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## Investigating How First-Year College Students Use Smartphones to Receive Parental Support

Jacob Bonne  
*University of Central Florida*

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INVESTIGATING HOW FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS USE SMARTPHONES  
TO RECEIVE PARENTAL SUPPORT

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Higher Education and Policy Studies  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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2020

Major Professor: Thomas Cox

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. A conceptual framework was implemented to frame the research and focused on first-year college student transitions and development within the context of parental support. A Phenomenological methodology with semi-structured interviews was implemented which explored the phenomenon from both immersive and holistic perspectives. Seven themes emerged from the analysis: *decision-making, academic pathways, autonomy, emotional support, access, safety, and preparation*. This study provided two recommendations for practice, including to educate students and parents about parental support and to educate parents about specific student success resources. Parental support is unlikely to stop once college begins, which requires students and parents to devise a strategy to maximize the effectiveness of parental support while also remaining mindful of the potential challenges.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

FTIC: First-Time-in-College Student

LMS: Learning Management System

NCES: National Center for Education Statistics

NELS: National Education Longitudinal Study

SEM: Structure Equation Modeling

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Successfully navigating the transition from high school to college is instrumental for undergraduate college students to progress, graduate, and succeed professionally (Braxton, 2016). Students can experience challenges throughout their transition to college, be it financial, relational, or academic (Arnett, 2000). If students fail to build sufficient collegial connections or cultivate necessary academic/social skillsets, they may withdraw or transfer from the institution (Braxton, 2016). Conversely, other factors can contribute to student retention and can be beneficial to their postsecondary success. Students come to campus with varied perspectives, life experiences, and meaning-making systems which impact their capacity to successfully navigate their transition to college (Braxton, 2016). For decades, higher education research has focused on retention and persistence of students and the associated barriers to their success (Braxton, 2016). While the number of potential solutions to these challenges seem immeasurable, each study conducted contributes to the body of literature which aids colleges and universities in their mission to support students.

As students transition to college, parental support can positively contribute to the likelihood of student success and college readiness (Leonard, 2013). Aside from the contribution of financial resources, parental support can include encouragement, guidance, and advice for the student (Green, Jewell, Fuentez, & Smith, 2019). For many undergraduate college students, transitioning to college involves physically moving away from home, often for the first time (Green et al., 2019). This newfound freedom can be beneficial to help students develop self-efficacy and includes the possibility that students will find themselves further removed from the parental support that they may utilize while in high school (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Despite

physical separation, technological advances have enabled college students to retain greater access to their parents (Lee, Meszaros, & Colvin, 2009). This study sought to understand how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support. By exploring how students use smartphones to access parental support, this study contributed to the scholarly research related to student transitions and parental involvement in higher education.

### Background

According to the Lumina Foundation (2016), employment prospects for college graduates have been stronger than those without a college degree, even when considering the Great Recession of the mid-2000s. Additionally, “Virtually all job growth in the U.S. since 2007 is in jobs requiring some form of postsecondary education” (p. 3). Higher education can increase the likelihood of financial stability, including homeownership, robust retirement savings, or funding for children’s college education. However, financial success after college is often contingent upon the completion of an undergraduate college degree.

For undergraduate students, there is no guarantee that starting college will lead to degree completion. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) indicated that “About 60 percent of students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution in Fall 2011 completed that degree at the same institution within 6 years” (p. 1). Furthermore, this percentage has not changed significantly when compared to previous generations of undergraduate students. The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1992 found that “59% of those who started college earned bachelor’s degrees by age 26” (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009, p. 20). Failing to transition to the college environment successfully can result in low academic performance, delayed graduation, or attrition (Aquilino, 2006). Each year, institutions host student orientations, welcome week activities, targeted programming for the first

six weeks of the semester, and other campaigns to ensure that students are adequately prepared to navigate the turbulence of the high school structure to college transition (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). Direct impacts on student success, such as persistence, graduation, and employability, have been correlated with the students ability to overcome challenges they may encounter in their first year (Kuh, et al., 2010).

Regardless of if the student seeks institutional support, colleges and universities should be prepared to provide students with the assistance and encouragement they need (Kuh, et al., 2010). However, the role of the institution when supporting students has shifted significantly. Originally, college and university faculty and staff were responsible for the students' wellbeing and behavior under the concept of *in loco parentis* until the 1960s (McClellan & Stringer, 2009). Caselaw (*Bradshaw v. Rawlings*, *Beach v. University of Utah*, and *Smith v. Day*) emphasized that *in loco parentis* is no longer applicable in college or university settings. As a result, the role of guardian shifts as students reach adulthood and the institution is no longer takes formal responsibility for the student. Rather, students are expected to maintain a level of independence and self-regulation throughout their college journey. Regardless of the shift from *in loco parentis*, institutions provide support and resources for first-year students, considering that a successful college transition can result in longitudinal student success (Kuh, et al., 2010).

Though students have access to many resources provided by the institution, they often turn to their parents for assistance when navigating the challenges experienced throughout their college transition (Dunn, 2015). The connections established between students and their parents provide interpersonal support or strategies for students to resolve the challenges (Wong, 2008). Parents continue to support their students even once their student transitions to the university, and this support has not been fully explored by higher education research (Dunn, 2015).



Precisely how students reach out to their parents for support has changed alongside the rapid innovations of communications technology (Stein, Osborn, & Greenberg, 2016). Messages sent by telegraph, written letter, and eventually the telephone have now been replaced by text messages, emails, or video calls. As a result, communication between students and parents occurs at significantly greater speed today than in the past. Further, “Advanced technologies, such as the cell phone and Internet, have transformed communication between college students, families, and friends, allowing instant connection and immediate response” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 717). Increased speed has led to increased access, which has given rise to concerns about interdependence due to smartphones and other technology (Stein et al., 2016). This interdependence could impact students during their transition to the university, as blurred boundaries could lead to role confusion for students, parents, and even institutional staff (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). As a result, further reliance on parents throughout the students’ transitions and college experiences may be possible.

### Problem Statement

The fundamental problem explored by this study was to determine the components of support that students receive through smartphones and how students perceive their experiences when using smartphones to receive parental support. While a variety of contributing factors can directly impact the student’s capacity to succeed, those who struggle during the transition to college are less likely to graduate. Failing to transition to the college environment successfully can result in low academic performance, delayed graduation, or attrition (Braxton, 2016). Attrition leaves, “many students with loan obligations, fewer job prospects, and a lifetime of lower earnings” (Leonard, 2013, p. 184). Therefore, the shift from high school to college (and

the subsequent first-year of college) is a highly critical time for students on their journey to success.

Braxton (2016) described four major constructs that indicate student departure, including economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological perspectives. According to Astin (1993), there are several challenges that first-year, first-time-in-college students are likely to face during their college journey which can impede their academic success. Whether it be correlated to financial hardship, sense of belonging, campus engagement, or academic performance, both the individual and environmental factors that comprise the students' experiences impact college success (Astin, 1993). While individual students' experiences vary, institutions must prepare to support students throughout their transition and encourage students to make their own preparations (Braxton, 2016).

Multiple factors can positively contribute to successful student transitions. Parental support has been found to result in positive outcomes related to student transitions and success (Green et al., 2019). Alternatively, a lack of parental support (or parental over-involvement) throughout the student's transition to college has been associated with negative outcomes, higher rates of dissatisfaction, and lower academic performance (Ingen et al., 2015). Further, if parents exhibit overbearing behavior during the college acclimation process, students are less likely to experience personal, goal-directed initiative or take personal responsibility for their actions (Dreher, Feldman, & Numan, 2014).

First-year undergraduate college students can maintain increased connectivity to their parents due to the invention and utilization of smartphones. Generally, students often wish for more contact with their parents, as they do not perceive their existing communication as too frequent (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). This level of contact can result in increased interdependence

for undergraduate college students which could have a significant, long-term impact on their development (Stein et al., 2016). Though many university policies are implemented to prevent parents from becoming entangled in the students' academic process, some institutions instead pursue opportunities to educate students and parents on parental support. For example, Bradley-Geist and Olson Buchanan (2014) suggested that institutions could provide "More guidance to parents and students during college visitations and orientations about expectations for student autonomy and appropriate types of parental involvement" (p. 324). As the increasing use of technology becomes a societal norm, the communication between students and their parents is unlikely to subside once the student matriculates to college. This study explored the components of support students receive when using smartphones and how students perceive their experiences with smartphone usage to receive parental support.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. Successfully navigating the transition to college is critical for academic success within the college environment. This study explored the situations and experiences where students used smartphones to receive parental support throughout their first-year. A qualitative methodology was implemented to understand how students view this transition from their own perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The themes that emerged from this study provided depth of knowledge to first-year undergraduate students' experiences throughout their transition. Additionally, this study added to the body of literature on student transitions and parental support.

## Conceptual Framework

Using concepts and theories to guide the literature and frame qualitative research helps provide a common perspective to frame this study within the context of higher education (Wolcott, 1994). The conceptual framework implemented in this study is first-year college student transitions and development within the context of parental support. Components from three theories were incorporated to form the conceptual framework for this study: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship (2001), and Rotter's Locus of Control (1966). Concepts from these theories were incorporated into the thematic analysis (Wolcott, 1994).

The first theory incorporated into the conceptual framework is Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), which describes the process and circumstances by which individuals navigate transition. Schlossberg's theory encompasses understanding the situation, personal factors (self), elements of support, and the strategies implemented to navigate transition (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). The second theory incorporated within the conceptual framework is Marcia Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship Theory (2001), which indicates that individuals transition from relying on external authorities to articulate personal beliefs, identity, and role in relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2008). The final theory within the conceptual framework is Rotter's Locus of Control (1966), which states that individuals who exhibit an external locus of control attribute the source of their rewards to outside forces (independent of the individual), while those with an internal locus of control attribute rewards to their own actions or attributes (Rotter, 1966).

The conceptual framework provided context to the experiences of the participants in this study. In *Figure 1* below, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, including the concepts of situation,

self, support, and strategies, provided the foundation for the research questions (Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg’s concept of transition (moving in, moving through, moving out) further scaffolded the conceptual framework (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). The concepts of self and strategies were further explored using Rotter’s Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966) and Baxter Magolda’s Self Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008).

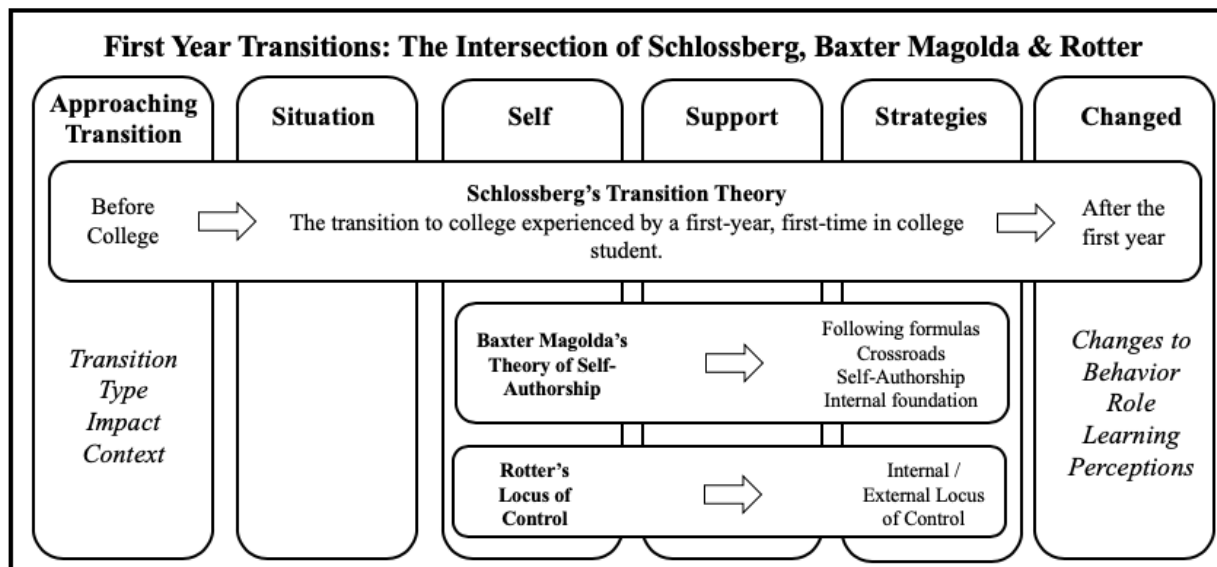


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Map  
Adapted from Schlossberg (1981), Baxter Magolda (2001), and Rotter (1966).

### Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. The phenomenon of *support* is integral to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, along with the other core concepts of *situation*, *self*, and *strategies* (Goodman et al., 2006). This study explored support through the remaining concepts of situation, self, and strategies. To understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support, the following research questions were utilized to guide this study:

1. In what *situations*, if any, do first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?

2. What aspects of *self*, if any, impact how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?
3. What success *strategies*, if any, result from first-year college students using smartphones to receive parental support?

### Significance of The Study

This study contributed to the literature regarding college student transitions and parental support. A student's successful transition to and through college is attributed to positive academic outcomes such as retention, graduation, and post-graduation success (Aquilino, 2006). Institutional efforts to support students during their transition to college have been a continual inquiry area, given graduation rates across the United States have not significantly changed in more than 100 years (Braxton, 2016). As a result, higher education research has focused on the concern of student departure for more than 70 years, with responses to attrition encompassing economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological approaches (Braxton, 2016).

One of the most pervasive transitional theories in higher education is Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This theory comprises four frames to understand and explore transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). These factors provide a framework to understand the circumstances necessary for successfully navigating transition (Goodman et al., 2006). While transition occurs throughout an individual's lifetime, the transition from high school to college is a specific application of Schlossberg's work (Evans et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. Parental support results in positive outcomes during student transitions (Green et al., 2019). Alternatively, parental disengagement

or over engagement can result in lower academic success rates (Ingen et al., 2015). The use of smartphones by college students to receive parental support has been the focus of limited research. The existence of smartphone technology has given students the ability to potentially retain access to parental support across distance (Lee et al., 2009). Smartphone technology has become lighter, faster, and more cost-effective (Hardell, 2018). As a result, students and parents now have more tools to maintain contact, and parents have more convenient tools to support their students (Pedersen, 2017).

This study provided recommendations for higher education practitioners and policymakers regarding potential implications for policy and outreach initiatives. For example, recommendations were made for student and parent transition programs concerning parental support from a distance. This study contributed to the body of literature that suggests expanding student orientation sessions regarding “Appropriate types of parental involvement” (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014, p. 324). The information gleaned from this study also helps direct parents to the appropriate academic support resources and to provide support to their students. According to Whitt (2006), “Effective schools provide guideposts to mark key transition points during college in order to channel student effort toward the right activities at the right time” (p. 5). The results of this study will illuminate the applicable contexts to incorporate parental support using smartphones for key outreach and communication efforts to students, referred to by Whitt (2006) as ‘guideposts’ (p. 5).

### Methodology

This study was conducted utilizing a phenomenological approach. According to van Manen (2014), “Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method

for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions” (p. 29). Researchers using phenomenology can explore and access ordinary day-to-day (or prereflective) experiences (van Manen, 2014, p. 28). A conceptual framework on first-year college student transitions and development within the context of parental support guided the thematic analysis of this study. This conceptual framework was comprised of Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1981), Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001), and Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966). The conceptual framework provided a lens through which to explore and make meaning of the phenomenon explored by this study (van Manen, 2014).

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research involves conducting informal interviews and pursuit of an interactive process using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were included in the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during this study to understand the experiences of first-year undergraduate college students who use smartphones to receive parental support. Once complete, the data collected during the interviews was coded using descriptive and conceptual methods before the data was categorized into emergent themes (Saldana, 2016). In total, six college students who completed their first year of postsecondary education were selected to participate in this study. A sample size of between three and ten participants is necessary to avoid bias, distortion, or being trapped by contingent facts (Dukes, 1984, p. 200).

### Positionality

Understanding the frame from which the researcher views student success and the subject of this research study is necessary to avoid bias (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher is a first-generation college student who completed a bachelor’s degree in 2010. While their parents could not provide specific financial guidance or assistance, significant support was provided to



them using smartphone technology. This parental support included frequent calls, text messages, and social media contact (active and passive).

After graduating, the researcher matriculated to a master's degree program in Higher Education Administration. While in graduate school and, simultaneously, in their first professional position, the researcher worked for a residence life department. During this experience, the researcher frequently supported first-year undergraduate students during their college journeys and often interacted with their parents. While working for the residence life department, the researcher first grew interested in the topic of student decision-making and parental support, as frequent interactions with both students and parents seemed to entangle these concepts.

Now, the researcher works in student success and advising, with direct responsibility for retention efforts for first-year, first-time-in-college undergraduate students. Coordinating retention efforts furthered the researcher's interest in investigating factors that contribute to students' capacity to successfully transition from their first year of college to their second year and beyond.

