benefits associated with a degree, namely stable

employment, a living wage, safe and meaningful occupation, quality of life benefits (health care, housing, vacations, etc.). Even though many job positions don't currently depend on skills or knowledge specifically gained in college, and the wide spread acknowledgement that a degree justifies differences in outcomes rather than causes them per se – our country in general, and the working class in particular, may be better served by more equally distributing those benefits directly or through a range of post-secondary options. Support for an expansion of such alternative routes to mobility have the potential to reduce the disparities in earnings, social/cultural capital, and opportunities between graduates and the rest of their families.

Reducing Disarticulation between first-generation graduate and family. The impact of higher education within first-generation families and communities has often been the introduction of cultural and identity-based differences and relational distance, along with the range of more identifiably positive outcomes. Discord and tension within first generation families are attributed to these differences. Along the same lines, Americans are currently more likely to marry outside their race or religion, than across educational levels (Lewin, 2005), making the first-generation family one of the few places where people currently interact across education levels. The role that college plays within the credentialed classes (i.e., upper and middle class) differs from the role it plays in the working and poverty class, in that it increases solidarity and similarity instead of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and disarticulation between graduate and family.

Colleges and universities must find ways to more broadly extend the college experience and credential, without that achievement also acting as a significant distancing mechanism within working class families. Currently, student support services geared

toward first generation college students (both online and campus-based materials) typically only mention the working class family as likely sources of stress and tension, rather than as sources of support for either student or institution. Some colleges suggest that students try to include their families in their college experience, but institutions do not yet include families in their institutional support efforts. Instead, they offer suggestions for what non-traditional students can do to better acclimate to their surroundings, or ways to successfully locate any additional support. Comparable suggestions for institutional or social change are much less visible, or publically advocated.

As Jennifer Ayala has argued (2005), it is important that institutions be receptive to strengths that working class students bring to their campuses, specifically their deep commitment to their families and communities, and understand them as models informing potential change at the institutional level. This would require a more tectonic shift away from a focus on production and accumulation, turning away from an anxiously aspirational culture toward one emphasizing relationship, service, deliberateness -- shifts being advocated by social theorists like Tim Jackson, British economist, who argued in the New York Times (May 26th, 2012) that there are natural limits to growth and productivity. Jackson goes on to argue that, "A whole set of activities that could provide meaningful work and contribute valuable services to the community are denigrated because they involve employing people to work with devotion, patience and attention. (…) In short, avoiding the scourge of unemployment may have less to do with chasing after growth and more to do with building an economy of care, craft and culture. And in doing so, restoring the value of decent work to its rightful place at the heart of society."

These “decent” positions – or “low productivity” sector jobs within the caring professions (medicine, social work, education) and craft industries (from carpenters to musicians) -- are also “denigrated” as lower classed jobs typically filled by those from the working and poverty classes. Greater support and development of such jobs, along with family wages for service workers, have the potential to make college a deliberate choice for those in the working class (instead of the only option). Policy initiatives should focus on increasing paths to socioeconomic stability, minimizing the gap in the life chances and choices that exists between the educated and less-degreed, and reducing the disparities in cultural capital between college graduates and others.

Limitations

Sampling. The primary limitation of this work is the limited number of family member participants. While I avoided relying on a white male sophomore sample of convenience, the limited number of family participants in this project hindered a fully relational analysis and emphasize graduate voices, experiences, and concerns. Although I had envisioned a study with a balanced ratio of graduate and family voices, actualizing that parity presented a challenge.

Relying on the internet as a recruitment tool played a role in this, as poor and working class Americans have significantly less online access. Data was also collected before the wide adoption of “smart” phones which currently offers people with limited material resources access to the internet, even without regular computer access. It was also a mistake to view first-generation graduates as a necessary port of entry to non-credentialed family participants rather than going directly into working class communities and asking people to talk about their experiences with and feelings about

college graduates in general and the college attainment and aspirations of their particular families. Although a person may identify in terms of their social class, they do not typically or consciously identify themselves in terms of their relationship to the one or two college graduates within their family.

A specific focus on family would have changed the way I approached family members from a focus on the gain or accomplishment of the graduate only, which framed the family in terms of an implied deficit, to a study of higher education within working families, regardless of the attainment of family members. This problem or limitation became clear only in my own reluctance in the interview setting, to ask certain questions that could only have been asked from the vantage point of an educated person, and my own awkwardness talking about my work when approaching family members.

I have dealt with this imbalance, in part, by explicitly take the position of families and over representing the voices I do have. Future research would do well to have a clear focus on family voices and to over sample family members, particularly parents and extended family, as well as male voices.

Through this research endeavor, I have learned much about the interview process, about my own response (of anxiety, resistance, empathy and identification), and the need in the future to be open and curious about strong emotions instead of fearful of them. I learned as much from reading the transcripts of my interviews as from the actual interviewing, particularly the need to follow up on the knotty, and emotionally laden aspects of the interviews, instead of abandoning them for safer, or more abstract ground.