#### Limitations/Delimitations

There are two primary limitations to this study: research design and the impact of the researcher. Phenomenological research is based on the experiences of individuals (van Mannen, 2014). As a result, the results of this study are limited to the experiences of the group selected for participation. Therefore, there may be other aspects of this phenomenon present in other groups of students. While the results of this study cannot be generalized to other students, the resulting thematic analysis can still be utilized to inform practice.

The data utilized during this study was collected, analyzed, and coded by the researcher. Because the researcher plays an active role in qualitative research, efforts must be made to limit the impact of the researcher on the resulting data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data validation is required to mitigate bias properly (Merriam, 2002). One such technique, outlining the positionality of the researcher, was completed in chapter one. Other approaches, such as verbatim transcription and the use of a rich thick description, were implemented and outlined in chapter three.

This study was partially impacted by the onset of the global Coronavirus pandemic in Spring 2020. The study site transitioned to remote instruction following spring break in March 2020. This resulted in the data collection process transitioning to Zoom rather than in-person semi-structured interviews. The transition also resulted in the participants of this study moving out of their on-campus residence halls and returning to their parents' homes. As a result, the participants of this study experienced a shorter time living away from their parents. However, the researcher was gained valuable insight into the students' experiences transitioning back home.

There are three primary delimitations to this study. Given the purpose of this study was to understand how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support, it focused on the lived experiences of students who use smartphones to communicate with their parents. As a result, the first delimitation was to focus the subject of this study on first-year, first-time-in-college (FTIC) undergraduate students. First-year FTIC students are not the sole focus of transition literature, however, they continue to represent a significant percentage of American college students at large public research universities (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). The second delimitation is that this study focused on students who use smartphones to communicate with their parents. Approximately 95% of teens own a smartphone (Anderson &

Jiang, 2018). The third delimitation was to focus on students who lived in on-campus residential facilities. By emphasizing some physical distance between students and parents, the potential use of smartphones to receive parental support was more likely to be pronounced than in situations where the student remained at home (Green et al., 2019).

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were utilized throughout this study:

1. Development: “The integration of epistemological (assumptions about knowledge), intrapersonal (assumptions about self or identity), and interpersonal (assumptions about relationships) dimensions” (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor & Wakefield, 2012, p. 420).
2. First-Time-In-College (FTIC): “First Time in College (FTIC) students are degree-seeking undergraduates starting college for the first time in postsecondary education, or who have earned less than 12 college credits after high school graduation. FTICs also include students who previously received college credit while attending high school; they may be classified as a sophomore or higher depending on the number of credits earned” (UCF, 2019).
3. First-Year College Student: The student in their first-year at the institution. Not to be confused with FTIC, or First-Time-In-College (UCF, 2019).
4. Helicopter Parents: “A version of overparenting in which parents demonstrate excessive involvement in their children’s lives and apply developmentally inappropriate parenting tactics by failing to allow for levels of autonomy suitable to their child’s age” (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012, p. 238).
5. Locus of Control: How an individual perceives the forces that impact gratifications, reinforcements, or rewards (Rotter, 1966).

6. Parent (functional definition provided to study participants during the interest survey): an individual who provided guardianship, support, and/or raised you while you were growing up. This definition allows for increased inclusivity for individuals who may identify that their parental figures are not their biological mother or father.
7. Parental Involvement: “The extent to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and willing to take an active role in the day-to-day activities of their children” (Wong, 2008, p. 498).
8. Persistence: “The percentage of students who continue their enrollment from one term to a later term, excluding those who graduated in the interim. This can be measured as Fall-to-Fall persistence, Fall-to-Spring persistence, or Spring-to-Fall persistence” (UCF, 2019).
9. Retention: “The rate at which students continue in their educational studies at an institution, expressed as a percentage. This is most commonly measured as an incoming cohort of students returning the following Fall term” (UCF, 2019).
10. Self-Authorship: the capacity to internally generate belief systems, intrapersonal states, and interpersonal loyalties (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012, p. 420).
11. Support: Rooted in the research of Nevitt Sanford, the idea of support emphasizes the resources, tools, or individuals available to assist individuals navigate challenges (Evans et al., 2010, p. 30).
12. Transition: Changes in role or environment that can be positive, negative, dramatic, or ordinary (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 3).
13. Undergraduate Student: The student enrolled in undergraduate courses that could be applied to a bachelor's degree. (UCF, 2019).

## Summary

The first year of college is of critical importance to future student success. Students who successfully transition to their collegiate institution are more likely to graduate (Leonard, 2013). Parental support has been found to result in positive outcomes related to student transitions and success (Green et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. To understand the experiences of first-year college students, a phenomenological research methodology was implemented in this study. Using this methodology provided the opportunity to understand why and how first-year college students solicit parental support and what potential outcomes arise from such support.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of four major components included in the literature, which are necessary to understand the context of this study. The first section includes an overview of the conceptual framework. The second section discusses literature regarding first-year college students' transitions, including institutional efforts to support students. The third section highlights current literature focused on parental support, including detailed explorations of both positive and negative outcomes. The fourth section highlights smartphone and technology literature, to contextualize the use of smartphones by college students.

### Conceptual Framework

Integral to qualitative research, and more specifically the phenomenological research methodology, is the use of a conceptual framework (Creswell, 2013). The conceptual framework implemented in this study is first-year college student transitions and development within the context of parental support. Using concepts and theories to help guide the literature and frame the research helps provide a common perspective from which individuals within the profession can view this study (Wolcott, 1994). The conceptual framework included components of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship (2001), and Rotter's Locus of Control (1966).

This conceptual framework was implemented to understand the constructs shared by the participants in this study. In *Figure 2* below, Schlossberg's Transition Theory is demonstrated as the core framework. Schlossberg's four concepts of *situation, self, support, and strategies* (Goodman et al., 2006) provided the basis for the research questions in this study. Schlossberg's

approach to transition is the foundation for the overall framework of this study, as students move into, move through, and move out of the college environment (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Rotter’s Locus of Control includes the descriptions of *internal and external locus of control* (Rotter, 1966), which was used to explore the research questions related to self and strategies. Baxter Magolda’s (2001, 2008) Self Authorship Theory provided further context to Schlossberg’s concepts of self and strategies as explored in this study.

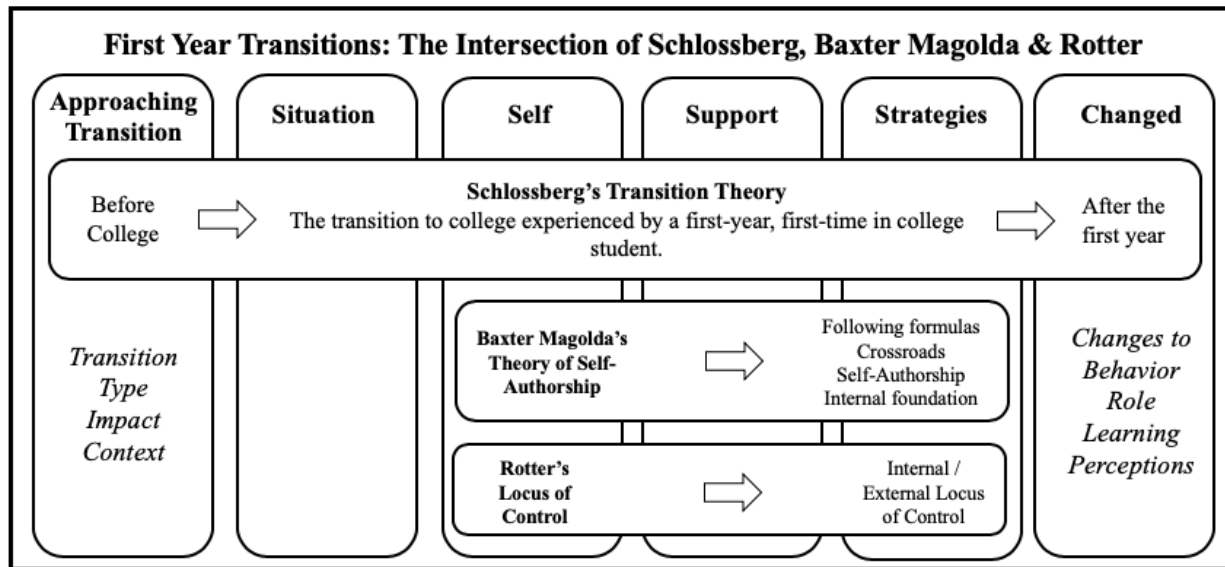


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Map  
Adapted from Schlossberg (1981), Baxter Magolda (2001), and Rotter (1966).

### Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Transition research has been at the core of student development theory since its inception (Evans et al., 2010). The theory proposed by Nancy Schlossberg frames transition using four factors: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). While designed for broader applications, this theory is commonly associated with first-year, first-time-in-college students (Goodman et al., 2006). Within the context of transition, the situation refers to the circumstances and details of the transition (Evans et al., 2010). For the purposes of this study, the

primary situation was the first year of college from the student's perspective. Other situations would likely arise which would spawn smaller sub-cycles of Schlossberg's theory, such as the actual act of physically moving onto campus or selecting a major. The second frame is self, which Schlossberg defined as any personal (gender, age, ethnicity/culture, etc.) or psychological characteristics (self-efficacy, resiliency, etc.) which contextualize the transition (Evans et al., 2010). The latter two frameworks, Rotter's Locus of Control (1966) and Baxter Magolda's Self Authorship (2001) served as additional characteristics by which self was conceptually explored. Support is the third frame, which Schlossberg defined to include family, communities, or other role dependent social structures (Evans et al., 2010). For the purposes of this study, parents were the primary focus of the support frame, specifically parental support from a distance, using technology. Finally, the last frame was strategies, which can include categorical approaches or modes such as modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress (Goodman et al., 2006). For the purposes of this study, the strategies associated with technology were the primary area of inquiry and target of one research question.

Recent usage of Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides context for current literature. For example, Workman (2014) explored how parents impact student decision-making regarding career and college choice. Workman (2014) conducted a study using a grounded theory approach with a phenomenological research design and facilitated semi-structured interviews with 12 students. Schlossberg's concepts of situation, self, support, and strategies emerged from the responses as significant themes, including the contexts of a student's transition (situation), their desire for financial stability (self), established relationships with advisors (support), and the advising structure (strategies) (Workman, 2014).



Rall (2016) utilized Schlossberg's Transition Theory as the theoretical framework for a study regarding the factors which prevent low-income and racial minority students from successfully navigating the transition from high school to college, also called summer melt. The issue of summer melt has been shown to affect low-income, non-White, first-generation students at greater rates (Rall, 2016). Rall (2016) used two studies to identify students who planned to pursue a postsecondary education but did not. Ten individual cases emerged from the original study population of 244. Rall (2016) found that "a lack of college knowledge with five subcategories: financial struggles, failure to meet requirements, inability to obtain the classes wanted/needed, inadequate support, and unclear communication" (p. 469). Many of these challenges align directly with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, including the concepts of self and support (Rall, 2016).

Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) provided another qualitative use of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which was utilized with a grounded theory approach, to provide context for the community college transfer student experience. Rodriguez-Kiino (2013) found that transferring institutions met Schlossberg's definition of a life-altering event. Additionally, psychological factors, such as intrinsic motivation, stood out when analyzing the elements of self that were common among transfer students. Furthermore, pre-professional fieldwork and finances were key aspects of the situation. Family members were the most valuable support system available to transfer students. Finally, course-taking patterns and using websites were helpful success strategies.

#### Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship

Supporting the first conceptual framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship is defined as the ability to articulate personal beliefs,

identity, and role in relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2008). During late adolescence or early college age, transition from external authority (teachers, parents) may occur, though the process is difficult for many individuals (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012).

As students develop self-authorship, they experience a multi-phase process. The first step is following formulas, during which students follow the plans established by external authorities, such as parents (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Given where students are in their self-authorship journey, this phase might include having their parents select the students' major or courses on their behalf. Next is crossroads, during which students are dissatisfied with their established path, they do not create their own due to fear (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The third phase is becoming an author of one's life, in which students choose values or beliefs contrary to the external authority (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Within the context of this study, this phase may include students electing to change their political stance or establish friendships outside of those accepted by their parents. Finally, the individual builds their internal foundation while remaining aware of external influencers (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Evans et al., 2010).

Efforts by Pizzolato and Olsen (2016) to research the relationship between the components of self-authorship proved to be beneficial, as prior literature regarding this area of research is scarce. As a result, the purpose of the study was to explore the relationships between the dimensions of self-authorship and determine the necessary progress to observe successful outcomes for students in their self-authorship journeys (Pizzolato & Olsen, 2016). A qualitative constructivist approach was utilized and interviews were conducted during an academic year, for longitudinal effect (Pizzolato & Olsen, 2016). The interviews were transcribed, and the data was coded similarly to other studies which focused on Self-Authorship by Baxter Magolda & King (2007). Finally, a comparative analysis was completed to review and revise the system used for

coding (Pizzolato & Olsen, 2016). The results of the study indicated that students included in the sample moved toward self-authorship, with 56% showing positive gains (Pizzolato & Olsen, 2016). One observation from the study was that students who lacked support were less likely to show positive gains.

McGowan (2016) highlighted another use of Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship Theory. McGowan (2016) sought to determine the effectiveness of a high-impact practice, specifically outdoor education programming. Participants completed the Self-Authorship Questionnaire (Baxter Magolda, 1998) and a survey regarding their experience, administered as a post-test, at the conclusion of their experience. Using paired sample t-tests and independent t-tests, McGowan (2016) determined that the program had a statistically significant impact on self-authorship, including situational coping, interpersonal leadership, and self-efficacy (p. 395). While this is one example of a high impact practice being studied using self-authorship, the example provided by McGowan (2016) highlighted the potential impact of programs and activities on regarding self-authorship.

#### Rotter's Locus of Control

Locus of control is defined as how individuals perceive the forces which impact their gratifications, reinforcements, or rewards (Rotter, 1966). Individuals who exhibit an external locus of control attribute the source of rewards to outside forces (independent of the individual), while those with an internal locus of control attribute rewards to their own actions or attributes (Rotter, 1966). An internal locus of control is often attributed to more positive outcomes and life satisfaction when compared to external locus of control (Rotter, 1990). Rotter's Locus of Control Scale was developed to measure this concept (Rotter, 1975), and the scale has been used for more than 40 years as a cognitive variable in a wide range of situations (Curtis & Trice, 2013).

One specific adaptation of the instrument applies it to academic concepts, including procrastination and anxiety (Curtis & Trice, 2013). Another approach to locus of control is to compare it to a belief in fate (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004). Though this research is not current, when the research was conducted, trends indicated that an increasing number of college students experienced an external locus of control (Twenge et al., 2004).

Recent literature builds from Rotter's original research regarding locus of control. For example, Dreher, Feldman, and Numan (2014) sought to develop an instrument to measure parental control for college students in response to their observation that lower personal control was present amongst college students. The goal of their study was to develop a reliable instrument which measures controlling parents and also, "To empirically examine the relationship of [controlling parents] with locus of control and enmeshment (lack of individuality within the family system) as well as the positive psychological constructs of hope and optimism" (Dreher et al., 2014, p. 99). Over the course of three separate studies, Dreher et al. (2014) refined their instrument from an initial scale of 39 questions to a final scale of 16 measures. The final study identified statistically significant positive correlations between intrusive parenting and internal locus of control. Furthermore, Dreher et al. (2014) found correlations between students with a greater external locus of control and emotional immaturity.

Edwards, Catling, and Parry (2016) sought to identify predictors of resiliency in students. Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control Scale was tested, along with the Connor-Davidson (2003) Resilience Scale, Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire, the College Student Stressful Event Checklist, and the Academic Delay of Gratification Scale (Edwards et al., 2016). A total of 161 participants completed the study, which was analyzed using Pearson's Correlation and

Multiple Regression (Edwards et al., 2016). Ultimately, Edwards et al. (2016) determined that “an internal locus of control predicted higher levels of resilience in young people” (p. 30).

### First-Year Student Transitions and Institutional Support

Moving to a college campus for the first time is one of the most significant transitions experienced in the modern world (Braxton, 2016). During this transition, first-year, first-time-in-college students may seek support through previously established relationships, such as from their parents. Parents can be accessed by an increased usage of smartphones, which has allowed students to remain connected to previously established support networks, even across long distances (Lee, Meszaros, & Colvin, 2009). Regardless of connectivity to support networks, students encounter challenges during their collegiate experience, many of which are enhanced by the transitional time during their first-year in college (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor & Wakefield, 2012). These challenges represent an opportunity for the student to develop along their journey to adulthood, or the experience can build barriers which could significantly impact their ability to succeed in higher education. Failing to finish college often results in significantly less earnings over the course of one’s lifetime (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Further, the wage disparity regarding education is widening (Bowen et al., 2009). Employers frequently list soft skills, such as teamwork and problem solving as the most necessary for new employees entering the workforce (Gray & Koncz, 2015). Whether learning these ‘soft skills’ or similar concepts or gaining technical knowledge related to a selected major, the landscape of higher education can provide students with the environment necessary to prepare them for the future (Kuh et al., 2010).

While not a new phenomenon, first-year, first-time-in-college students have not reached a finalized stage of adulthood by the time they arrive on campus, nor are college students assured

to consider themselves as adults (Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett (2000), “Emerging adulthood is a period characterized by change and exploration for most people, as they examine the life possibilities open to them and gradually arrive at more enduring choices in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 479). College can define these opportunities for change and exploration for those students who attend college (Arnett, 2000). This time of exploration provides students the opportunity to learn from and interact with a greater range of individuals than they previously had. However, if students are not prepared for this exploratory phase, challenges and difficulties may arise, which can be significantly difficult to overcome without support (Arnett, 2000).

Students who experience academic challenges or social difficulties during the transition to college are less likely to graduate (Bowen et al., 2009). Understanding students’ perspectives and perceptions during their transition has also been the subject of extensive research (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Specific frames, such as the work of Tinto, Schlossberg, and Baxter Magolda, highlight the importance of balancing targeted support throughout the transition period while also enhancing the opportunity for students to carve their own path (Goodman et al., 2006). Not insignificant to this conversation are the potential pitfalls facing students across various socioeconomic and social disparities (Braxton, 2016).

Braxton (2016) described four major constructs that frame student departure, including economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological perspectives (p. 259). According to Astin (1993), there are several challenges first-year, first-time-in-college students are likely to face during their college journey that can impede their academic success. Whether the issues are related to finances, sense of belonging, engagement, or academic performance, the individual and environmental factors that comprise the student’s experience do impact college success (Astin, 1993). While individual students’ experiences vary, finding a balance between ensuring

institutions are prepared for students to successfully transition and encouraging students to prepare for their impending transition is important for students' ultimate success (Braxton, 2016).

Other potential challenges are based on individual wellbeing. A study by Kenyon and Koerner (2009) explored college students' psychological wellbeing during their transition to college. Kenyon and Koerner (2009) used the "Late Adolescence Individuation Questionnaire" to explore independence and separation during their transition to college (p. 4). Kenyon and Koerner (2009) investigated variables, including depression, positive affect, psychosomatic symptoms, satisfaction with college, self-efficacy in college, grades, and distance from parents. Kenyon and Koerner (2009) found that distance from parents was a statistically significant factor correlated with attrition. Furthermore, students who were 'individuated' had lower rates of depression and psychosomatic symptoms than students who were dependent on their parents (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009, p. 10). Effectively, students who were more prepared to be individuals were less likely to experience depression and other psychosomatic symptoms.

Not all students are prepared for college and the transitions they will face, however. Hughes and Gibbons (2018) used relational career theory to explore the experiences of underprepared college students. Underprepared college students require remedial coursework to succeed academically, which places increased pressure on the student regarding their choice of major, time to graduation, and finances given the need for additional courses (Hughes & Gibbons, 2018). These underprepared students could also need additional career support, especially regarding self-efficacy and locus of control. There were 140 first-year college students who participated in the study on family influence, internality, and career decision-making self-efficacy (Hughes & Gibbons, 2018). Hughes and Gibbons (2018) found that underprepared

students received less informational and financial support but more advocacy regarding values and expectations. Furthermore, “underprepared college students perceive they have control over their career, but are also aware of external factors, such as family, that may influence career development” (Hughes & Gibbons, 2018, p. 462).

Understanding how to provide targeted support to students during their transition to college has been a significant focus of many institutions, as “Effective colleges and universities recognize that new students need affirmation, encouragement, and support as well as information about what to do to be successful” (Whitt, 2006, p. 5). Ongoing efforts to craft programs or resources to aid first-year students (or programs like orientation, in advance of the first-year) have been foundational for decades, with varying levels of success (Braxton, 2016). Each year, institutions host orientations, welcome week activities, programs centered on the first six weeks of the semester, or other campaigns to ensure students are adequately prepared to navigate the turbulent transition from a high school structure to college life (Kuh et al., 2010). This approach is reminiscent of other frameworks that elect to balance student’s work with the processes or structures. For example, Challenge and Support by Nevitt Sanford explained that an environment built by a combination of challenge and support allows the student to develop and grow (Evans et al., 2010).

Other factors play a key role, such as the impact of other students within the institutional environment. According to Ingen et al. (2015), “Given the importance of peer trust and peer alienation to self-efficacy, it is recommended that counseling centers actively create opportunities for university students to build connections and a sense of community” (p. 16). Involvement Theory (Astin, 1993) highlights how critical other students are to the educational mission, and it insinuates that peer to peer interactions are a core contributor to student success.



The environment also contributes significantly to student success. Kuh et al. (2010) attributed the college environment to influencing academic outcomes for students. Kuh et al. (2010) found that a student's effort contributes to their academic success, but environmental factors provide the greatest opportunity to improve student success. That is, "The ways the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate and benefit from such activities" should be the focus for improving student success (Kuh et al., 2010, p. 9).

### Parental Support for First-Year Students

For many college students in America, college represents the first opportunity to step beyond their parents' watchful gaze (Green, Jewell, Fuentez, & Smith, 2019). For others, college enrollment occurs while they are still enrolled in high school, using dual enrollment to get ahead on their academic next steps (Leonard, 2013, p. 183). For commuting students, departing for college means they are still living at home. ). For some students, college course enrollment occurs while they are still in high school, as they use dual enrollment courses to advance their next academic steps (Leonard, 2013). For commuting students, departing for college often means they still live at home. Ultimately, how parents interact with their students once the student transitions to college, varies. The potential for newfound freedom might lead to a stark contrast from previous levels of involvement that students received from their parents. According to Wong (2008), "Parental involvement is the extent to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and willing to take an active role in the data-to-day activities of their children" (p. 498).

Prior to the college transition, however, high school students are more likely to consult their parents than peers, teachers, or the media when determining where to attend college (Galotti

& Mark, 1994). Conflict may arise, because of concepts such as incompatible goals or as the result of role confusion (Bartos & Wehr, 2002), such as the student and parent disagreeing about the major the student should pursue. This may become increasingly more likely as the student matures to become the author of one's life on their journey to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). However, in other ways, assistance from the parent is correlated with student success. Whether by financial support, emotional support, or by encouraging the student's personal progress, parents can positively impact their students while in college (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay, 2007).

One of the most basic displays of parental support is parental involvement. Edelman (2013) conducted a qualitative case study to explore parental involvement during college transitions. Edelman (2013) sought to understand parental involvement by interviewing six first-year students and inquiring about their perceptions of how their parent's involvement in the search, application, and transition process may have helped or hindered the student. Several themes emerged, including changing relationships, supportive parents (academically, spiritually, futuristically), parental involvement during transition, and trends toward independence and developing autonomy (Edelman, 2013). Edelman (2013) found "some level of parental involvement can help students navigate the transition more successfully, especially if they feel supported and have a strategy for coping with the transition process. However, the results also indicated that too much parental involvement resulted in greater dependence on parents, reducing the amount of independence and autonomy development a student demonstrated during their first-year of college" (p. 89).

During the stress of the college transition process, understanding how and when a student might place their anxiety is important. Green et al. (2019) explored the association between

students' worries about college with need satisfaction and whether parental involvement would successfully mediate the effects of the association between worry and need satisfaction. Thus, Green et al. (2019) administered a quantitative assessment to 355 incoming college students at a large public university, using Covarrubias and Fryberg's (2015) family achievement guilt questionnaire, La Guardia's (2000) basic need satisfaction in relationship scale, van Igren's (2015) parental bonding instrument, and Osman's (2001) student worry questionnaire. Using multiple regression analysis, Green et al. (2019) determined that autonomy was significantly correlated to worry and "remained a unique predictor even when considering the contribution of competence and related need satisfaction" (p. 130). Furthermore, parents who support autonomy are a statistically significant mediator of need satisfaction.

This support through communication has other applications beyond concern for where to attend college. For example, Small, Morgan, Abar, and Maggs (2011) explored the intersection of parental communication and its impacts on students' dangerous drinking habits. In addition to possible health and life safety consequences from drinking, high risk alcohol consumption has potential negative impacts on academic success (Small et al., 2011). Communication between students and parents has a significant influence on student choices, in addition to college-related situations. Therefore, Small et al. (2011) sought to determine if parental communication would also impact students' alcohol consumption, using a longitudinal survey approach with 746 total respondents. Using multiple models, Small et al. (2011) found that "parents and students communicate often, and increased parent communication is associated with less drinking among first-year college students" (p. 452). In fact, "After controlling for location, a statistically significant effect for number of drinks (20% reduction) and heavy drinking (25% reduction) remained" (Small et al., 2011, p. 451).

While benefits to life safety are crucial, literature also indicates that academic success may be positively associated with regular parental communication. Weintraub and Sax (2018) explored the potential impact regular communication with parents had on academic success (GPA). A total of 1,155 students participated in the study, which combined a first-year student success survey with an instrument designed to measure the frequency of parental interactions (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). The results were analyzed using frequency distribution, ANOVA, and paired sample t-tests (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). Weintraub and Sax (2018) found that satisfaction with parental communication did not directly correlate to increased GPA for all quartiles. However, regression analysis did indicate that student-parent communication was a predictor of GPA outcome (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). Specifically, “Students who had earned higher GPAs tended to receive more social and emotional support from their fathers (or stepfathers) and had higher quality interactions with their mothers. Alternatively, more frequent interaction with mothers (regardless of quality) correlated with lower grades for first-year students” (Weintraub & Sax, 2018, p. 68).

Dunn (2015) argued that parents have significant insight into the needs of college students. There are several potential positive correlations between parental support and student success outcomes (Duchesne et al., 2007). During the transition to college, students who have strong parental relationships may be more likely to possess the skills necessary to self-regulate (Ruberman, 2014). Similarly, appropriate parental support could result in autonomy development (Duchesne et al., 2007). The inverse is also true, as individuals who lack parental support may experience social or academic challenges (Waithaka, Furniss, & Gitmu, 2017). Parental support does not stop when a student graduates, however, as strong parental relationships also result in greater life satisfaction (Waithaka et al., 2017). Parents may also

equip students with strategies like stress management or coping skills by which they can address challenges (Goodman et al., 2006). However, what is unclear in the literature is how support is qualified, considering intensity, frequency, or aid. Often, research is based on perceived support, which leaves room for interpretation. Furthermore, Green et al. (2019) found that “Autonomy-supportive parenting may benefit millennials transitioning to college, helicopter parenting may instead hinder them” (p. 133).

### Parental Interdependence and “Helicopter Parenting”

Overprotective parenting is colloquially known as helicopter parenting. Often, overprotective parenting behavior derives from a desire to ensure a student’s success and prevent potential negative outcomes (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). However, the results of several studies indicated that overparenting can result in negative outcomes, including social anxiety (Spokas & Heimberg, 2008), negative self-efficacy (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014), increased dependence (Ingen et al., 2015), and an external locus of control (Dreher et al., 2014; Spokas & Heimberg, 2008). Some challenges extend into the workforce, where the potential impact of overparenting could lead to decreased skill capacity (Ingen et al., 2015) and negatively impact workplace adaptivity (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014).

Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) explored overparenting to understand the conditions which are more likely to give rise to overparenting habits and how they impact the student’s experience. This study included 482 students from a large university in the United States (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). This study used Shrer’s (1982) self-efficacy measure alongside designed tools to measure overparenting behavior and maladaptive workplace scenarios. Using regression analysis, Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) correlated students living with their parents to overparenting but not parental involvement. Other

correlations included a negative relationship between overparenting, student self-efficacy, and social self-efficacy (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014, p. 322). Conversely, parental involvement was positively correlated with social self-efficacy (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014), which reinforced the idea that some but not an overabundance of parental support is helpful for students.

A 2008 study by Spokas and Heimberg explored the effects of social anxiety disorders and parenting style, emphasizing potential mediating factors such as locus of control. Spokas and Heimberg (2008) hypothesized that higher parental overprotection would increase social anxiety with the effects partially mediated by an external locus of control. Three tools were implemented using one survey instrument: Mattick & Clarke's (1998) Social Interaction Anxiety Scale, the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 1979), and Levenson's (1979) Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale (Spokas & Heimberg, 2008). The instrument was distributed to 923 psychology students at a large urban university, and the bootstrap method was implemented, given a non-normal distribution in the sample (Spokas & Heimberg, 2008). Spokas and Heimberg (2008) found significant correlations between external locus of control and social anxiety through parental overprotection, saying, "As the child's external locus of control increases, his/her reliance on parents may increase, which could contribute to parents increasing their control and protection. Reinforcing such beliefs through overprotection may increase the child's social anxiety and may also increase the child's avoidance" (Spokas & Heimberg, 2008, p. 549).

Darlow, Norvilitis, and Schuetze (2017) examined the relationship between overparenting and social and academic adjustment for college students. Darlow et al. (2017) hypothesized that "Helicopter parenting would lead to higher levels of depression and anxiety

and lower levels of self-efficacy which would adversely affect student adjustment to college” (p. 2293). The College Student Parental Interaction Scale was created for this study and was combined with LeMoyne and Buchanan’s (2011) Helicopter Parenting Scale and Padilla-Walker’s (2008) Parental Control Scale. There were 294 students surveyed at a large public university. Using a combination of analysis of variance (ANOVA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), Darlow et al. (2017) found a significant positive correlation between parental control/helicopter parenting and depression. A significant negative correlation was also discovered between parental control/helicopter parenting and both self-efficacy and adjustment to college (Darlow et al., 2017). Furthermore, the impacts of poor adjustment were also made apparent through the students’ academic success, as “Depression and anxiety were both negatively associated with both social and academic adjustment to college. Self-efficacy was positively associated with GPA, and both social and academic adjustment to college” (Darlow et al., 2017, p. 2294).

According to Ingen et al. (2015), helicopter parents may negatively impact their students despite good intentions and a desire to help their students succeed. Primarily, this is because, “Helicopter parenting may unintentionally foster dependence rather than independence” (p. 7). Ingen et al. (2015) explored the relationship between helicopter parenting and newly formed peer relationships in college. Positive peer connections help students succeed during their college transitions (Ingen et al., 2015). This study hypothesized that the negative impacts of helicopter parenting could result in low peer attachment and self-efficacy (Ingen, 2015). A total of 190 students from a public liberal arts university participated in the study, which measured helicopter parenting behavior using Parker, Tupling, and Brown’s (1979) Parental Bonding Instrument. This tool was paired with Armsden and Greenberg’s (1989) Parent and Peer Attachment

Inventory and Sherer et al.'s (1982) Self-Efficacy Scale (Ingen et al., 2015). Using Pearson correlations, Ingen et Al. (2015) found correlations between overbearing parents and “mistrust in peers, feeling alienated from peers, and poor peer communication” (p. 13). Ingen et al. (2015) concluded that “Perceptions of helicopter parenting were associated with low general self-efficacy and poor peer attachment. Students who perceived their parents as intrusive felt a diminished capacity to perform or accomplish tasks” (p. 13).

### Smartphones on Campus

Technology has rapidly advanced over the past 50 years with critical events occurring during this short history (O'Regan, 2012). Few events likely impacted student to parent communication like the development of smartphones. Most Americans used written letters to communicate during the early half of the 20th century, even after the early adoption of the telephone in the late 19th to early 20th centuries (O'Regan, 2012). Great advances to portable technologies have significantly arisen since the 1990s (Hardell, 2018). The world wide web allows access to send messages and for data to be transmitted from a distance (O'Regan, 2012). By the late 2000s, smartphones allowed college students to have computer access at all times (O'Regan, 2012). Given that technology has become lighter, faster, and more cost-effective, access has increased, even for young people (Hardell, 2018). Approximately 95% of American teens owned a smartphone by 2018, which increased from 73% in 2014 and 2015 (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). As a result, digital communication is one of the foremost communication methods for young persons, including between young persons and their parents (Pedersen, 2017). What would have previously occurred during a weekly call from a landline phone can now occur while the student walks to class or by sending a text message (Stein, Osborn, & Greenberg, 2016).



While technology has offered society increased flexibility and access, it has also caused individuals to become increasingly interdependent because of its use (Stein et al., 2016). Students are likely to contact their parents when making decisions during college (Pedersen, 2017). Higher initial communication rates among female students (Pedersen, 2017) or students who feel a greater sense of family obligation (Stein et al., 2016) highlight significant complexity and that this is not a one-dimensional issue. Integral to the concept of interdependence is both the impact and perception of parental contact. One study indicated that students did not perceive that they contacted their parents too frequently (Weintraub & Sax, 2018). Little research has been conducted to determine what, if any, implications there might be for sustained decision-making support from parents.