Future Directions

This project was also about finding relevant ports of entry (research directions, agendas, priorities) into psychological questions of family, relationships, higher education and social class. This project has done that, offering several possible avenues for future research. Conceptualizing the working class family as moving from intra to inter-group relations opens up a set of theoretical frameworks with which to productively investigate higher education and social class. For example, investigating the working class family as a "contact zone" (Torre, 2010). Torre reminds us in her employment and revision of contact zone theory, that a "shift to zones brings an awareness of the context of contact – of history, power, and place. It encourages an analysis that braids individual moments to the larger sphere of social relations" (Torre, 2010; p.149). Framing the first-generation family as a real world occurring contact zone – one infused with personal and family history, emotion, deep longing for connection as well as psychic resistances -- would allow an engagement of the inherent power differences "*as a way of knowing,* texturing, and informing our analysis and creations" (Torre, p. 155).

The first-generation family also offers a rich real-world – and relational -- context for a social psychological investigation of social identity; for example, the application of a more general identity formation model as endorsed by Cross (2011). As well, these findings around reconfigured power relations within in-groups could inform analyses of similar intra-cum-inter group dynamics. We tend to privilege the experience of the individual who has made a mobility shift up and not the transformation that takes place within the individuals who stay behind in one capacity or another, or the groups they are members of; For example, the process that transsexual men undergo in their social

transition from female to male, has primarily been investigated from the individual perspective of the trans male, while the communities they leave in varying degrees remain under-examined (this is less the case for the communities that trans-women leave behind; see Boyd, 2003). Another possible example, or potentially relevant domain is within the disability community, when a disabled person pursues chooses to more typically participate in society, such as in the case of cochlear implant patients, which inevitably impacts those within a vibrant deaf community who choose not to or don't have the opportunity to, as well as effecting the larger typically developing/participating community as a whole. There are likely many more potential areas (e.g., disparate immigration) that not only these findings, but these questions could fruitfully inform.

The conclusions drawn from this work also inform clinical research, suggesting under what circumstances we might expect to see increased tension and conflict within families or between persons differentially experiencing shifts in mobility and/or higher education (or some other valued but scarce commodity). This work also supports clinical practice with clients attempting to deal with issues related to class and credential-related family dynamics. Future related research investigating more deeply the ways in which individuals consciously and unconsciously attempt to resolve or negotiate such dynamics will have multiple invested audiences.

The quantitative attribution findings also crack open a range of new research paths: what for example, is the relationship between attribution type and quality of family relationships (in terms of education-related tension, and family closeness)? Some of the quantitative survey findings hint at a positive relationships between Family Closeness and situational attributions for success (for both Self and Other); and Family Support and

situational attributions. Given the focus on sibling tensions, one might evaluate whether there are differences in family tension, closeness and support between families with one child, or those with more than one (within working class families). And alternately, possible relationships between family tension around educational attainment and dispositional attributions for college going. In the factor analysis, two items that I thought would fall into the Educational Tension factor ("I sometimes downplay my educational achievements" and "I watch the level of language I use") were not related to reported levels of education-related tension within first generation families, which might be because these behaviors represent attempts to reduce conflict and tension. The relationship then between practices which minimize difference (including attribution style) and aspects of family relations (e.g., conflict/tension, closeness) – specifically the presence, strength and direction of such relationships -- represent another potential contribution to the fields of social psychology and education.

Final Thoughts

PROSPECTIVE IMMIGRANTS PLEASE NOTE

by Adrienne Rich (1962)

Either you will

go through this door

or you will not go through.

If you go through

there is always the risk

of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly

and you must look back

and let them happen.

If you do not go through

it is possible

to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes

to hold your position

to die bravely

but much will blind you,

much will evade you,

at what cost who knows?

The door itself

makes no promises.

It is only a door.

So much about this poem is relevant to the class immigrant that the first generation college graduate often is. The consequences of crossing and not crossing the threshold of the door, which increasingly is the door to a college or university; like the risk in remembering instead of forgetting your name: who gave it to you and where you come from. Things will look differently, double, triple layered, perhaps veiled, which Dubois's John taught us so much about; a warning that crossing is leaving, and while you may be able to peer back at the goings on, you can longer change them, as you are no longer of them. There is honor in staying, but also deprivations and "blindness"es: shifting consciousness, raising it and otherwise (Schnee, 2009). The door is (and isn't) only a door; sometimes it's only a window; it's labeled "Promise," but doesn't always lead one there.

Our relationship within/to educational institutions shapes our foundational psychological notions of ontology, epistemology, group relations, and identity. Schooling plays a constitutive role in how we come to know and understand ourselves as individuals, as group members and members of society. Our subjectivities are substantially forged via our educational successes and failures (Lucey, Melody & Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine, 2003), in turn, shaping our interpersonal relationships, our ways of relating and of communicating, and our very understanding of personal rights and responsibilities.