In addition to the interdependence of contacting parents for support using technology, the significant rate at which individuals have become interdependent on the technology is alarming. In 2014, nearly 60% of teens were affected by technology addiction (Roberts, Yaya, & Manolis, 2014). In five years, the adoption rate for technology increased so rapidly that original statistics must be revised. For college students, technology addiction and social media influence can negatively impact relationships and students' mental health (Lepp et al., 2016). Given the pace at which technology has evolved, everyone, including young persons, access dizzying amounts of technology without a full understanding of the potential consequences. Additional work to understand the implications for society is necessary.

McDaniel and Brouin (2018) investigated the impact that technological interruptions have on individuals' lives, today. Their study focused on situations where romantic relationships were potentially disrupted by portable technology, or 'technoference' (p. 1). Effectively, this study was based on the premise that using technology, rather than interacting with someone in

person, could demonstrate that technology is more important than face-to-face communication (McDaniel & Brouin, 2018). This study was completed partly due to the participants' involvement with the Daily Family Life Project and included 183 adult participants who were in romantic relationships. McDaniel and Brouin (2018) found that 72.1% of participants experienced 'technofence' at least once in a two-week period, with 56.1% sharing that it occurred more than once (p. 5). Furthermore, interruptions "Had a significant effect on mood, quality of interactions, perceptions of relationship quality, and couple conflict, above and beyond general relationship dissatisfaction and any feelings of depression or attachment anxiety" (McDaniel & Brouin, 2018, p. 6). While this study did not explicitly consider the implications of cell-phone use on college students' interpersonal relationships, this exploration could be beneficial.

Investigating the usage of social media is also important. Panek (2014) explored college students' social media usage through the lens of the parents' potential mediating effects during childhood. Ultimately, Panek (2014) sought to determine the impact of parental restrictions on social media during childhood played on students' social media usage once they started college. A survey was conducted at a large mid-western university that included 454 participants and asked various questions about media use including amount, format, restrictive mediation, age of adoption, and self-control. Panek (2014) found that media habits were, "in part a reflection of when individuals began using these and other media as well as the extent to which individuals possess self-control. They are not, the study suggests, a reflection of whether or not the individuals grew up in households in which social media was regulated by parents" (p. 136). Panek (2014) emphasized that it is important for parents to educate their children on the concept of self-control rather than limit their access to media, because once their children are away at

college, mediating a student's media behavior does not determine a student's overuse of social media.

### Parental Contact by Smartphone

Technology has allowed distance communications to become increasingly frequent between individuals in modern society, including students and their parents. Decades prior, parents and students sent written letters which may have taken a week or longer to arrive (O'Regan, 2012). This indicates that modern technology allows students to remain connected with their parents more frequently and conveniently (Lepp, Li, & Barkley, 2016). Consistent with similar research, students vastly prefer texting to phone calls (Fletcher et al., 2018). Texting provides enhanced flexibility and communication when support may not, otherwise, be possible (Fletcher et al., 2018). It will be important for this study (and future research) to consider the long-term impacts of constant communication and coordination with parents on students' independence and behavioral development.

Lee et al. (2009) explored the impact of cell phones on parental attachment using a quantitative assessment modified from Aoki and Downes' (2003) attitude toward cell phones questionnaire and the continued attachment scale. A total of 558 responses provided a sample which was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and both two-way ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc test (Lee et al., 2009). Given the time period during which this study occurred, the usage of cell phones was measured by the number of phone calls (Lee et al., 2009). Participants used cell phones for personal purposes, as they were most "likely to talk with their immediate family members and boy/girlfriends" (Lee et al., 2009, p. 732). Lee et al. (2009) found that students who were more connected to their parents by cell phone showed greater levels of attachment, with a significantly greater correlation occurring for female students.

While technology may allow parents to provide support for students, it can also provide overprotective parents an avenue to access students at all times (Kelly, Duran, & Miller-Ott, 2017). Some students may elect to avoid their overconnected parents, which can result in increased conflict (Kelly et al., 2017). Understanding potential codependence resulting from technology would help both parents and students learn to navigate these relationships (Kelly et al., 2017). Building upon this study and investigating other intersecting issues will provide clarity for future research.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support. Schlossberg's four concepts of situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006) provided the foundation for the research questions in this study. Schlossberg's approach to transition supported the overall framework for this study, as students move in, move through, and move out of the college environment (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2008) Self Authorship philosophy provided further context to Schlossberg's concepts of self and strategies, as explored in this study (Goodman et al., 2006). Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control includes the descriptions of internal and external locus of control, which was used to explore research questions related to self and strategies. There are several important concepts from the literature that provided further context for this study topic. The first topic was first-year college student transitions, including institutional efforts to support students. The second topic provided current contexts of parental support for college students on campus, including detailed investigations into positive and negative outcomes. The final topic highlighted the use of smartphones by college students. By

understanding the context of the literature, gaps in research can be identified and further clarity made to the experiences shared by participants in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods used in this study. The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. The phenomenological approach contextualizes the day-to-day experiences of individuals (van Mannen, 2014). By conducting semi-structured interviews, this study explored the phenomenon of first-year college student smartphone usage to receive parental support from both immersive and holistic perspectives. This study explored these concepts using a conceptual framework articulated in the previous chapter, namely through the research of Schlossberg (1981), Baxter Magolda (2001), and Rotter (1966).

The first step to conducting this study was to develop the research questions and research design. To accomplish this, the conceptual framework and literature were considered. Next, the study site and sample were identified. Purposeful sampling was implemented to identify participants who specifically met the criteria of the study through an interest survey. Participants were contacted and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were audio-recorded and the data was transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was completed first by completing descriptive and conceptual coding (Saldana, 2016). Ultimately, the data analysis was completed by grouping and clustering codes into themes before the themes were discussed using the context of the conceptual framework.

Several considerations provided background support for this study. First, rapid developments in smartphone technology provide a myriad of avenues for individuals to communicate. Secondly, research and trends for parental support, and hindrances provided by helicopter parenting, indicate mixed results. Finally, a historical context into the role and nature

of student development and student transition programs help root this study within higher education and potential future application for the themes that emerged.

### Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. The phenomenon of *support* is integral to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, along with the other core concepts of *situation*, *self*, and *strategies* (Goodman et al., 2006). This study explored support using the remaining concepts. To understand how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support, the following research questions were utilized to guide this study:

1. In what *situations*, if any, do first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?
2. What aspects of *self*, if any, impact how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?
3. What success *strategies*, if any, result from first-year college students using smartphones to receive parental support?

### Paradigm

This qualitative study followed a social constructivist perspective. Social constructivism emphasizes methodologies that allow individuals to make meaning of their life experiences and concludes that the meaning we have in life is from social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985). Throughout social constructivist research, open-ended questioning is necessary, "As the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings" (Creswell, 2013, p. 7). This paradigm also required that the researcher reflects on their own life experiences, and

consider the personal contexts of the participants. Ultimately, this reflection helps make meaning of the responses shared by participants (Gergen, 1985).

### Rationale for Qualitative Method

The concepts explored throughout this study require great depth and nuanced understanding. To fully explore the research questions posed by this study, participants were required to reflect and construct their own understandings of these concepts. This process is a hallmark of the qualitative methodological approach, as it is not derived from a single universal truth nor could likely be articulated using a list of categorical variables (Merriam, 2002). By using qualitative research methods, significant depth of insight into the everyday experiences of individual participants was gained.

This methodology provided greater depth to the research and voice to the participants within the study. Furthermore, such depth provided opportunities from which future exploration (both qualitative and quantitative) could be based. Limited higher education research currently exists that focuses on understanding the students' experiences as they use smartphones to seek support from their parents. This methodology provided a depth and perspective unlike other studies in adjacent research.

### Research Design: Descriptive Phenomenology

Phenomenology was originally a 20th century philosophical tradition championed by Edmund Husserl (1970). This tradition focuses on formulating and translating meaning from experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological research involves the participant reflecting upon their experience to “obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflect structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). Phenomenology focuses on the exploration of the problem or phenomenon to guide research



rather than attempting to reach predetermined conclusions (Moustakas, 1994). Through this exploration, phenomenology focuses on seeking answers to questions or seeking new questions rather than determining factual truths (Van Manen, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. To achieve this purpose, semi-structured interviews with 6 participants were conducted. These interviews allowed the participants to reflect upon their experiences, formulate meaning, and articulate that meaning. The interviews included some predetermined questions designed to explore the central research questions and also provide opportunity for follow-up and additional inquiry. Responses were assembled into a comprehensive thematic analysis of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To form a complete and accurate description, only information from the experiences of the participants was included (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, prejudgments in the research, called epoche by Moustakas (1994), were avoided. The goal of epoche is to see the experience as it is, where “Phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In addition to describing the phenomenon central to this study, the description should include “Context, participants, and activities of interest” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### Study Sample

To frame the thematic analysis of this study, selection criteria were developed to craft the study sample. The participants for this study were first-year, first-time-in-college undergraduate students who own or use smartphones. Participants in this study were students who recently completed their first year at the institution. Interviews took place during the summer following the completion of the spring semester. By selecting this timeframe, this study sought to

understand how first-year college students used smartphones to receive parental support throughout the entirety of their in college and during multiple situations rather than solely during the student's first few weeks away from home. One critical factor for selecting participants was to identify individuals who regularly interacted with their parents by smartphone. Participants were also selected if they lived on campus (no longer living at home) during the Fall 2019 semester. Participants were not eliminated based on gender, race, or other demographic factors. While participants who had parents out of state were originally considered, none participated in the study. The population for this study included first-year, first-time-in-college students who began school during the 2019-2020 academic year, lived on campus in Fall 2019, and were still enrolled during Summer 2020. From the potential population of 2,624 students, six participants were selected. Dukes (1984) suggested that a descriptive phenomenology approach can be completed using between three and ten participants and that this sample size avoids bias, distortion, or being trapped by contingent facts.

#### Sampling Technique

By using an interest survey to identify participants, criterion and purposeful sampling were implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Within qualitative research, purposeful sampling helps ensure all individuals share specific demographics, are on a similar chronological timeline, or share other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, participants selected by purposeful sampling are chosen because they can “inform an understanding of the research problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 157).

A data request was submitted to acquire a list of students and their email addresses from the institution's data office. A request for participation in the study was shared with 2,624 students who met the preliminary criteria, using a short interest survey. The interest survey

included questions which determined if participants met the additional criteria, which was that the student: owns a smartphone, has at least one parent who owns a smartphone, and considers both themselves and their parents proficient at using their smartphones. There were 17 students who completed the interest survey. Of these students, 15 met the additional criteria. Of these 15 students, five did not respond to the email requesting an interview, two declined to participate in the interviews, two did not show up for their scheduled Zoom interview, and six completed the interviews. No demographic data (race, sex, etc.) was collected and, therefore, was not utilized for selecting participants.

### Setting

This study was conducted at a state university in the Southeast United States. The institution is classified as “R1: Doctoral Universities—Very High Research Activity” according to its Carnegie Classification. The institution is one of the largest in the Southeast, with more than 55,000 undergraduate students. The campus is located in a metropolitan area of 2.5 million residents.

### Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected from the participants using semi-structured interviews. Before data collection, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study, and the study participants provided informed consent. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research involves conducting informal interviews through an interactive process using open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were loosely incorporated into the protocol for the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were open-ended and broad, which allowed for follow-up inquiries and dialogue between the participant and researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). This

conversational approach is most likely to build rapport and yield a greater understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants, especially when the research seeks to understand the perception of the phenomenon experienced by the participant (Moustakas, 1994).

Once identified, the participants were contacted by email to schedule video calls using the Zoom platform. Participants were encouraged to find a private space to conduct the interview away from other individuals.

### Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from participants. To sufficiently prepare for the interviews, the study’s interview protocol was developed to maximize broadness and depth (Moustakas, 1994). *Table 1* below provides an overview of the semi-structured interview questions and topics aligned with the research questions.

*Table 1: Interview Protocol Overview*

<i>Purpose Statement: Understanding how first-year students use smartphone to receive parental support.</i>		
<b>Semi-Structured Interview Topic Area</b>	<b>Purpose/Description</b>	<b>Alignment of Research Question(s)</b>
Introduction and Rapport Building	Learn about participant and establish rapport	RQ2: What aspects of self?
Participant Background and parental relationship	Learn about participant and explore context of parental support	RQ2: What aspects of self? RQ3: What success strategies?
Smartphone usage	Explore student smartphone usage (personally as well as with parents)	RQ1: In what situations? RQ3: What success strategies?
Transition to College	Learn about participants experience transitioning to college environment	RQ1: In what situations?
Parental support throughout college transition	Learn about how parents have provided support throughout their first-year and through transition	RQ3: What success strategies?
Student use of smartphones to receive parental support	Intersection of previous discussion topics and overarching central phenomenon	RQ1: In what situations? RQ2: What aspects of self? RQ3: What success strategies?

The conceptual framework of Schlossberg (Goodman et al., 2006), Baxter Magolda (2001), and Rotter (1996) was utilized to develop the research questions. The phenomenon of support is integral to Schlossberg's Transition Theory as well as the other core concepts of situation, self, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). This study explored the concept of support using the remaining concepts. As a result, the research questions aligned with topic areas to explore the associated aspect of the phenomenon and subsequent research question with the participants of the study. Specific interview questions were crafted for the semi-structured interviews based on this interview protocol. The interview questions were open-ended and broad, which allowed for follow-up inquiries and dialogue between each question (Moustakas, 1994). For the semi-structured interviews to be conducted successfully and for data to be adequately collected, rapport must be built with each participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rapport building allowed for trust to be established and for the participant to feel comfortable sharing the details of their life and experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

#### Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, efforts to make meaning of the experiences shared by participants began through the data analysis process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that phenomenological research should result in descriptions that completely capture the experience of the participants. The process of data analysis through coding moves from real to abstract and from particular to general (Saldana, 2016, p. 14). Ultimately, this results in a synthesized description of the phenomenon that incorporates the conceptual framework (Moustakas, 1994). The first step was data collection, clarification, and transcription. Interviews were conducted through Zoom and each interview was audio recorded. The audio recording was first cleaned using a voice-to-text program. Each interview was reviewed multiple times and corrections were

made to the transcription until accurate and complete. In this step, field notes were incorporated into the interviews.

The second step was to layout the data in preparation for coding (Saldana, 2016). The data was separated into readable stanzas in Microsoft Word. By laying out the data, it is easier to identify topic changes (Saldana, 2016). During this step, any identifiable information (names of cities, institutions, individuals) were removed from the data (Saldana, 2016). The third step was to pre-code the data (Saldana, 2016). An initial review of data was completed and phrases or concepts of interest were highlighted. The purpose of this pre-coding is to help identify potential codes in the next step (Saldana, 2016).

The fourth step was coding the data, which was completed in multiple cycles (Saldana, 2016). Preliminary codes were identified using a descriptive coding methodology and inserted as comments in Microsoft Word (Wolcott, 1994; Saldana, 2016). Descriptive coding focuses on the description of each phrase or passage throughout the coding process (Saldana, 2016). For the second cycle of coding, the process was moved to Microsoft Excel for a more thorough analysis. Previously identified descriptive codes, and any new codes that emerged at this stage using conceptual coding (Saldana, 2016), were placed in one column while the original data was also brought into the new Excel file. Conceptual coding attempts to assign meaning to the concept within the data (Saldana, 2016).

Once the descriptive and conceptual coding processes were completed, the fifth step of the data analysis process was to group codes into categories. Rather than reviewing the codes in the linear form that they were originally listed, the descriptive and conceptual codes were grouped by similar concepts in Excel. The sixth step in the data analysis process was to identify the overarching themes that emerged from within the synthesized clusters of categorized codes

(van Mannen, 2014). Once identified, these themes were presented alongside the conceptual framework to provide meaning to the experiences shared by the participants. *Table 2* provides an overview of the analysis process (*Adapted from Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2016*).

*Table 2: Data Analysis Process*

<b>Data Analysis Process</b> <i>(Adapted from Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2016)</i>	<b>Description</b>
Data Collection, Clarification, Transcription	Verbatim transcription of interviews and field notes.
Data Layout	Organize the data so it is ready for coding by sorting concepts
Pre-Coding	Initial review to highlight phrases or concepts that stand out
Coding	Begin with preliminary coding and complete multiple cycles of coding to refine final codes. Utilized descriptive and conceptual coding.
Grouping categories & Clustering	Identifying and connecting concepts from the data based on the final codes. Cluster invariant categories into themes.
Synthesize	Synthesize categories into themes and into a description of experience by incorporating conceptual framework

### Trustworthiness

Phenomenological research requires that data be reviewed without predetermined conclusions or judgments (Moustakas, 1994). Efforts to validate the data was critical to the ultimate reliability of the final study. There are several key strategies to ensure validity, and when completed, collectively highlight the strength of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Multiple approaches further enhance the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2014). There were three methods to ensure trustworthiness implemented in this study.