Family, as a group context, has been “relatively neglected by social psychology as a topic for focused study in their own right (Lucey, 2006; p67). Families, understood as a private domain, are seen as insulated from “outside” social influences and also not seen as influencing the social. The force that education is, often only limitedly understood as an individual status shift up, is also demonstrated by the force that it has on families and communities…pushing them apart and pulling them together in different ways, shaping interpersonal relations, ways of communicating and relating, influencing the very way that family members – educated and non-educated alike -- come to see themselves within and through an educational intervention.

Helen Lucey (2006) advocates for a shift from the more traditional social developmental rendering of families (i.e., how families affect individuals), to a sociological social psychological approach to families, which acknowledges and addresses “societal processes and the ways in which these impact on family structures and practices” (Ibid). My analysis of the impact of disparate levels of educational attainment within working class families takes up this research agenda, supporting Lucey’s argument that, “…families afford fascinating possibilities for an emerging social psychology in which the individual is not studied as isolated from social, cultural, and structural processes. The study of families, therefore, can shed valuable light on power relations and situated knowledges and attempt to transcend individual-social and agency-structure dualisms” (Ibid, p68).

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the intentional absence of my own story as a first-generation college graduate. My primary reason for not including an auto-ethnographic look at my own history and family dynamics is that I wanted to be able to meaningfully

represent the wildly diverse perspectives of my parents and siblings within a family narrative – and that story is just not ready to be written yet, while the stories shared with me by these, often incredibly open, and always generous, participants were.

Appendix A Recruitment Materials

Graduate Interview Recruitment Flyer

Are you the first person in your immediate family to earn a college degree?
Do you have more education than other members of your family?

If so, please consider participating in an interview about your experiences and opinions.

I am a graduate student researcher who is interested in speaking with people who are the first in their family to earn a college degree, about how their education has affected their lives and their relationships with family and friends.

If you are interested in talking about these issues in an interview, please email me the following information:

- Highest degree earned;
- The year you earned B.A./B.S.;
- And a few sentences about how you feel/think your family regards your educational accomplishments.

If you selected for an interview, you will receive $25 for your participation.

I also plan to interview family members of 1st generation college graduates, so those who are interested in interviewing a family member (you both would receive $25 stipend), or think a member of your family would like to be interviewed by a researcher, will be given priority in participant selection.

Graduate Survey Recruitment Posting to Alumni Listserves

Subject: Do you have more education than the rest of your family?

Dear [University/College] Alumni,

Are you the first person in your family of origin to earn a 4-year degree (or higher)? If so, please consider completing this survey about your experiences and opinions.

My name is April Burns and I am a graduate student researcher in the Ph.D. program in Social/Personality Psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center. I am interested in hearing from people who are the first in their family to earn a 4-year degree, how earning a college degree has affected their lives and their relationships with family and friends.

Researchers don't often get the opportunity to hear from first-generation college graduates, so your voice is very important to us.

This anonymous survey takes 10-15 minutes to complete and can be accessed at:
https://app.formassembly.com/forms/view/63408

**There is also a similar survey for the FAMILY-MEMBERS of first-generation college graduates, a population that has not yet been represented in social research. Whether you decide to complete the above survey or not, please also consider forwarding the link to this family-specific survey (below) to family members who might be interested in participating.

Family-specific survey: https://app.formassembly.com/forms/view/44473

Sincerely,
April Burns,
CUNY Graduate Center
Doctoral Program in Social/Personality Psychology
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016-4309
aburns@gc.cuny.edu

Family Interview Recruitment Flyer

Does one member of your family have more education than the rest of your family?

If so, please consider participating in an interview about your experiences and opinions.

I am currently a graduate student in psychology and am studying how differences in educational level between family members affect people and their relationships with family and friends. I am looking to speak with people whose brother/sister or son/daughter earned a college degree, but no one else in the immediate (parents/siblings) family did. And if you are the first in your family to earn a 4 year degree (like I am), pass this on to any family you think would be interested in talking with me.

If you are interested in talking about these issues in an interview, please email me the following information:

• Your highest level of education;

• Your relationship to the person with the highest level of education in your family;

If you are selected for an interview, you will receive $25 for your participation.

April Burns
Aprilburns72@gmail.com
Graduate Center, City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10016

Family Survey Recruitment Flyer

Does one member of your family have more education than the rest of your family?

Is your **brother/sister** or **son/daughter** the first person in your immediate family to earn a college degree?

If so, please consider completing an online survey about your experiences and opinions. Survey participants are automatically entered into a raffle for $25 (several awards, 1 in 25 chance of winning).

I am a graduate student researcher who is interested in learning from people whose son/daughter or brother/sister has more education than the rest of your family (minimum of a 4 year college degree). I am studying how educational differences within families affect people and their relationships with family and friends.