The first method was to clarify bias by identifying and articulating positionality, which was done in chapter one (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, positionality was considered throughout the analysis process to ensure bias did not influence the results of this study. Verbatim transcription of the interviews was completed to capture complete and detailed responses from the participants. To complete the verbatim transcription, the interviews were audio-recorded.

Voice-to-text software was implemented to begin the transcription, and the recordings were listened to repeatedly to ensure that the words of the participants were captured completely. Finally, Creswell (2014) also suggests using a rich, thick description to provide context to the data. The rich, thick description was completed as part of the discussion of the data in chapter four.

#### IRB Approval and Ethical Considerations

Qualitative researchers must adhere to a strict ethical code of conduct given they work with human subjects (Creswell, 2013). Since this study required participants to disclose personal information about their experiences with their parents and family, it was critical for the researcher to protect their identity. This was accomplished before, during, and after the interview process.

Approval to begin this study was obtained before data collection by formally proposing the research. Once the proposal was approved by the dissertation committee, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was acquired using the appropriate institutional processes. The study received IRB approval by exemption. Additionally, the detailed nature of phenomenology required the researcher to ensure transparency and privacy for the participants. Informed consent was obtained before the study began. During the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to suggest a pseudonym to protect their identity and ensure their interview data was not identifiable. All passwords to online systems involved with the data were known only to the researcher.

#### Written Confidentiality

To maintain anonymity, all data and recordings were protected and stored. All information shared during the interviews was kept confidential. Participants provided their



names and email addresses when they completed the interest survey. The data was collected using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. To ensure compliance with the institution's data retention policies, the data was downloaded and a copy was saved to an external hard drive which was placed and will remain inside of a locked file cabinet located in the researcher's home office. Five years following the study, the data will be destroyed.

Written informed consent was collected during the interest survey. Participants were presented with the Explanation of Research (see appendix), and the first question captured whether the participant agreed with the statement and wished to proceed. The explanation of research was, again, shared at the beginning of each Zoom interview to ensure participants understood that their participation in the study was voluntary, the interviews would be audio recorded, and that data would be properly secured and kept confidential.

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the phenomenological research methods that were implemented during this study to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. This study began with the development of the research questions and research design using a conceptual framework. Next, purposeful sampling was conducted to identify participants who met the criteria of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was completed through descriptive and conceptual coding before the concepts were grouped for thematic analysis. An exploration of this phenomenon provided vivid context to the current literature, which lacks qualitative research. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship, and Rotter's Locus of Control, served to contextualize the constructs shared by the participants in this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Introduction

The following chapter details the personal profiles and experiences of the six participants in this study. There were seven themes that emerged during the analysis of the phenomenological experiences of the participants. The first two themes, *decision-making* and *academic pathways*, are connected to the situations experienced by the participants. The third theme, *autonomy*, explored the aspects of self of the participants. The final four themes, *emotional support*, *access*, *safety*, and *preparation*, provided context to strategies for success utilized by the participants.

### Participant Profiles

There were six participants in this research study. Participants were given the opportunity suggest their own pseudonym. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview, which lasted between 21 and 43 minutes. Each participant responded to the interest survey. Based on the criterion sampling, each participant responded as indicated to the following questions:

1. Do you own a smartphone? *Yes*
2. Do you have one or more individuals that you identify as a parent? *Yes*
3. Are you Proficient with a Smartphone? *Definitely yes*
4. From your perspective, is one or more of your parents proficient at using a smartphone?  
*Probably yes / Definitely yes*
5. Do you have one or more parents who live out of state? *No*

The following participant profiles include an overview of each student. Each participant profile serves to introduce the participant and to contextualize their experiences. The participant profiles

contain information shared within the interview that may or may not directly correlate to the themes that emerged within the analysis.

*Table 3: Study Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Description</b>
Amelia	Secondary Education Major. Lives 40 minutes away from the institution. Owns an iPhone. Shared her experiences with her mother.
Betsy	Animation Major. Grew up 2.5 hours away from the institution. Owns an iPhone. Discussed her experiences with both parents (mother/father).
Jeff	Health Sciences Major. Grew up 2 hours away from the institution. Owns an iPhone. Primarily spoke about his mother.
Cleopatra	Mechanical Engineering Major. Lives 40 minutes away from the institution. Owns an iPhone. Spoke about both parents (mother/father).
Douglas	Biotechnology Major. Grew up 3 hours away from the institution. Owns an Android. Discussed both parents (mother/father).
Kira	Biomedical Sciences Major. Lives 45 minutes away from the institution. Owns an iPhone. Discussed experiences with parents (mother/father).

#### Amelia

Amelia is originally from a city approximately 40 minutes away from the institution. She is a secondary education major with a concentration in English language arts. She has always been interested in becoming a teacher, but it was through her participation in speech and debate activities that she found a love for literature.

Amelia owns an iPhone. Features such as FaceTime allow her to keep in contact with others. While she does not post on social media frequently, she described herself as a “lurker”, and she uses social media to “look at what everyone else is up to.” She also uses her phone as a source of entertainment by playing games. Her phone is also helpful for academic purposes, given she uses applications such as that associated with her institutional online Learning Management System (LMS). Amelia’s phone is her primary tool for technology, as she shared she spends “Way more time on my phone than on my computer.”

During her interview, Amelia detailed her relationship with her mother. Amelia described her mother as supportive of her goals and actively willing to assist her in achieving them. Her mother did not attend college in the United States, which Amelia characterized as being a very different experience. For example, Amelia's mother did not live in a "dorm" and, as a result, she could not provide direct advice regarding what Amelia needed. Despite a lack of familiarity or inability to give direct advice, Amelia shared that her mother "Does whatever she can. If I have any issues, she tries to help me with them."

Since the onset of COVID-19, the institution transitioned to remote instruction following the spring break period. Amelia shared that she returned home and has been working and taking courses since her return. She plans to live at home and commute for the upcoming semester.

#### Betsy

Betsy is from a small town approximately 2.5 hours from the institution. Betsy is pursuing a degree in animation. She previously pursued a degree in game design but recently switched to animation. Betsy has always been interested in the entertainment industry as well as drawing and art. Therefore, she considered an animation major to be a natural fit for her career and college program.

Betsy has an iPhone. In addition to using her iPhone for communication, Betsy shared that she uses her phone to watch applications such as YouTube or Twitch. She shared that she is most likely to use these applications for "Streaming stuff to watch either video gamers or artists." Betsy also uses her phone for limited social media interactions or texting friends. Ultimately, her phone is the device she uses most often, given its increased portability compared to a computer.

Betsy described her parents as supportive. First, her parents did not fully understand how her passion for art would translate into a career. However, Betsy articulated how her interests

aligned with “These things you see on TV” or “The movies you watch.” Furthermore, Betsy shared that her parents “Are always 100% for trying new things or getting out there or just hanging out with new people.”

Betsy described her transition to college as positive. Initially, she was nervous, but the experience has, “been a lot better than I probably would have thought it would have been like a year ago.” Betsy described her appreciation for how easy it was to meet new people as well as make connections with others without parental oversight. Her academic transition was also generally positive, though Betsy shared that she has been learning to balance academic responsibilities and classes, given she is now in control of her own schedule. After the institution transitioned to remote instruction, Betsy returned to campus briefly to gather art supplies and equipment to continue her work on projects from home. She moved back in with her parents, where she will be until the Fall 2020 semester.

#### Jeff

Jeff is from a large metropolitan city located about two hours away from the institution. He was raised there with his parents and younger siblings. Jeff is majoring in health sciences at the institution. He plans to pursue a career as an Osteopathic Physician after he graduates. He chose this path because he “Likes the idea of being able to directly help people. And since I want to be a DO [Osteopathic Physician], it’s different than an MD [Doctor of Medicine]. It offers a bit more person relationship with patients.” His interest in medicine is connected to his desire to help others.

Jeff has an iPhone. He uses his smartphone to, primarily, keep in contact with others, which has become increasingly important, “especially now during COVID-19.” Formerly, Jeff

worked at a summer camp and, as a result, has friends who live out of town. Jeff shared that he uses the group chat features included in his smartphone daily, to remain in contact with others. Jeff's parents have been married for 20 years. He also has three younger sisters, therefore, he was the first to go to college. Jeff felt that his transition to college was also a big transition for his parents. He receives much support from his parents, as he said, "My parents both told me that when I went to college, they would 100% do whatever they can, financially, to support me, so that's been good." Beyond financial support, Jeff appreciates the trust and responsibility his parents have granted him, which is something he believes he has earned over time. He believes his parents were, "Good examples, role models instilling the morals and ethics I have in me now. They've set me up very well."

Jeff shared that he experienced a smooth transition to the institution and that he is, "Happy I'm here." Speaking about his transition, he shared that, "Everything, like socially and grades-wise, it's all been really good for me." Given Jeff was raised in a large family, his transition back home during the onset of the pandemic posed some challenges. When he originally moved to college, Jeff's bedroom was transformed into a new bedroom for his sister. Therefore, he did not have a bedroom to utilize when he returned home. As a result, he went to live with his grandparents to be better able to concentrate on his academic responsibilities.

#### Cleopatra

Cleopatra is from a suburban city located approximately 40 minutes away from the institution. Her major is mechanical engineering. She also works for an engineering corporation. She was originally interested in computer science. However, her college coursework helped her realize that she wanted to be more hands-on and engaged with others, rather than interacting with software development.

Cleopatra has an iPhone 7. She shared that, while it is several generations old, she purchased it herself, it includes the features she needs, and it was reasonably priced. In addition to using her phone to communicate with others, Cleopatra was once an avid social media user but recently deleted her social media applications. She did this to ‘cleanse’ herself of toxicity and focus on religious and spiritual pursuits instead, including using a bible application on her phone. She also uses her phone to check her personal and school email inboxes. She accesses her work email inbox using her work computer. Cleopatra prefers to have important conversations in person, but she uses her phone to coordinate conversations or short interactions. She also uses applications such as WhatsApp, which allows her to communicate with her grandparents, who often travel.

Cleopatra shared that both of her parents have been supportive, but Cleopatra has worked hard to maintain her independence. Her father is an engineer, and both her parents were supportive of her career and institution choice. Regarding her academics, Cleopatra’s father encourages her to get good grades, but she continues to maintain autonomy, stating, “I just have to push him away and be like, you know what, I’m doing my best. He’s definitely caught on and stops asking me what my grades are, he stops pressuring me, because he knows I’ve got it under control.”

Cleopatra had a successful transition to the institution during the Fall semester. She attended a small private religiously affiliated high school and, as a result, the transition to a large metropolitan research university presented a significant change. However, Cleopatra shared that she is outgoing and enjoys meeting new people, so she did not experience any challenges connecting with the campus community. She also joined a leadership community at her institution, and she established additional friendships within her residential community. After the

institution transitioned to remote instruction, Cleopatra returned home. She was taking three classes and working from home. Her work routine proved challenging, as her schedule shifted from part-time to full-time during the summer.

### Douglas

Douglas was raised in a large metropolitan city approximately three hours from the institution. His major is biotechnology. His interest in biotechnology stemmed from a high school teacher who was passionate and did an excellent job of educating everyone in the class. Douglas became specifically interested in genetic engineering and how it could “Change the entire world.”

Douglas has an Android phone. He first acquired a smartphone at age 13. Douglas considered this to be a late age to have his first phone. He believed he received his phone at a late age because his mother was a teacher and was often near him in school. However, when he attended a different school, he received a phone because he was separated from his mother. He uses his smartphone to communicate with others using text messaging, calls, to access the internet, and to watch videos.

Douglas described his parents as very supportive. They supported any future career pursuits of his, except teaching (the job held by his mother). Douglas shared that his parents always encouraged him to do what he wants with his career. His parents also provide support to help him manage his stress. Douglas shared that he is a perfectionist, and his parents often help him remain level-headed and encourage him not to take things so seriously.

Douglas considered his transition to college to have been relatively smooth. Before moving to the institution, he was responsible for maintaining his own bedroom cleanliness and study routines. He did not find time management challenging, as he multitasked by tending to



activities such as laundry and studying, simultaneously. During his transition to college, he took time to text and call his parents for support and to “Talk through things.” Given COVID-19 caused the institution to transition to remote instruction, Douglas returned home to live with his parents.

### Kira

Kira’s family lives approximately 45 minutes away from the institution. She is a biomedical science major, and she hopes to become a physician. Since her pediatrician first spoke to her about the importance of both physical and mental wellness as a child, she has been interested in medicine

Kira has an iPhone 6S, which she says, “goes everywhere with me and never leaves my side.” She frequently uses social media applications, such as Instagram, and she enjoys taking photos. She also uses applications such as GroupMe, Snapchat, and Whatsapp to contact others, including her family in India. Kira shared that she does not usually call people and prefers to text. This habit changed during the mandated quarantine, as she is now more likely to call her friends from whom she is isolated.

Kira has a good relationship with her parents. She believes this is partially because she always listened to them and did not behave rebelliously. Kira describes her relationship with her mother as alternating between friend and mother/daughter. Both of Kira’s parents were born in India. While Kira does approach her parents for comfort or support, she believes her being raised in a different country impacts their worldview. Kira’s parents have always encouraged her to pursue a career in the STEM field, which she attributes to her parents’ desire for her to be financially successful.

Kira shared that her college transition began with some difficulty, as she had never left home before. While she had newfound freedom, she also missed her parents and her daily interactions with them. She also did not have a concrete routine like she had at home, affecting things like her eating habits. After transitioning back home, following the onset of COVID-19, Kira shared that she experienced a return to some of her parents’ previous rules. Kira said, “For them nothing has ever changed in terms of parenting or their relationship with me. But for me, since I moved to college, a lot has changed, because I’ve had that freedom.”

Research Question One: Situation

The first research question which guided this study was: *In what situations, if any, do first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?* This question was addressed by interview questions 2, 4, 6, and 7 (as demonstrated in *Appendix C: Interview Protocol*). The purpose of this research question was to illuminate the situations in which students typically use smartphones to receive parental support, if any. After reviewing the thematic analysis, two overarching themes emerged: *decision-making* and *academic pathways*. The themes of *decision-making* and *academic pathways* are based in the conceptual framework through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006). Table 4 (below) indicates which participant responses included the situational themes.

*Table 4: Situational Themes*

Situational Themes	Participant					
	Amelia	Betsy	Jeff	Cleopatra	Douglas	Kira
Decision Making	X	X	X	X	X	X
Academic Pathway	X	X	X	X	X	X

## Theme One: Decision-Making

The first theme to emerge was *decision-making*. The theme of decision-making encapsulated the various situations in which the participants of this study contacted their parents for assistance with life-related decisions. These decisions were often not about academics or coursework directly, but rather a variety of personal decisions. The level of these decisions ranged from minor questions about cooking to more significant situations like navigating the process after being in a car accident. How significantly the student relies on their parent for *decision-making* help is reminiscent of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006). Therefore, how the student progressed during their transition from child to adult may correlate to their relative reliance on their parents for support with basic decisions. This concept of *decision-making* highlights how the medium of communications technology allows participants to rapidly connect with their parents for a variety of reasons, including help with *decision-making*.

Amelia described this concept of decision-making as including a spectrum ranging from "basic life questions" to those questions that, "Journey far into the depths of my own soul." Amelia shared an example of the former, where she texted her mother about how long it was necessary to cook an egg to prevent salmonella. Regardless, Amelia uses her smartphone to connect with her mother on a significant range of decisions without the need to see her in person. Similarly, Douglas frequently uses his smartphone to request advice from his parents regarding a variety of situations.

Betsy specifically connected her college transition to parental support. Betsy believes, "It would have definitely been a lot more difficult without being able to talk to them a couple of times during the week." Betsy continued and shared that she found herself reaching out during these new situations throughout her college transitions, and she specifically asked for help.

During one particularly complex interpersonal situation, Betsy provided comfort and support to one of her roommates. Betsy called her mom to update her and discovered she did not feel confident handling the situation effectively. Therefore, Betsy's mother helped her roommate through the situation and offered additional solutions, including offering that Betsy and her roommate visit Betsy's hometown for a few days if needed. This result highlights the importance of parental support for Betsy's decision-making process, and the additional *emotional support* provided by her mother (*an emergent theme within RQ3*).