This anonymous survey takes 10-15 minutes to complete and can be found here: https://app.formassembly.com/forms/view/44473

April Burns,
CUNY Graduate Center
Doctoral Program in Social/Personality Psychology
365 Fifth Avenue
aburns@gc.cuny.edu

If you are interested in talking about these issues in an interview, please email me the following information:

- Your highest level of education;
- Your relationship to the person with the highest level of education in your family;

Appendix B Consent Forms

Graduate Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is April Burns and I am a graduate student in the Psychology Ph.D. program at the City University of New York. I am conducting a research project about first-generation college-graduates and their families. I am sending this letter through your former high school in order to locate individuals who may be interested in participating in this research.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how a college degree affects first-generation college graduates and their families. I am particularly interested in how a college education impacts family relationships.

You are not required to participate in this research study. **Participation is voluntary.**

If you agree to volunteer, you and one member of your family (of your choosing) will be asked to participate in 2 interviews. You will each be interviewed separately once and also interviewed together once. In the interview I will ask you general questions about your educational experiences, your family relationships and your thoughts and opinions about educational opportunity in the United States. <u>You will not be evaluated or tested in any way.</u>

The interviews will take place at a mutually convenient time and place, and will last approximately 1 hour each. Study participants will receive $25 per interview ($50.00 total) as compensation for their time.

The anticipated risks of participating in this research are minimal, although some participants may feel uncomfortable or anxious thinking about and discussing aspects of their educational and family experiences that are, or were, difficult or less than satisfying. However, you do not have to respond to any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you may also end your participation at any point during the interviews. You will also have the opportunity to review the transcript of our conversation(s) and provide clarification of facts and offer your own interpretations or opinions.

Even though you will not directly benefit from participation, you will be helping educators, researchers and schools better understand how the path to a college degree affects first-generation college students as well as their families, hopefully to improve the way that schools support students and families.

All information you share will remain **<u>strictly confidential</u>**. This means that your name or any other identifying characteristics will not be collected or saved with

your feedback. I may publish results of this study, but no names of people, schools, communities or other identifying characteristics will be used in any of the publications.

If you have any questions about this research, contact **April Burns** at (917) 647-9392 or email me at aburns@gc.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center, CUNY, (212) 817-7525 or kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

Yes, I would like to participate in the study of first-generation college graduates and their families. The researcher has answered all of my questions about the project. I was also given a copy of this form.

***(please circle one)*:** Yes No

I agree to have my interview audio-taped, and have my transcript be used in the study:

(*please circle one*): **Yes** **No**

______________________	______________________	__________
Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Date
______________________	______________________	__________
Investigator's Name	Investigator's Signature	Date

Please indicate here if you would like a summary of the study findings [circle one]:

Yes **No**

Address to which study findings should be sent: ____________________

____

____

Family Interview Consent Form

Dear Family member,

My name is April Burns and I am a graduate student in the Psychology Ph.D. program at the City University of New York. A member of your family (possibly your son, daughter or sibling) is taking part in a research project that I am conducting about first-generation college-graduates and their families. I am sending this letter through your family member to see if you would be interested in also participating in this research.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how a college degree affects first-generation college graduates and their families. I am particularly interested in how a college education impacts family relationships.

You are not required to participate in this research study. **Participation is voluntary.**

If you agree to volunteer, you and your family member will be asked to participate in **2 interviews**. You will each be interviewed separately once and also interviewed together once. In the interview I will ask you general questions about your educational experiences and your family relationships. I will also ask about your opinions on educational opportunity in the United States. <u>You will not be evaluated or tested in any way.</u>

The interviews will take place at a mutually convenient time and place, and will last approximately 1 hour each. Study participants will receive $25 per interview ($50.00 total) as compensation for their time.

The anticipated risks of participating in this research are minimal, although some participants may feel uncomfortable or anxious thinking about or discussing aspects of their educational and family experiences that are, or were, less than satisfying. However, you do not have to respond to any question that makes you uncomfortable, or you may end your participation at any point during the interviews.

Even though you will not directly benefit from participation, you will be helping educators, researchers and schools better understand how the path to a college degree affects first-generation college students as well as their families, hopefully to improve the way that schools support students and families.

All information you share will remain **<u>strictly confidential</u>**. This means that participant names or any other identifying characteristics will not be collected or saved with their feedback. I may publish results of this study, but no names of people, schools communities or other identifying characteristics will be used in any of the publications.

If you have any questions about this research, contact April Burns at (917) 647-9392 or email me at aburns@gc.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center, CUNY, (212) 817-7525 or kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

Yes, I would like to participate in the study of first-generation college graduates and their families. The researcher has answered all of my questions about the project. I was also given a copy of this form.

***(please circle one)*:** Yes No

I agree to have my interview audio-taped, and have my transcript be used in the study:

(*please circle one*): **Yes** **No**

________________________	________________________	____________
Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Date
________________________	________________________	____________
Investigator's Name	Investigator's Signature	Date

Please indicate here if you would like a summary of the study findings [circle one]:

Yes **No**

Address to which study findings should be sent: ____________________

____

____

Appendix C Survey

CUNY FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATE SURVEY: Differences in Educational Attainment within Families

Do you have more education than the rest of your family of origin? If so, complete this survey about your experiences and opinions.