Jeff also shared similar sentiments to Betsy. For Jeff, the ability to connect with his parents on various topics and rapidly is beneficial. He shared, "Being able to talk to them about whatever, whenever, just always having that constant source of advice, has been good. I can almost always get clarification on whatever. So that's definitely helped." Despite this, Jeff also shared his perspective on the importance and responsibility regarding decision-making. Jeff feels that "trust and responsibility" are important factors that will benefit both students and their parents during the college transition. Jeff shared that, "Parents should 100% embrace the fact that their kid is growing up." Jeff feels that embracing this will help both students and parents because parents will not have to worry, and students will be "Able to make their own decisions and most of the time, be successful." This is an intriguing juxtaposition because Jeff hopes for additional trust and responsibility from his parents. However, he also appreciates having them available as a constant source for advice when needed.

Like Jeff, Kira expressed a balance of both supportive *decision-making* and a desire for independence regarding *decision-making*. Kira believes that having open communication with her parents eased her college transition, including access to an ongoing source of advice. Kira also recognized the distance helped her develop, given her parents were only "a phone call

away.” She shared, “It kind of helped me personally, because, they weren’t always there in person next to me. So I had that little bit of freedom to figure out what I wanted to do, and figure it out myself, and make my own decisions for the first time.” Reflecting on her college transition, Kira also explained how she is no longer “influenced” by the decisions of her parents. While this was ultimately something she appreciated, it also resulted in indecisiveness. She was responsible for her own decisions (such as what to eat for dinner), which was a new situation for her to experience, and it required transition.

Cleopatra believes she acts independently rather than needing ongoing parental support with *decision-making*. She stated, “I am just so independent that I don’t need their support. It’s great if it’s there, but I just kind of go through it, I do it on my own.” Unlike other participants, Cleopatra does not regularly connect with her parents for assistance with decisions, though she does connect with her parents for other support (*see emotional support within RQ3*). She provided a specific example of her independence and *decision-making* which occurred during the Fall 2019 semester. Following a minor car accident, Cleopatra first sought to resolve the situation herself. However, once it was clear that she needed to involve her insurance company, she reached out to her father using her smartphone to arrange a time to meet and discuss the situation (and get assistance) in person. Cleopatra’s independence is reminiscent of the theme of *autonomy (within RQ2)*.

## Theme Two: Academic Pathways

The second emergent theme was the student’s *academic pathway*. The concept of *academic pathways* is reminiscent of Schlossberg’s Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006), whereas the students’ *academic pathway* could be an entirely separate journey or transition from their transition to college. For Amelia, Betsy, Douglas, and Jeff, the experience of choosing a

major and career field was mostly within their control. They each described a level of *autonomy* when deciding their initial major and crucial academic decisions throughout their transition to and through their first year at the institution. However, this was not the case for all participants. As Cleopatra and Kira picked their majors, it was evident there was parental influence in that decision. The level of independence reflected within the students' academics is further explored in the *autonomy* theme (RQ2). This autonomy within the context of the situation of the *academic pathway* highlighted the participant's journey from Interdependence to Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Jeff, Amelia, Betsy, and Douglas all described having a level of *autonomy* in their process of choosing a major as well as the events surrounding that major. Jeff explained that he decided to become a doctor, specifically due to the relationships which can be developed with patients. Jeff explained that his belief system and desire to help others meant he would be interested in becoming a doctor or rabbi, but he chose to study medicine. Jeff's parents did not play a role in this decision.

Amelia also chose her own major and *academic pathway*, which is secondary education. Amelia is very thankful for how supportive her mother is, and she said, "She's always been a big supporter of whatever goals I had. She always wants to do whatever makes me happy, even if it's not the most financially stable goal, she wants me to do it and go for it as long as it will make me happy, and I really appreciate that." Despite the ongoing support from her mother, Amelia did not directly attribute this support to academic success. She shared, "My classes weren't easier or anything because she was there, but it was nice to know that she was just a phone call or text away."

Betsy's parents supported her art endeavors, but she expressed that she needed to explain how her art could translate into a career. Once she decided art was her passion, and it was clearly something at which she was successful while in school, her parents quickly "Got on the bandwagon" with the idea of art and design. While she may have been in control of her initial major selection and academic pathway, Betsy did engage with her parents for support. She was thankful for the ability to communicate frequently (*access is an emergent theme under RQ3*), and she specifically went to them for advice about courses or the possibility of changing majors within the larger umbrella of art programs.

Douglas received support from his parents as long as he did not pursue teaching, which is the job held by his mother. He shared that, "Other than that, they're really supportive and basically just always trying to push me to do what I felt like I really wanted to do which is always nice." Additionally, the potential financial benefits to his chosen field of genetics is something that his parents support.

Alternatively, Cleopatra and Kira expressed that there was some level of parental influence around their chosen major. Cleopatra is following in her father's footsteps as an engineer. Her father encouraged her to pursue a STEM major, especially because she is female. The institution was both Cleopatra and her parents' first choice for her, so she "Had no trouble with that." Part of the underlying interest in engineering is for financial stability. Despite the influence placed on her chosen major, Cleopatra prefers to be academically autonomous from her parents (*a theme explored in RQ2*).

Much like Cleopatra, Kira's parents pushed her towards STEM. Kira shared that one of her earliest presents as a child was a toy doctor's kit. At first, she had no interest in medicine, but she eventually realized that there were several positive aspects to the medical field. Her passion

for helping others and considering the whole person (addressing mental and physical wellness) solidified her interest in medicine.

### Research Question Two: Self

The second research question which guided this study was: *What aspects of self, if any, impact how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?* Interview questions 1, 3, 6, and 7 were utilized to address this research question (as demonstrated in *Appendix C: Interview Protocol*). The purpose of this research question was to give meaning to the personal characteristics expressed by students who use smartphones to receive parental support, if any. After reviewing the thematic analysis, one overarching theme emerged: *autonomy*. *Autonomy* is reflected in the conceptual framework through Rotter’s Locus of Control (1966) and Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship (2001). Table 5 (below) indicates which participant responses included the theme.

*Table 5: Self Theme*

Self Theme	Participant					
	Amelia	Betsy	Jeff	Cleopatra	Douglas	Kira
Autonomy	X	X	X	X	X	X

### Theme Three: Autonomy

The theme to emerge under self was *autonomy*, which could also be defined as independence. This theme was present throughout the experiences of all the participants, though much like the theme of *academic pathways (reflected in RQ1)* the participants expressed varying levels of *autonomy* throughout their experience. Furthermore, the circumstances surrounding this study provided a unique view of the student transition due to the impact of COVID-19. The juxtaposition of their transition to college in August 2019, followed by a rapid return home when their institution transitioned to remote instruction in March 2020, framed the participants’



experiences of independence. The concept of *autonomy* connects directly to Rotter's Locus of Control (1966) and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship (2001).

Amelia shared a dualistic perspective regarding her *autonomy*. She discussed that her mother is very engaged in what Amelia does with her time. Amelia shared, "She loves being part of whatever I want to do. I don't mind it, [but] sometimes I'm like, okay, let me find my own way. But I really don't mind that she wants to be a part of it." Amelia also shared how her transition back home following the onset of COVID-19 was a sudden shift back to a highly supportive and 'coddling' environment that she experienced while she was away for college. Regardless, Amelia was thankful to have support from her mother throughout her transition to college. She stated, "I wasn't really sure what I was getting into. I've never been to college before. So, it was helpful to have that line of support from my mom."

Betsy described *autonomy* as being integral to her college experience. The environment was much different than living at home, as she could, "Walk out of my dorm and go hang out with people without having to worry about getting permission from my parents." She described this *autonomy* as being very helpful for her to build relationships and engage in her institutional community. Betsy also expressed some level of *autonomy* regarding how frequently she communicates with her parents and the subject matter. She shared, "If I don't want to talk, they're not going to pester me. If we are going to talk, I have to reach out. They are good about knowing boundaries."

Jeff connected his *autonomy* with the development of a sense of trust. He shared, "They give me the responsibility that I've earned and that I've shown I can be trusted with. It's really helped our relationship." Additionally, he feels like his relationship with his parents has improved since he transitioned to college. He attributes this to physical distance and the less

tangible concept of 'space' which includes autonomy. Jeff further described a change in the relationship between himself and his parents, in which they view him more as an adult, and he "Almost consider my parents friends now." Interestingly, there is evidence that this transition to adulthood was intended to be permanent, as Jeff's childhood bedroom was converted to a bedroom for his sister when he transitioned to college. As a result, Jeff, "Never really liked coming home in the first place because I was having a good time in college and because I didn't really have my own place."

As mentioned with *academic pathway (RQI)*, Cleopatra tried to exert some level of *autonomy* over her academics. She shared that, while her father influenced her to pursue a career in STEM, she works to "push them away" from directly supporting her academically. While her father insists that she should do everything that she can to earn A grades, Cleopatra shared that she "Would rather have a C and actually try in a class than have an A and BS my way through it." Cleopatra further shared that her father has stopped pressuring her so much and understands that she has everything under control.

Regarding campus involvement opportunities, Cleopatra made her own decisions about choosing to establish herself and get involved on campus. Her parents did not play a role in helping her explore opportunities in which to engage, however, she took the step to join a leadership program. Ultimately, the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 highlighted her *autonomy* at her institution rather than her living at home. She shared, "It's definitely made a difference because going from the dorm at [institution] and being literally independent without my parents and then having to come back home living with my parents." She is looking forward to the Fall 2020 semester, when she plans to regain some of that *autonomy* by moving back to her institution and living in an apartment, which she denotes as being even more autonomous.

Douglas operated *autonomously* before and following his transition to college. He had previously been responsible for his own bedroom and living space while living at home. Additionally, Douglas managed his studies during high school, so he did not feel that the transition to college was not difficult for him. He balanced multiple responsibilities, simultaneously (such as studying and doing laundry).

Kira described her parents as having influence over life when at home. For example, she attempted to go for a walk in the evening while living at home and her mother discouraged her from going outside, and she expressed concern for her *safety* (a theme explored in RQ3). Kira shared, “I was really scared to go to college, actually. Because I did not know how it felt to be alone from my parents, separate, independent.” Despite this initial fear, Kira recognized her transition as a positive developmental opportunity. She shared, “I grew from my experiences, I kind of took things as they were and made mistakes. But ultimately, I think it was a good thing because I was kind of more independent.”

### Research Question Three: The Strategies

The third research question which guided this study was: *What success strategies, if any, result from first-year college students using smartphones to receive parental support?* Interview questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 were utilized to address this research question (as demonstrated in *Appendix C: Interview Protocol*). The purpose of this research question was to explore the potential success strategies employed by students who used smartphones to receive parental support, if any. After reviewing the thematic analysis, four overarching themes for strategies emerged: *emotional support*, *access*, *safety*, and *preparation*. *Emotional support* is present within the conceptual framework through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006). *Access* is reflected in the conceptual framework through Rotter’s Locus of Control (1966)

and Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship (2001). Additionally, *safety* and *preparation* are present within the conceptual framework through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006). Table 6 (below) indicates which participant responses included the strategies themes.

Table 6: Strategies Themes

Strategies Themes	Participant					
	Amelia	Betsy	Jeff	Cleopatra	Douglas	Kira
Emotional Support	X	X		X	X	X
Access	X	X	X	X		X
Safety	X	X		X	X	X
Preparation			X	X	X	X

#### Theme Four: Emotional Support

The fourth theme to emerge from the responses of the participants was *emotional support*. For the purposes of this study, *emotional support* is defined as the emotional assistance a student receives from their parents. This theme also included the desire by students to receive *emotional support* from their parents. This sense of *emotional support* occurred with some variance between participants but was cited as the most beneficial form of support received. Ultimately, this desire by the participants to continuously receive *emotional support* from their parents, despite the physical distance, was an interesting factor, juxtaposed with other factors such as the desire for *autonomy* or control over their *academic pathway*. Additionally, *emotional support* is present within the conceptual framework through Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006).

Cleopatra highlighted this juxtaposition by sharing that she was *prepared* for college, therefore, she did not need much hands-on support (*explored in RQ3*). As a result, she appreciates her parents’ *emotional support*, but she does not find ongoing assistance (such as

help with *decision-making*) necessary. Amelia described a reassurance which stemmed from texting with her mother. Amelia knows her smartphone gives her a line of communication for ongoing *access* to her mother (*a theme explored under RQ3*). This *emotional support* takes the form of ongoing reassurance that her mother is available to help her, regardless of the challenges she experiences. Amelia shared that her mother “Does whatever she can. If I have any issues, she tries to help me with them.” Amelia finds this support comforting.

Much like Amelia, Douglas is very academically autonomous. However, Douglas believes that interacting with his parents regularly is beneficial. He shared, “It definitely helps, being able to talk to my parents during college, just to have someone to talk to and interact with and take a break from doing work. But I don't think my [school] work would have gotten that much worse if I hadn't had a smartphone to interact with them. It's mostly just like *emotional support*, not really academic support.” Douglas considers his academic success as something that is not reliant on the support he receives from his parents.

Betsy described the *emotional support* that she receives from her parents. She shared that she calls them three or four times per week to catch up, ease her stress, share her college experiences, or ask how her pets are doing at home. When navigating a difficult roommate situation, Betsy's mother provided tangible assistance and reassurance and offered support if Betsy or her roommates needed to get away from the situation for a few days. The *emotional support* her parents offer her also comes in the form of encouraging Betsy to have fun. Betsy shared, “I don't really think they've ever tried to steer me away from just having fun and doing things outside of school and taking a break from those things now and then because I definitely know in high school, I was a bit of a workaholic.”

Kira has also gone to her parents for *emotional support* throughout her transition to college. She described her relationship with her mother, stating, “She'll listen to me whenever I need help or whatever. I'll go to her for like comfort.” Despite going to her parents for comfort, Kira shared that there are some differences between her experiences and those of her parents, though they still provide support. Ultimately, Kira believes the *emotional support* she receives from her parents has been helpful throughout her college transition. Kira shared that she had “an easier transition into college because I had that communication with them.”

#### Theme Five: Access

The concept of *access* directly relates to the experiences of the participants and their ability to quickly connect with their parents for support. All the participants selected for this study did not live with their parents during the Fall 2019 semester. Using smartphones to communicate quickly, efficiently, and conveniently with their parents became an emergent theme. Some participants discussed how important certain messaging applications were to connect them with extended family outside of the country when traditional phone calls would be expensive and impractical. Additionally, using messaging applications to communicate outside of the limitations of an audio call also proved advantageous. The concept of *access* is reflected in the conceptual framework through Rotter's Locus of Control (1966) and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship (2001).

Amelia highlighted her perception of the advantage of instantaneous communication despite being in close physical proximity to her mother. She shared, “She's never usually more than a drive away, but sometimes the drive can feel like forever. So, it's nice to have a phone where I'm able to get an immediate response without having to worry about it actually being sent. Like it tells me if it's sent or not. And it tells me if it's been read.” She also provided a

scenario that described a time when communication with her mother has been helpful. Amelia shared that she often discusses the specific wording of important emails or messages with her mother. She expressed concern about the tone of her communications so having the support of her mother to digitally proofread critical communications is reassuring to her. Without quick access through her smartphone, this would be impossible.

Betsy also expressed that instant communication with her parents was helpful. Anytime she experienced a stressful situation, she knew she could reach out to her parents and they would be available to talk about the situation with her. For Betsy, these situations could be related to academics or personal experiences.

Jeff chose to text his parents more often than call them. He found that these texts and calls were most frequently to check-in and to update them on his experiences. He also appreciated the flexibility and *access* his smartphone provided him during the transition. More specifically, his communication with his parents has allowed Jeff to have their assistance with *making decisions (as explored in RQ1)*. Jeff shared, “Being able to talk to them about whatever, whenever, always having that constant source of advice, has been good. Because I can almost always get clarification on whatever. So that’s definitely helped.”

Much like Jeff, Kira leveraged the power of her smartphone to connect with her parents despite the physical separation. Kira shared that she would “call on the phone, and even though they were there with me, it kind of felt like it. Whenever I needed advice, I would go call my mom, whenever I wanted to tell her a story, I could go call her.” Kira’s experience highlighted the power of accessibility and reflects the themes of *decision-making (RQ1)* and *emotional support (RQ3)*.

## Theme Six: Safety

The theme of *safety* manifested in two primary forms. The first form included situations in which participants and/or their parents leveraged technology to monitor the *safety* of the participant. This version of *safety* often revolved around intervention by the parent. The second form of *safety* included the feeling of safety by students, either through the use of technology or having ongoing *access* to communication tools through their smartphone. In other cases, such as with Douglas' experience, parents' intuitions inform them when their student feels "off." Therefore, parents do what they can to address any issue and support their student. *Safety* is present within the conceptual framework through Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006).

For Amelia, the safety she feels from her smartphone correlates to the tools that help her feel safe. She shared, "It's made me feel a lot more secure. I've always had this fear on college campuses, you never know what's going to happen." One of the most helpful tools she uses is location sharing with her friends and family. She noted that if she found herself in a location or situation where she should not be, a friend or family member might text her and ask if she is okay. Her concern throughout these experiences is that she might get kidnapped. She shared, "It makes me feel a lot *safer* when I'm going places or doing things. I love being able to communicate with my mom like that."