[and if you are a **family member** of a first-generation college graduate, please complete the survey located here]

My name is April Burns and I am a graduate student in the Psychology Ph.D. program at the City University of New York. I am conducting a research project about first-generation college-graduates and their families entitled, "Differences in Educational Attainment within Families: Cause of Pride, Conflict or Complication?"

The purpose of this study is to better understand how differences in educational attainment within families affect people and their relationships with family and friends.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY, you must be the first person in your immediate family of origin (i.e., your parents and siblings) to earn a bachelors (or 4-year) degree. You must also be 18 years of age or older. Participation is voluntary.

The study is expected to take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The anticipated risks of participating in this research are minimal, although some participants may feel uncomfortable or anxious thinking about aspects of their educational and family experiences that are, or were, difficult or less than satisfying. However, you do not have to respond to any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you may also end your participation at any point by clicking "enter" at the end of the survey page.

Even though you will not directly benefit from participation, you will be helping educators, researchers and schools better understand how the attainment of a college degree affects first-generation college students as well as their families, hopefully to improve the way that schools support students and families.

If you agree to participate in the study, an ID code will be assigned to your responses. Your ID code will not be linked to your name at any point during or after the study. You will remain completely anonymous, except in the event that you include your e-mail address at the end of the survey. You have a right not to provide an e-mail address, in which case there will be no information that ties you to your data.

If you have any questions about this research, contact April Burns at (917) 647-9392 or email me at aburns@gc.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant

in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center, CUNY, (212) 817-7525 or kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.[47]

I have read this page. I understand that clicking on "I agree" below I am at least 18 years of age, and am consenting to participate in this research study. * ☐ I agree to participate in this survey ☐ I am not interested in participating in this survey

Demographic Information
What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female

How do you identify racially/ethnically? ☐ White, non-Hispanic ☐ Black, non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Other

How many siblings (brothers/sisters) do you have? [Please select... ▾]

What is your highest level of educational attainment?
[Please select... ▾]

In what year did you earn your highest degree? [ ]

In what year did you earn your Bachelor's degree? [ ]

Family's Level of Educational Attainment
What was your mother's highest level of educational attainment at the time you started college? [▾]

What is your mother's CURRENT highest level educational attainment?
[▾]

What was your father's highest level of educational attainment at the time you started college? [▾]

What is your father's CURRENT highest level of educational attainment?
[▾]

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[47] There were two versions of this survey, one for CUNY alumni and non-CUNY alumni. This is the CUNY Version. This survey has been very minimally edited for length

Please indicate the highest level of educational attainment of your sibling(s) who went the furthest in school.

College Information
Where did you primarily live while attending college?

What was your college major?

Which CUNY college did you earn your Bachelor's degree from? Baruch College Brooklyn College City College City Tech College of Staten Island Hunter College John Jay College Lehman College Medgar Evers College Queens College York College Other/Non-CUNY College or University

Which Non-CUNY college or University did you earn your Bachelor's degree from?

What type of college/University (public or private) did you earn your bachelor's degree from?

How satisfied are/were you with your college experience?

COLLEGE EXPERIENCES: Please indicate how much you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements.

- I basically got through college on my own.
  Earning a college degree has been my most important accomplishment so far.
- My family played a big role in my decision to attend college.
- My parents supported my decision to attend college.
- I wish my family would have been more supportive of my pursuit of a college degree.
- In general, my siblings supported my decision to attend college.
- In general, my extended family supported my decision to attend college.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected your life.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected your PARENTS' lives.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected your SIBLINGS' lives.
- On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected your CHILDREN'S lives.

- On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has effected the lives of your EXTENDED FAMILY (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc).

FAMILY RELATIONS: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about family relationships.

- My family is proud of my educational achievements.
- My family thinks that I should have achieved more than I have so far.
- In my family, my education is frequently a topic of discussion.
- In my family, my education is sometimes the cause of tension.
- In my family, my education sometimes makes other members feel uncomfortable.
- My education effects how my family treats me.
- I would describe my family as especially close.
- My family really understands me.
- My life would be very different if I had never finished college.
- My family's life would be very different if I had not completed college.
- I usually consult with my family about big decisions or problems.
- My family usually comes to me to discuss their big decisions or problems.
- I sometimes downplay my educational achievements around some members of my family.
- Compared to other members of my family, I receive special treatment in my family. I worry a lot about how my family will think or feel about me.
- My family thinks my accomplishments are a much bigger deal than I do.
- My opinion holds a lot of weight in my family.
- I watch the level of language I use with less educated members of my family.
- We can talk openly about almost anything in my family.

PERSONAL BELIEFS: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

- With hard work, anyone can succeed educationally.
- If given a chance, anyone can earn a degree.
- Earning a college degree means that people respect you more.
- People with a lot of education tend to judge those with less.
- The chief benefit of a college education is that it increases a person's earning power.
- College was something that my parents wanted to pursue, but didn't have the opportunity to do so.
- College was something that my sibling(s) wanted to pursue, but didn't have the opportunity to do so.
- I work as hard or harder than anyone else in my immediate family.
- Getting an education just wasn't very important to my parents.
- Getting an education just wasn't very important to my siblings.