Betsy frequently communicated with her parents during her transition to college, totaling approximately 10 phone calls in the first week. While she admits that she initiated some of the communication, her parents also actively checked on her. Betsy shared, "a lot of it was also them calling me to check-in, [to] make sure I'm eating, I didn't get robbed, or something." Betsy's



smartphone served as a vehicle for her parents to connect to her and ensure she had everything she needed to be successful and to ensure she was *safe*.

Cleopatra experienced a situation that involved a different type of *safety*. She explained that she learned to be aware of her bank account early into her college transition, thanks to her father's vigilance. Her father checked her bank account activity and noticed an unusual charge, which Cleopatra resolved. She shared, "That definitely helped me as a person, because if he hadn't communicated with me, then I wouldn't have been able to resolve the problem. And obviously I learned from it." Cleopatra also shared that her mother actively used a tracking application on her phone. When out one evening with friends, she received a message from her mother asking why she was out of her dorm late in the evening. Eventually, Cleopatra removed the location sharing permissions to be more *autonomous* (RQ2).

For Kira, the ongoing support also translated to support when she became ill with a minor cold. When contacting her mother for advice regarding which cold medicine to take or at what temperature she needed to see a doctor (*like with decision-making from RQ1*), Kira's mother attempted to provide more support to ensure Kira's *safety*. Kira shared, "She wanted to come whenever I had a really bad cold. She wanted to come over and take me home. I was like, 'no, you cannot do that.'" Much like Cleopatra, Kira is also tracked by her mother using the location application within her phone. Once, while at dance practice one evening, Kira received a check-in call from her mother because she was out later than expected.

### Theme Seven: Preparation

The theme of *preparation* highlights the efforts of the participants and their parents to ensure college success by instituting success strategies in advance of the transition to college. For the participants who shared information about *preparation* and planning prior to the

transition to college, the support they received during their college experience could be complementary to this preparatory material or different. For example, Jeff believes his relationship with his parents evolved due to the morals and ethical principles they instilled within him. This relationship built a foundation of responsibility that Jeff believes prepared him for success in college. Furthermore, preparation has given him the opportunity to gain additional trust from his parents. The theme of preparation relates to the conceptual framework through Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006).

At first, Amelia's access to her mother for communication assistance was reactionary, Amelia described that some of the communication with her mother encompasses planning for the future. Amelia was given the tools to write a resignation letter, despite not yet needing the skill. She attributes this to positive communication experiences with her mother that prepared her for communicating with others in the future.

As discussed during *emotional support (RQ3)*, Cleopatra felt she was prepared to succeed by her parents and has benefited from their ongoing *emotional support*. She shared, "I believe that my parents set me up beforehand to be so independent and academically motivated that I wasn't dependent on their support to get through the college on my own my first-year because I was prepared. I was ready to go for it." Another way Cleopatra was prepared to succeed was because her father instilled the importance of education and success in her, which she has maintained along with taking charge of her *academic pathway (RQ1)*.

Douglas discussed preparation extensively. His study management method, which helped him balance his personal and academic responsibilities (*as highlighted in RQ1*), is a technique his mother taught him. Before going to college, Douglas' mother shared study strategies (such as the importance of always having your books accessible) and how to manage them. Douglas

shared, “They mostly just tried to be as supportive as they could from 300 miles away while I was doing stuff in college. And that’s mostly because I transitioned pretty well. I didn’t really need help getting used to it although I did take some my mother’s advice.”

Alternatively, Kira expressed very little preparation before her college transition. She had little experience living outside of the governance of her parents, as discussed under *autonomy* (RQ2). Early into her college transition, she found herself experiencing challenges, such as dietary issues, due to her lack of preparation for living independently. However, Kira shared that she quickly adapted to her new surroundings and appreciated the learning opportunity the situation provided her (allowing her to make more decisions on her own and act independently).

Understanding the Major Themes: Addressing the Purpose of the Study

There were seven themes that emerged from analyzing the results from the three research questions. The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. Using these emergent themes, the researcher developed a description of the participants’ experiences. Table 7 (below) includes all themes aligned with the participants of this study.

Table 7: Combined Table of All Themes

All Themes		Participant					
		Amelia	Betsy	Jeff	Cleopatra	Douglas	Kira
Situational	Decision-Making	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Academic Pathways	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self	Autonomy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strategies	Emotional	X	X		X	X	X
	Access	X	X	X	X		X
	Safety	X	X		X	X	X
	Preparation			X	X	X	X

As the participants of this study transitioned into the college environment for the first time, they encountered varied situations that required *decision-making* on behalf of the participant. One of the most complex situations each participant experienced was exploring their *academic pathway*, including what major and career field they planned to pursue, and their coursework performance throughout the first year. For the participants in this study, parental support in either *decision-making* or their *academic pathway* was likely to be impacted by their personal characteristics (self). While manifesting in various levels, the participant's level of *autonomy* throughout their transition influenced if and when they contacted their parents for support.

Ultimately, several themes emerged around parental support strategies. For most participants, a need and desire to have *emotional support* from their parents persisted even when other forms of support were not warranted. The importance of leveraging smartphone technology through *access* is a critical component of the experience of most participants. *Safety* was an ongoing concern for most participants and their parents. Finally, *preparation* for the college transition and adulthood emerged as a core approach.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Overview

This chapter details a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and implications for practice. The discussion of the findings explores each research question and connects the results of this study to both literature and the conceptual framework. The implications for practice include three recommendations for higher education administrators which, essentially, include educating students and parents about transition support. The recommendations also include educating parents about academic success resources and ensuring student support resources are smartphone accessible. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the limitations and delimitations of this study and opportunities for future research.

### Summary of this Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental *support*. The following three research questions guided this study:

1. In what *situations*, if any, do first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?
2. What aspects of *self*, if any, impact how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?
3. What success *strategies*, if any, result from first-year college students using smartphones to receive parental support?

These research questions were established based on a conceptual framework. Components from three theories were incorporated to form the conceptual framework for this study: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship (2001), and Rotter's

Locus of Control (1966). Using concepts and theories to guide the literature and frame qualitative research helps provide a common perspective to frame this study within the context of higher education (Wolcott, 1994).

To explore these research questions, this study was conducted using qualitative methods. A descriptive phenomenological approach was implemented, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to encourage participants to articulate their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The data was analyzed using descriptive and conceptual coding before the codes were grouped into themes (Saldana, 2016). To select the participants for this study, a purposeful criterion sampling technique was utilized (Creswell & Poth, 2017) to identify individuals who own smartphones, have at least one parent who owns a smartphone, and consider both themselves and their parents proficient at using a smartphone. Six first-year undergraduate college students were selected to participate in this study, and the interviews were conducted using Zoom during the Summer semester following the participant's first year of college.

### Discussion of the Findings

There were seven emergent themes that resulted from the thematic analysis conducted for this study. These themes were derived from the transcribed interviews to identify shared experiences amongst the participants. The following sections will explore each research question and the associated themes. Specifically, this section connects the resulting themes to literature and the conceptual framework. For Research Question one, exploring the situation, the themes of *decision-making* and *academic pathways* emerged. For Research Question two, exploring factors of self, the theme of *autonomy* emerged. Finally, for Research Question three, exploring strategies, the themes of *emotional support*, *access*, *safety*, and *preparation* emerged.

## Discussing Research Question 1: Situational Themes

The first research question which guided this study was: *In what situations, if any, do first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?* The purpose of this research question was to illuminate the situations during which students use smartphones to receive parental support, if any. The importance of the situation is a critical component of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2006). Schlossberg considers the situation to include the circumstances and details of the transition (Evans, et al., 2010). The emergent themes connected to this question provided context for the experiences of first-year college students during their transitions. These two overarching themes were *decision-making* and *academic pathways*.

The concept of *decision-making* is discussed frequently throughout the literature associated with parental support and student transitions. The theme of *decision-making* included situations in which the participants of this study contacted their parents for assistance with life-related decisions. These decisions often did not pertain to academic or coursework support, but rather, a variety of personal decisions. These decisions ranged from minor inquiries about cooking to significant situations such as navigating the process after getting into a car accident. A study conducted by Workman (2014) highlighted that students felt their parents positively influenced their *decision-making*. The participants of this study described their experiences as positive, and they appreciated the support their parents provided during their decision driven scenarios.

How significantly the student relies on their parent for decisions is a key highlight in Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006). How far the student has progressed through their transition from child to adult may correlate to their relative reliance on their parents for support with basic decisions. Similarly, some circumstances regarding assistance with

decisions may result from where the student is on their journey to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). While some decisions students encounter encompass unfamiliar situations, other situations could likely be resolved by the student, rather than the student needing to following formulas, or adhere to the guidance of authority figures (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Additionally, a student's locus of control (Rotter, 1966) can be impacted by their *decision-making*, as the student might attribute their successes to external forces (i.e. their parents who assisted them with decisions). This concept of *decision-making* highlights how communications technology allows participants to rapidly connect with their parents for a variety of reasons, including assistance with *decision-making*.

The concept of *academic pathways* is also discussed frequently throughout the literature associated with parental support and student transitions. The second emergent theme was the student's *academic pathway*. There are also other adjacent concepts, such as professional journey or career path, that are reminiscent of the *academic pathway*. For Amelia, Betsy, Douglas, and Jeff, choosing a major and career field were experiences reasonably within their control. They each described some level of autonomy over their major and initial academic decisions during their first year of college. The study conducted by Curtis and Trice (2013) found significant connections between academic locus of control and positive academic outcomes through the development of an Academic Locus of Control Scale. In the results of their study, students also experienced a negative correlation with procrastination and depression (Curtis & Trice, 2013). One example of a loss of control could result from family pressures. Not all participants in the current study had *autonomy* over their academic-related decisions, however. Two participants, Cleopatra and Kira, shared that their parents had some influence over their major and academic decisions throughout their transition to college. Workman (2014) articulated that family



pressures regarding career outcomes, ultimately, influenced major and career choice, much like how the academic pathways of family pressures were exerted onto Kira and Cleopatra. Whether or not the student retained their *autonomy* throughout their academic decision-making processes could be an indicator of if they follow formulas or transitioned to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

### Discussing Research Question 2: Self Theme

The second research question which guided this study was: *What aspects of self, if any, impact how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support?* The purpose of this research question was to give meaning to the aspects of self expressed by students who use smartphones to receive parental support, if any. After reviewing the thematic analysis, one overarching theme emerged: autonomy.

The theme connected to self was *autonomy*. All participants articulated this theme as part of their experience, though the levels of *autonomy* experienced varied. Furthermore, the circumstances surrounding this study provided a unique view of the students' transition processes due to the impact of COVID-19. The juxtaposition of their transition to college in August 2019 and their rapid return home when their institution transitioned to remote instruction in March 2020 framed the participants experiences of *autonomy*.

The concept of autonomy is frequently discussed throughout the literature associated with parental support and student transitions. A study conducted by Pedersen (2017) detailed the level to which parents support student *autonomy* and how this positively influences the student's university experience. Pedersen (2017) found a significant relationship between university satisfaction and parental *autonomy* support for female students. In this study, increased *autonomy*

was a positive experience. Alternatively, overparenting from helicopter parents results in low levels of *autonomy* (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

The concept of *autonomy* connects directly to Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control and Baxter Magolda's (2001) Theory of Self-Authorship. As individuals develop *autonomy*, they are more likely to experience a crossroads or situation where they first find themselves in a position to create their own paths, as described by Baxter Magolda (2001). Similarly, Rotter's Locus of Control describes a situation in which the student would transition from certain circumstances to indicate they attribute their successes to their own achievements (1966).

### Discussing Research Question 3: Strategy Themes

The third research question which guided this study was: *What success strategies, if any, result from first-year college students using smartphones to receive parental support?* The purpose of this research question was to explore the potential success strategies employed by students who used smartphones to receive parental support, if any. After reviewing the thematic analysis, four overarching themes regarding strategies emerged: *emotional support*, *access*, *safety*, and *preparation*.

For the purposes of this study, *emotional support* is defined as the emotional assistance a student receives from their parents. This theme also included the desire by students to receive *emotional support* from their parents. While their experiences varied, all participants expressed gratitude for the *emotional support*. Additionally, the participants of this study found the *emotional support* helpful to their success even when desiring *autonomy* during other aspects of their transition to college. The concept of *emotional support* is discussed frequently throughout the literature associated with parental support and student transitions. A study conducted by Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay (2007) found that parents could positively impact their

students by providing *emotional support*. Similarly, Weintraub and Sax (2018) reported that academic success (GPA) was positively associated with higher levels of *emotional support* from parents.

The concept of *emotional support* could be associated with multiple aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al., 2006) depending on the context. For example, it could be a strategy implemented by the student. However, in this study, the experiences of the student regarding *emotional support* were more closely connected to their identity as a child and their pre-established relationships with their parents. Unlike the concept of *autonomy*, the relationship between *emotional support* and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) is not certain. Students may rely on their parents for *emotional support* (void of any need for decisions) even after they develop self-authorship, which was expressed by one participant in this study.

The concept of access is related to the experiences of the participants and their ability to connect with their parents for support, despite any distance barriers. The theme of *access* included the benefits of connecting with their parents quickly, efficiently, and whenever they wanted to communicate. Other technological features were also beneficial to increasing *access*, such as voice-over-internet applications, which allowed for international communication exchanges or text-based messaging. Hardell (2018) articulated that technological advances have allowed greater access to technology, especially given it is now lighter, faster, and more cost-effective. Overall, support from parents which previously occurred using a landline phone can now occur by utilizing text messaging or can occur at any point during the day (Stein et al., 2016).

Leveraging technology to access parental support is an example of a strategy articulated by Schlossberg (Goodman et al., 2006). The concept of strategies includes categorical

approaches or modes such as modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress (Goodman et al., 2006). Similar to the discussion regarding *decision-making*, *access* could be directly connected to Baxter Magolda's Journey to Self-Authorship (2001). In the current study, increased access to technology was generally beneficial to the students. However, there could have been positive or negative impacts for students who might have experienced a crossroads (or delay in experiencing a crossroads).

The overarching theme of *safety* included leveraging technology to ensure and monitor the safety of students. It also included situations where the student felt safe because of access to the communication tools available through the smartphone. Throughout the literature, there are several examples of studies which intersect *safety* and parental support. For instance, communication between students and parents has a positive influence on students' choices (Small et al., 2011). Alternatively, Simpson (2014) argued that constantly monitoring the location of children using GPS does not teach resilience and independence. To emphasize, the concept of safety is framed in a unique juxtaposition with autonomy. One participant in this study disabled the GPS tracking feature of her smartphone, effectively choosing *autonomy* over the desire for safety expressed by her parent.

Leveraging tools for safety emerged as a strategy for successfully navigating the transition. However, there are possible negative impacts as well. If students rely on this strategy regularly, they may not learn other strategies to resolve their situations. One participant in this study shared that she appreciated when others checked on her when she was in an unsafe area, possibly trading lessons in situational awareness for the strategy of relying on others, using her smartphone. Understanding which strategies (Goodman et al., 2006) promote long-term success is important to the student.

*Preparation* prior to the transition to college is a success strategy which may require the least amount of ongoing parental support throughout the transition. The theme of *preparation* includes plans to ensure college accomplishment by instituting success strategies in advance of the transition to college. While the exact content the student might learn throughout their college experience will likely vary, any planning support provided by the parent to help students navigate circumstances along their transition will help them. This strategy has the potential to enhance a student's locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001), as it encourages the student to seek resolution to their situation using the provided strategies. Ultimately, the concept of *preparation* benefited the students in this study by giving them a foundation from which to base decisions and approach situations. This did not indicate that students no longer needed to engage with their parents for support in other ways, such as emotional support or *decision-making*. However, as a strategy, *preparation* assisted the students from the beginning to scaffold their experiences.

### Implications for Practice

The themes revealed in the results of this study highlighted several recommendations which should be implemented by student affairs practitioners who support first-year students' transitions to college. These recommendations include educating students and parents about transition support and enhancing the education to parents about student success resources.

#### Recommendation: Increase Education about Parental Support

Universities provide significant support to students and parents through transitional support resources like orientation, newsletters, and networking. Many of these support resources focus on practical details of the college transition, such as registering for courses or navigating the campus environment. The emergent themes from the experiences of the participants in this

study highlighted a series of complexities which would benefit from enhanced educational conversations and training during the transition to the college environment.

Smartphones have given first-year college students the ability to seek decision-support from their parents with ease of *access*. This *access* can provide students the support they need, regardless of distance or time constraints. The participants in this study also shared their desires for *autonomy*. The juxtaposition of *autonomy* and *decision-making* generated conflicting roles for the students who participated in this study. They expressed a desire for *autonomy*, but they also wanted access to their parents for support with decisions or challenges they were not prepared to address independently. In addition to the desire for support with decisions, the participants placed value on ongoing *emotional support* from their parents.

Given the overall complexity of these factors (students seeking *autonomy*, yet ultimately benefiting from *emotional support* and *decision-making*), students would benefit from reflecting on their needs during the college transition process. Additionally, it would be helpful for students to engage in conversations with their parents regarding the manner and mode of support that would be most helpful for them during their transition. Given students may not initially know the type of support they most prefer, these conversations would be unlikely to occur without intervention. Further, none of the participants in this study reported that they explicitly engaged in conversations about support from their parents with their parents. Given this, universities should consider adding guidance to their own plans to support students throughout the transition to encourage students to engage with their parents in conversations regarding their parental support. Universities could implement this in various ways and a multi-method approach would likely be beneficial to ensure the student has sufficiently engaged in a conversation with their parents.

First, universities could provide written conversation guides to students, like the resources currently created to facilitate conversations between students and their roommates. Next, universities could provide educational sessions during the admissions or orientation processes to help students consider how their relationships with their parents will change and how the student might continue to benefit from parental support while positively moving toward autonomy, independence, and other concepts, such as self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Finally, universities could engage with parents using a similar format to contextualize the transition their student will experience. Providing parallel conversations for both students and parents could help clarify any potential role confusion experienced by both parties, especially in circumstances in which one party may expect roles to shift while the other might expect roles to remain the same (Bartos & Wehr, 2002).

#### Recommendation: Educate Parents About Student Success Resources

The participants in this study received support from their parents during a variety of situations. One of the prominent strategies that emerged was the use of smartphones to ensure the students' *safety*, often by GPS tracking. Another emergent theme was strategies designed to *prepare* the student for success. While *academic pathways* emerged as a theme, for multiple participants in this study, it was more closely associated with *autonomy* than the remaining themes. Moreover, the participants in this study received less support from their parents, which was directly connected to their academics and, overall, success as a student.

Despite this, the participants in this study did attribute some of their success as a student to the support they received from their parents (especially *emotional support* and assistance with *decision-making*). As a result, the recommendation for practice is to further strengthen the parents' ability to provide academic support to their students, if this support is distributed in a

way that caters to the student's needs and desires. To assist with this, parents should receive additional support from the university to support their students through academic-related scenarios. For instance, the university could provide reference guides regarding tutoring services and similar academic support resources to parents with recommendations for how they might leverage this information to support their students. Additionally, providing parents guidance regarding basic information to help their student navigate an academic process or policy would help the parent leverage this information when supporting their student through the transition process, even when the process must be facilitated entirely by the student. Kira described a situation where her mother encouraged her to speak with a faculty member about a course grade. This scenario is an example of how having informed parents could lead to better-informed students.

This recommendation does not require the parent to become an expert in the content or subject areas in which their student is studying, but rather that the university provides parents the necessary resources to serve as a referral source for their student. When educating parents about these resources, it would also be beneficial to emphasize the first recommendation provided above. The literature regarding helicopter parenting emphasizes the potential negative impact of parents who are too closely entwined with their student's academic pursuits. At least one participant in this study sought to be academically *autonomous*, given their parents' previous level of involvement in their academics. As a result, this recommendation does not determine that parents should intervene academically on behalf of their students. Rather, the recommendation is that universities, specifically, should support parents during their student's transition to the institution in a manner that can help parents become effective resources and support systems for their students during periods of academic difficulty.



### Limitations and Delimitations

There are two primary limitations to this study: research design and impact of the researcher. Phenomenological research is based on the experiences of individuals (van Mannen, 2014). As a result, the results of this study are limited to the experiences of the group selected for participation. Therefore, there may be other aspects of this phenomenon present in other groups of students. While the results of this study cannot be generalized to other students, the resulting thematic analysis can still be utilized to inform practice.

The data utilized during this study was collected, analyzed, and coded by the researcher. Because the researcher plays an active role in qualitative research, efforts must be made to limit the impact of the researcher on the resulting data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data validation is required to properly mitigate bias (Merriam, 2002). One such technique, outlining the positionality of the researcher, was completed in chapter one. Other approaches, such as verbatim transcription and the use of a rich, thick description, were implemented and outlined in chapter three.

There are three primary delimitations to this study. Given the purpose of this study was to understand how first-year college students use smartphones to receive parental support, it focused on the lived experiences of students who use smartphones to communicate with their parents. As a result, the first delimitation was to focus the subject of this study on first-year, first-time-in-college (FTIC) students. FTIC students represent a significant percentage of American college students at large public research universities (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). The second delimitation is that this study specifically focused on students who use smartphones to communicate with their parents. Approximately 95% of teens own a smartphone (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Smartphones are the most common platform for communications (including calls,

text messages, and other modalities) used in the United States today, including between college students and their parents (Stein et al., 2016). The third delimitation was to focus this study on students who live in on-campus residential facilities. By emphasizing some physical distance between students and parents, the potential use of smartphones to receive parental support was more likely to be pronounced than in situations where the student remained at home (Green et al., 2019).

### Impact of COVID-19

The single most defining factor impacting this study was the onset of the global Coronavirus pandemic in Spring 2020. The study site transitioned to remote instruction following spring break in March 2020. This resulted in the data collection process transitioning to Zoom rather than in-person semi-structured interviews. The transition also resulted in the participants of this study moving out of their on-campus residence halls and returning to their parents' homes. As a result, the participants of this study experienced a shorter time living away from their parents than the researcher originally intended to study.

However, the researcher was gained valuable insight into the students' experiences transitioning back home, and the participants discussed concepts, such as autonomy, with significant saliency. Several participants shared how they perceived their college experience to be atypical. One participant expressed sadness over the situation and how much it impacted their college experience. Another participant felt that they lost nearly all of the autonomy gained at college because of COVID-19 and their unexpected return home. While this was certainly not the intended purpose of this study, understanding how significant events beyond the control of college students impact autonomy is worthy of further inquiry.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. This study utilized a phenomenological approach with the intention to understand the experiences of specific individuals (van Mannen, 2014). Using this study and the literature from which it is based, there are several opportunities for further research. These include studying the parental experience, conducting a longitudinal ethnographic study of college students in transition, and exploring this topic from a quantitative perspective.

The first recommendation is to explore the topic of parental support from the perspective of the parents. Little research in higher education is from the perspective of the parents providing support to college students. While this study explored the experiences of students and gained understanding of their perspectives, the field of Higher Education would also be well served by research designed to gain additional understanding of the parents' perspectives of the support they provide. The themes which emerged from the analysis of this study intersected in a complex way, much like the complexity between student and parent relationships. For instance, the delicate balance between decision-making support, autonomy, and safety all while communicating through smartphones rather than face-to-face is a potential topic in which further inquiry would be valuable. To best design programs that support student and parent transitions, understanding how parents view this experience would be beneficial.

The second opportunity for further research would be to conduct a longitudinal study involving students throughout their transition to college. This study explored the topic from a phenomenological perspective and occurred after the participants completed their first-year of college. A research design utilized to follow the participants throughout their transition would

capture a unique essence of their experience. One such study could utilize an ethnographic research design focused on immersive data collection using multiple sources with the intention to learn more about a specific subset of first-year undergraduate students during their transitions to college.

Ethnographic research aims to understand the meaning behind behaviors and interactions for a group or groups of people living their daily lives (Emerson et al., 2011). Furthermore, ethnographic research requires a cultural interpretation of the meaning of experiences by the researcher (Merriam, 2002). This study did not focus on a specific student population, however the development of an ethnographic study could be tailored to understand first-generation students who use smartphones throughout their transition. Presenting the data through an ethnographic lens would further explore the culture of first-year college students and any potentially selected sub-populations. This approach would provide a rich understanding of the daily experiences of the participants.

The third option for potential research is to explore this topic from an additional quantitative perspective. While previous literature, such as Edward, Catling, and Parry (2016) or Spokas and Heimberg (2008), have explored Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control (and the associated scale) with college students and parental involvement, studies have not explored the impact of smartphone use, with this scale. In this study, Rotter's (1966) Locus of Control served as a secondary component of the conceptual framework which enhanced the primary theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Goodman et al, 2006). Given the presence of both decision-making and autonomy as emergent themes in this study, further exploration of the impact of smartphones on students' locus of control presents an interesting opportunity for further inquiry. Such a study could also include other instruments, to measure the connection between students

and parents, such as van Igren's (2015) parental bonding instrument as implemented by Green et al. (2019).

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year undergraduate college students use smartphones to receive parental support. To achieve this purpose, a conceptual framework was implemented to guide the literature and frame the research (Wolcott, 1994). The conceptual framework implemented in this study is first-year college student transitions and development within the context of parental support. Components from three theories were incorporated to form the conceptual framework: Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self Authorship (2001), and Rotter's Locus of Control (1966). A Phenomenological methodology was implemented which contextualizes the day-to-day experiences of individuals (van Mannen, 2014). By conducting semi-structured interviews, this study explored the phenomenon of first-year college student smartphone usage to receive parental support from both immersive and holistic perspectives. After transcription, the data was analyzed first through descriptive and conceptual coding (Saldana, 2016). The codes were then grouped and clustered into themes before ultimately the themes were synthesized within the context of the conceptual framework.

Seven themes emerged as a result of the analysis. The participants engaged with their parents through smartphone and experienced support with *decision-making*, *emotional support*, as well as *safety*. Participants experienced varying levels of *autonomy*, especially throughout their journey along their *academic pathways*. Additionally, their smartphone provided quick *access* to reach their parents when assistance was needed. Some participants experienced

*preparation* from their parents before their transition, which also impacted how much support was needed throughout their college transition.

The themes that emerged from this study illuminate how complex the transition to college can be for first-year undergraduate students. Using smartphones for parental support can positively attribute to the success of the student throughout their transition. However, it would be beneficial to educate students and parents about the benefits, pitfalls, and complexities of parental support throughout the students' transition to college. Furthermore, this study illuminated the importance of educating parents about specific student success resources so they are best equipped to assist their students. Furthermore, additional research into parental support would be beneficial. Such research could be conducted from the parents' perspective, or from a longitudinal, ethnographic, or quantitative perspective.

Parental support does not stop once college begins. As reinforced by the conceptual framework and literature, it is important for students and parents to be mindful of the journey toward independence during college. Devising support strategies in a way that encourages student growth and success is crucial to developing the leaders of tomorrow.

## **APPENDIX A: EXPLENATION OF RESEARCH**



UNIVERSITY OF  
CENTRAL FLORIDA

## EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: An investigation into how First-Year Undergraduate College Students use Smartphones for Parental Support

Principal Investigator: Jacob Bonne, Graduate Student  
Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education  
College of Community Innovation and Education

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Thomas Cox, Dissertation Chair  
Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education  
College of Community Innovation and Education

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this study is to understand how first-year undergraduate students use smartphones for parental support. This study will focus on your smartphone usage with your parents during your first-year of college. You will also be asked about your transition to the college environment.

In order to be eligible for this study, you must:

Have started classes in Fall 2019 and be enrolled classes for Summer 2020

Have at least one parent who owns a smartphone

Consider both yourselves and your parents proficient with a smartphone

Have lived in a residence hall or off campus apartment (separate from your parents) during the Fall 2019 semester

You will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute individual interview through Zoom. You will also be asked to answer a nine-question survey to determine your eligibility for this study. You will be recorded during this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you will not be able to be in the study. Discuss this with the researcher. If you are recorded, the recording will be kept in a locked, safe place. The recording will be erased and destroyed five years after the study has concluded in accordance with UCF Policy.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your relationship with UCF, including continued enrollment, grades, employment or your relationship with the individuals who may have an interest in this study.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.



Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints:

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IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu).

## **APPENDIX B: INTEREST SURVEY**

## Start of Block: Criterion Questions

Q2 Do you own a smartphone?

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone** is defined as: a device that combines a cell phone with a handheld computer, typically offering internet access, multiple applications, data storage, email access other communications tools, etc.*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Do you own a smartphone? For the purposes of this study, smartphone is defined as: a device tha... = No*

---

Q3 Do you have one or more individual(s) that you identify as your parent?

*For the purposes of this study, **parent** is defined as: an individual who provided guardianship, support, and/or raised you while you were growing up.*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Do you have one or more individual(s) that you identify as your parent? For the purposes of th... = No*

---

Q4 Do you have one or more parents who own a smartphone?

*For the purposes of this study, **parent** is defined as: an individual who provided guardianship, support, and/or raised you while you were growing up.*

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone** is defined as: a device that combines a cell phone with a handheld computer, typically offering internet access, multiple applications, data storage, email access other communications tools, etc.*

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Do you have one or more parents who own a smartphone? For the purposes of this study, parent is... = No*

---

Q5 From your perspective, are you proficient at using your smartphone?

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone** is defined as: a device that combines a cell phone with a handheld computer, typically offering internet access, multiple applications, data storage, email access other communications tools, etc.*

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone proficiency** is defined as: the ability to successfully utilize multiple features, applications, and/or tools within the smartphone to store data, find information, and communicate with others.*

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Might or might not (3)
- Probably not (4)
- Definitely not (5)

*Skip To: End of Survey If From your perspective, Are you proficient at using your smartphone? For the purposes of this st... = Definitely not*

---

Q6 From your perspective, is one or more of your **parents** proficient at using a smartphone?

*For the purposes of this study, **parent** is defined as: an individual who provided guardianship, support, and/or raised you while you were growing up.*

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone** is defined as: a device that combines a cell phone with a handheld computer, typically offering internet access, multiple applications, data storage, email access other communications tools, etc.*

*For the purposes of this study, **smartphone proficiency** is defined as: the ability to successfully utilize multiple features, applications, and/or tools within the smartphone to store data, find*

information, and communicate with others.

- Definitely yes (1)
- Probably yes (2)
- Might or might not (3)
- Probably not (4)
- Definitely not (5)

*Skip To: End of Survey If From your perspective, is one or more of your parents proficient at using a smartphone? For the... = Definitely not*

---

Q7 Where did you live during the Fall 2019 semester?

- With parent(s) (1)
  - In university housing (2)
  - In off campus or private housing (not with parents) (3)
  - Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q8 Do you have one or more parents who lives out of state?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

**End of Block: Criterion Questions**

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**Start of Block: Contact Information**

Q9 What is your name?

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Q10 What is your email address?

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**End of Block: Contact Information**

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## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

<b>Semi-Structured Interview Topic Area</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Alignment of Research Question(s)</b>
Introduction and Rapport Building	Tell me a bit about yourself. What is your major/career path? Why did you choose it? What are some of your interests outside of academics?	RQ2: What aspects of self?
Transition to College	Share with me your thoughts about your experience at the university so far? Tell me about your transition to college. What has been easier/harder than expected?	RQ1: In what situations?
Parental Relationship	Tell me a bit about your parents. How would you describe your relationship with them? Do you think they've supported you? In what ways?	RQ2: What aspects of self?
Smartphone usage (personal and with parents)	Tell me about your experiences using a smartphone. Did your smartphone assist you with your college transition? If so, how? Do you interact with your parents through your smartphone? If so, how? What apps/tools do you use most frequently?	RQ1: In what situations? RQ3: What success strategies?
Parental support throughout college transition	Did your parents support you during your transition to the university? If so, how? Have your parents supported your academics? Have your parents supported your life outside of the classroom?	RQ3: What success strategies?
Student use of Smartphones to receive parental support	Do you believe that being able to communicate with your parents through your smartphone contributed to your academic/personal success at the university? Why/why not? What situations was this communication helpful/not helpful? What particular aspects of the smartphone (apps, features) are or are not helpful for your academic/personal success?	RQ1: In what situations? RQ2: What aspects of self? RQ3: What success strategies?
Student use of Smartphones to receive parental support	Do you believe that being able to communicate with your parents through your smartphone contributed to your personal success? Why/why not? How has it helped/hindered you as a person? What particular aspects of the smartphone (apps, features) are or are not helpful for your personal success? Have you learned anything about how to navigate difficult situations as a result of the support you've received from your parents through Smartphones? Please explain	RQ1: In what situations? RQ2: What aspects of self? RQ3: What success strategies?



## **APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL**



**EXEMPTION DETERMINATION**

May 28, 2020

Dear Jacob Bonne:

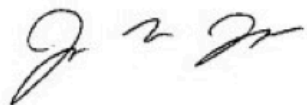
On 5/28/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category 2
Title:	An Investigation into how First-Year Undergraduate College Students use Smartphones for Parental Support
Investigator:	Jacob Bonne
IRB ID:	STUDY00001836
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;</li> <li>• Explanation of Research.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• HRP-255-FORM- Request for Exemption.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Interest_Survey.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Interview Protocol.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;</li> <li>• Recruitment Email.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> </ul>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Racine Jacques', written in a cursive style.

Racine Jacques, Ph.D.  
Designated Reviewer

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