- Why do you think you were the first in your family to earn a degree?

How important are the following matters to you personally?

- Influencing the political structure of the country?
  Becoming successful in one's own business.
- Being successful in my line of work.
- Being able to find steady work.
- Being well off financially.
- Becoming an authority in a given field.
- Being a leader in my community.
- Getting away from this country.
- Giving my own children better opportunities.
- Having leisure time to enjoy interests.
- Living close to parents and relatives.

First-Generation Experiences: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements

- My education provides a resource for my family members.
- There are important differences between people with a college education and those without.
- I belong to the same social class as my family of origin.
- I have changed social classes from the social class I grew up in.
- I believe that things are improving for poor and working-class people.
- I believe that a college education changes a person for the better.
- The fact that I have completed more formal education than anyone in my family has negatively affected my relationships with my family members.
- Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently than the rest of their family [politics, likes/dislikes, culture, religion]. How true is this in your family?

Please explain or give an example of this experience.

- Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?

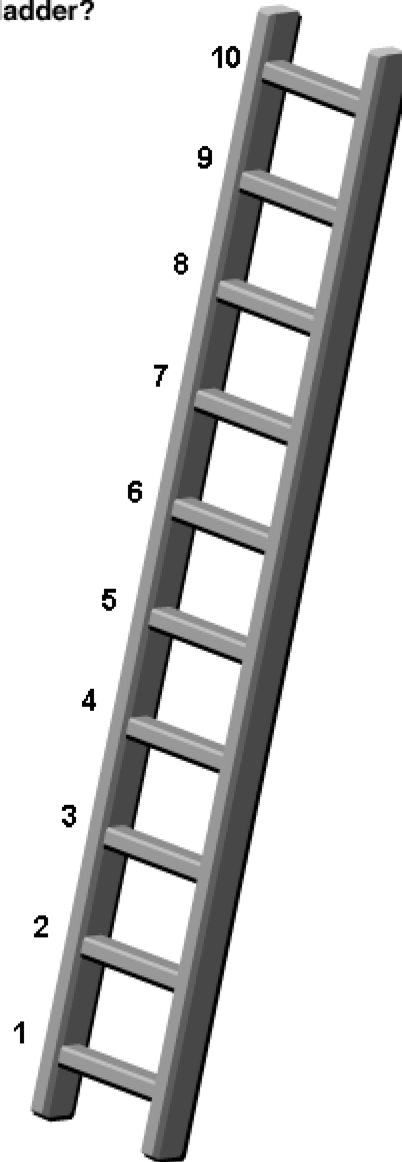
Please explain or give an example of this experience.

Social Class Information

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in their communities.

People define community in different ways; please define it in whatever way is most meaningful to you. At the **top** of the ladder are the people who have the highest standing in their community. At the **bottom** are the people who have the lowest standing in their community.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder?

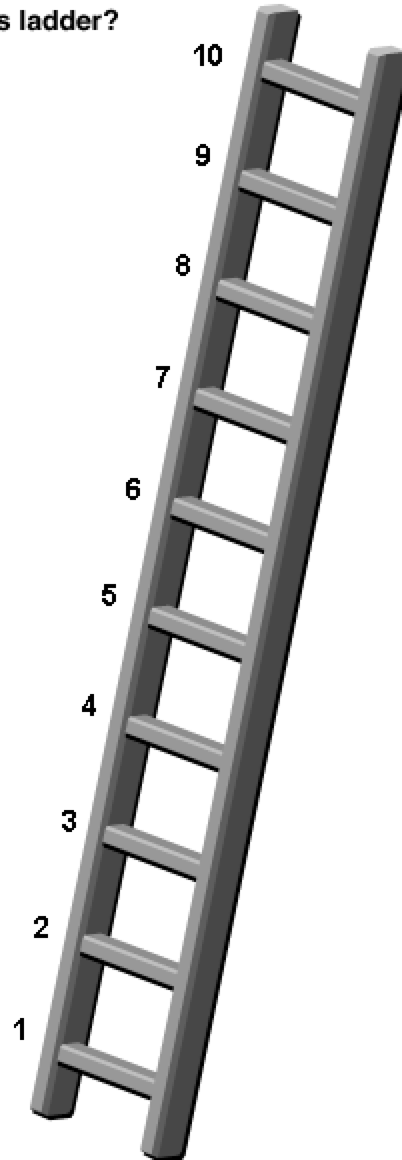


Please indicate which rung you think you stand on at this time in your life, relative to other people in your community.

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in the United States.

At the **top** of the ladder are the people who are the best off – those who have the most money, the most education and the most respected jobs. At the **bottom** are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder?



Please indicate which rung you think you stand on at this time in your life, relative to other people in the United States.

Which of the following best describes your current main daily activities and/or responsibilities? Please select...

With regard to your current or most recent job activity, in what kind of business or industry do (did) you work?
For example: hospital, newspaper publishing, mail order house, auto engine manufacturing, breakfast cereal manufacturing.

What kind of work do (did) you do? (Job Title)
For example: registered nurse, personnel manager, supervisor of order department, gasoline engine assembler, grinder operator.

Do you currently owe student loans? Yes No I have already repaid my student loans

How much do (or did) you owe in college loans?

How much did you earn, before taxes and other deductions, during the past 12 months?

Appendix D Factor Analysis

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.748	31.934	31.934
2	2.712	15.066	47.000
3	1.765	9.804	56.803
4	1.295	7.196	64.000
5	.829	4.606	68.606
6	.719	3.992	72.598
7	.642	3.566	76.164
8	.632	3.512	79.676
9	.521	2.892	82.568
10	.509	2.826	85.394
11	.457	2.539	87.934
12	.418	2.325	90.259
13	.365	2.030	92.288
14	.319	1.774	94.062
15	.311	1.730	95.792
16	.281	1.561	97.352
17	.253	1.403	98.755
18	.224	1.245	100.000

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.854
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1957.007
	Df	153
	Sig.	.000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
My family played a big role in my decision to attend college.	1.000	.692
My parents supported my decision to attend college.	1.000	.803
I wish my family would have been more supportive of my pursuit of a college degree.	1.000	.656
In general, my extended family supported my decision to attend college.	1.000	.574
On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected your PARENTS' lives.	1.000	.667
On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected your SIBLINGS' lives.	1.000	.684
On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected the lives of your EXTENDED FAMILY.	1.000	.643
In my family, my education is sometimes the cause of tension.	1.000	.682
In my family, my education sometimes makes other members feel uncomfortable.	1.000	.746
I would describe my family as especially close.	1.000	.597
My family really understands me.	1.000	.689
I usually consult with my family about big decisions or problems.	1.000	.630
My family usually comes to me to discuss their big decisions or problems.	1.000	.591
My opinion holds a lot of weight in my family.	1.000	.499
We can talk openly about almost anything in my family.	1.000	.559
The fact that I have completed more formal education than anyone in my family has negatively affected my relationships with my family members.	1.000	.710
My education effects how my family treats me.	1.000	.597
Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?	1.000	.500

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component			
	FamSupp	EdTension	FamClose	FamEff
My parents supported my decision to attend college.	.907			
My family played a big role in my decision to attend college.	.770			
In general, my extended family supported my decision to attend college.	.734			
I wish my family would have been more supportive of my pursuit of a college degree. (Reverse coded)	.729			
In my family, my education sometimes makes other members feel uncomfortable.		.881		
In my family, my education is sometimes the cause of tension.		.802		
My education effects how my family treats me.		.792		
The fact that I have completed more formal education than anyone in my family has negatively affected my relationships with my family members.		.702		
Some families report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education, and/or college educated people. How true is this in your family?		.594		
My family usually comes to me to discuss their big decisions or problems.			-.779	
My opinion holds a lot of weight in my family.			-.720	
We can talk openly about almost anything in my family.			-.717	
My family really understands me.			-.662	
I would describe my family as especially close.			-.652	
I usually consult with my family about big decisions or problems.			-.631	

On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected your SIBLINGS' lives.				-.821
On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected the lives of your EXTENDED FAMILY (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc).				-.794
On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much your earning a college degree has affected your PARENTS' lives.				-.769

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Appendix E

Coding structure to Open Ended item 1 (OE1)

"Why do you think you were the first in your family to earn a degree?"

In this first open-ended survey item, graduates were asked to account for their differential educational success, specifically explaining why they succeeded when others in their family (i.e., their social position) did not. The coding structure for this first open-ended item, generated from initial readings of the data, consists of 4 main coding categories: *Dispositional Self,* and *Dispositional Family*; *Situational Self*, and *Situational Family*. The general character and parameters of each code are described in the appendices:

Dispositional attributions regarding SELF: these are attributions made by respondents that relate to:

a. *an internal and stable aspect of self:* drive, determination, being an "over achiever," love of learning or school, resilience, ambition, not willing to settle, high self-esteem, motivated, different personality than rest of family; or to
b. *an action taken or effort exerted*[48] *by self*: "I pushed forward," "I created a support network," "I took opportunities," "Only one willing to take on the costs of education," "I worked hard," "didn't give up," "saw value in a degree" or to

[48] Personal action/effort is here considered a dispositional attribution as the action is used narratively to represent/reflect some internal aspect of self, and functions to set the graduate apart from others in the family in a fundamental and stable way.

c. *a participant's personal goal or desires:* "I wanted it," personally important, desire to learn, "hungry to grow my brain," interests, curiosities;

d. *participant's desire to escape:* from an anticipated fate or future they didn't want; for example,

- *from deprivation*, desire to escape from a hard life and poverty (but not necessarily from family per se), from "utter intellectual and spiritual deprivation," to escape the fate of older siblings and parents who had to work too hard for too little.
- *Negative Role models*: Family members as examples of what **not** to do; didn't want to be like parents and friends; family members as negative role models
- *Freedom:* from dependence on others, from gender roles; the desire for independence from family

Dispositional attributions of *FAMILY* members are attributions that relate to:

a. *an internal and stable aspect of members of respondents' FAMILIES*: "passive," Parents/siblings were "not as motivated," or to

b. *to an action NOT taken or effort NOT exerted by family members*: family members did not work as hard; or to

c. *a lack of interest or desire of family members:* siblings "weren't interested,"

Situational and unstable attributions of SELF: these are attributions that relate to the external/situational and unstable aspects of respondents' context that contributed to their educational success:

a. *opportunity:* Graduate was first with opportunity, "lucky"
b. *external support and encouragement:* supportive family; influential adults, parents, teachers, mentors; social and peer pressure; "family sacrifice," influence of degreed spouse who supported or motivated them
c. *family or community expectations:* parents' expectations: Siblings didn't go to college so they had to; family priority for them to go, family pushed them; peer pressure; Birth order (e.g., as either oldest or youngest); Culture/ethnic value (e.g., Asian); to fulfill parent's (thwarted) desires to get an education; desire to make family proud, "promised grandmother" she would

Situational attributions and unstable attributions of *FAMILY* members: these are attributions that relate to the situational and unstable aspects of family member's context: e.g., Grads were first to earn a degree only because parents lacked opportunity, had children or had to work.

Appendix F -- Interview Questions

For Family Members

Background:

Tell me a bit about your family: where did you grow up? What was your community like?

Tell me about your experiences in school. [Probe: What did you enjoy most/least about school?]

What did education mean to you growing up? What does it mean to you now?

How did your economic situation or social class most affect your life growing up, if at all?

Educational expectations:

a) For self

- Growing up, what did you think you would end up doing for a living?
- How close is that to what you currently do for work? What kinds of work have you most enjoyed doing?
- Was college something you ever considered for yourself? Why/why not?
- Is it something you consider for yourself now? Why/why not?

b) For children

- Was college something you considered for your children (grandchildren)?
- When did you know your child/sibling was planning to go to college? [Why do you think they decided to pursue a degree?]
- How did you feel about the decision at the time? How do you feel about it now?
- What do you think that college was like for them?
- How do you think having a degree has affected them or their life?

Family:

a) How close would you say your family is now?

- Do you usually consult with your child/sibling (graduate) about big decisions or your problems? [Do they consult you?]
- How would you describe your conversations with your family, particularly your (graduate) child/sibling? [How often, and by what means, do you most often communicate with your family? What is that like for you? For them?]

- What kinds of things do you talk about? [Are there things that you don't talk to your family about, but wish you did/could?]

b) What's your relationship with your child/grandchild/sibling like? [Has it changed over time?]

- What aspects of your relationship are you most satisfied with?
- Describe a time when you felt particularly close to them.
- Are there areas of your relationship that you wish were different?
- How does the fact that your child/sibling went to college and earned a degree affected your family, if at all? [communication, closeness, resources?]
- Some 1st generation graduates say that their education changed their lives. Has the fact that your child/sibling went to college changed **your** life at all? [Has it made you think about yourself or the world any differently?]

Response to Interpretations:

- Some families and graduates report having mixed or ambivalent feelings about higher education. Has that ever been an issue for you or your family?
- Some 1st generation graduates say that because of their education, they see the world differently. Do you think that is true in your family?

For Graduates

College experiences

- How did you make the decision to attend college? What did your family think about this decision? [Probe: How supportive were they of your efforts?]
- What was your college experience like? [How did you experience social and academic life?]
- How has having a degree affected your life, if at all? [What did you take away from your experience besides a degree?]
- What did education mean to you growing up? What does it mean to you now?
- What did it mean to your family? What do you think it means to your family now?

Family life

- Tell me a bit about your family: where did you grow up? What was your community like?
- How close would you say your family is? Whom do you feel closest to?
- Describe a time when you felt particularly close or connected to your family (or family member)
- Do you usually consult with them about big decisions? Do you go to them with your problems?
- How would you describe your conversations with your family? [How often, and by what means, do you most often communicate with your family?]
- Are there things that you don't talk to your family about, but wish you did/could?

First-Generation status within the family

- How do you think your family evaluates your life choices? How about your siblings'?
- Does that differ from how *you* understand the choices you've made?
- Why do you think you were the first in your family to earn a degree?

Consequences of higher education

- Would you say that your educational experiences have changed you? In what ways? [How would you describe yourself compared to yourself before and during your educational experience?]

- Has the fact that you have completed more formal education than anyone in your family affected your interactions with family members? [do you think they see you/themselves differently at all?]
- Describe how these changes came about. [Were there specific events or people who prompted these changes?]

Current family/living situation

- Describe your present living context (children? Partner? Career/job?) Are your educational experiences still influencing your life? How? [How do they influence the decisions you make or present relationships?]
- What do you see for yourself in the future?

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