



3-12-2021

Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy: Parental Support Through the Lens of COVID-19

Elena G. van Stee

University of Pennsylvania, evanstee@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/education_inequality_workshop



Part of the [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

van Stee, Elena. 2021. "Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy: Parental Support Through the Lens of COVID-19." Penn Education and Inequality Working Papers, #13. https://repository.upenn.edu/education_inequality_workshop/13

This paper has been published in a journal here: van Stee, E. G. (2022). Privileged dependence, precarious autonomy: Parent/young adult relationships through the lens of COVID-19. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1– 18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12895>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/education_inequality_workshop/13
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy: Parental Support Through the Lens of COVID-19

Abstract

Objective: This article identifies how undergraduates' responses to educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were shaped by social class differences in their relationships with parents.

Background: The mechanisms through which parents transmit class advantages to children are often hidden from view and therefore remain imperfectly understood. This study leverages the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic to examine how young adults from different social class backgrounds expect, negotiate, and attach meaning to parental support in a time of crisis. **Method:** This study draws from in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of 48 Black and White upper-middle and working-class undergraduates from a single elite university, along with 10 of their mothers. **Results:** Facing pandemic-related disruptions, upper-middle-class students typically sought substantial direction and material assistance from parents. In contrast, working-class students typically assumed more responsibility for their own—and sometimes other family members'—well-being. These classed patterns of “privileged dependence” and “precarious autonomy” were shaped by students' understandings of family members' authority, needs, and responsibilities. **Conclusion:** Upper-middle-class students' expectations for extended dependence on parents functioned as a protective force, enabling them to benefit financially and academically from parents' material and cultural resources. These protections—which were not available to their working-class peers—may yield cumulative advantages as students progress through higher education and enter the labor market.

Keywords

COVID-19, pandemic, social class, educational disruption, educational sociology, in-depth interviews, elite universities, working-class, middle-class, upper-middle-class, higher education, labor market, parental support

Disciplines

Educational Sociology | Family, Life Course, and Society | Inequality and Stratification | Medicine and Health | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Sociology

Comments

This paper has been published in a journal here: van Stee, E. G. (2022). Privileged dependence, precarious autonomy: Parent/young adult relationships through the lens of COVID-19. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 1– 18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12895>

Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy:
Parental Support Through the Lens of COVID-19

Elena G. van Stee
Department of Sociology
University of Pennsylvania

Submitted version

March 11, 2022

Access the final published version [here](#)

ABSTRACT

Objective: This article identifies how undergraduates' responses to educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were shaped by social class differences in their relationships with parents.

Background: The mechanisms through which parents transmit class advantages to children are often hidden from view and therefore remain imperfectly understood. This study leverages the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic to examine how young adults from different social class backgrounds expect, negotiate, and attach meaning to parental support in a time of crisis.

Method: This study draws from in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of 48 Black and White upper-middle and working-class undergraduates from a single elite university, along with 10 of their mothers.

Results: Facing pandemic-related disruptions, upper-middle-class students typically sought substantial direction and material assistance from parents. In contrast, working-class students typically assumed more responsibility for their own—and sometimes other family members'—well-being. These classed patterns of “privileged dependence” and “precarious autonomy” were shaped by students' understandings of family members' authority, needs, and responsibilities.

Conclusion: Upper-middle-class students' expectations for extended dependence on parents functioned as a protective force, enabling them to benefit financially and academically from parents' material and cultural resources. These protections—which were not available to their working-class peers—may yield cumulative advantages as students progress through higher education and enter the labor market.

**Privileged Dependence, Precarious Autonomy:
Parental Support Through the Lens of COVID-19**

The social processes underlying the “invisible transfer of privilege” (Swartz, 2008) from parents to children are often hidden from view and remain imperfectly understood. Existing research identifies significant class differences with respect to parental involvement in higher education (e.g. Armstrong & Hamilton, 2015) and parents’ material assistance to young adults—especially in times of crisis (e.g. Swartz et al., 2011). However, we know less about the cultural understandings that facilitate these exchanges. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought fault lines of inequality into sharp relief, providing a novel opportunity to examine hidden social processes (Klinenberg, 2003). Using in-depth interviews with 48 upper-middle-class and working-class undergraduates at an elite university, this study examines young adults’ classed understandings of the parent/young adult relationship through the lens of their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I find striking class differences in young adults’ strategies for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their reactions were shaped by classed understandings of the parent/young adult relationship: upper-middle- and working-class students possessed different understandings of parents’ authority, needs, and responsibilities. In turn, these differences informed the realm of possibilities that students considered when making decisions. Upper-middle-class students displayed *privileged dependence* as they sought substantial direction and assistance from parents. In contrast, working-class students displayed *precarious autonomy* as they assumed greater responsibility for their own—and sometimes other family members’—well-being.

These findings advance our understanding of the cultural and relational mechanisms that facilitate the transmission of class advantage from parents to children. Greater dependence on parents’ material resources and advice functioned as a protective force for upper-middle-class

young adults, sheltering them from many immediate financial and academic disruptions. These protections—which were not available to their working-class peers—may yield cumulative advantages as students progress through higher education and enter the labor market.

BACKGROUND

Parental Support in the Transition to Adulthood

As the transition to adulthood has become increasingly delayed and uncertain for young adults, sociologists have argued that parental support operates as a key mechanism in the intergenerational transfer of privilege (Author; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2021; Swartz, 2008). Existing research primarily focuses on predictors and consequences of parents' involvement and assistance rather than how young adults understand or experience parental support.

Parents' financial support functions as both a “scaffold” facilitating educational attainment and a “safety net” for young adults to fall back on in times of crisis (Swartz et al. 2011). In the context of rising tuition costs and an increasing return to college degrees among young adults, many parents feel that they should provide financial support to facilitate their offspring's postsecondary educational attainment, yet they are unequally equipped to do so. Disparities in parents' financial assistance go beyond tuition, with recent studies describing affluent parents providing funds for housing, groceries, clothes, technology, travel, and entertainment (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2015; Hurst, 2020). These studies suggest that parents' financial assistance during college yields academic and social benefits; it reduces students' need to engage in paid work and thus facilitates the accumulation of social capital through extracurricular and leisure activities.

Parental support extends beyond financial assistance: cultural and social resources also

matter (Swartz, 2008). The higher education literature depicts middle-to-upper class college students as beneficiaries of parents' cultural knowledge and social connections while showing how working-class and poor students navigate college more autonomously (Lareau & Cox, 2011; Roksa & Silver, 2019). For example, recent research describes more educated parents monitoring students' academic progress, giving academic and professional advice, and providing hands-on assistance with job searches or graduate school applications—forms of assistance not available to students whose parents did not attend college (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2015; Kurz, Forthcoming; Roksa & Silver, 2019). Although these studies hint at class differences in families' perceptions of young adults as “grown” (Lareau & Cox, 2011) and parents' understandings of the appropriate level of support (Hamilton, 2016), these studies do not focus on how young adults come to expect, experience, or attach meaning to parental support.

Whereas the sociological literature foregrounds education and career benefits associated with greater parental assistance, studies that consider psychological outcomes tend to emphasize the negative impacts of “overparenting” or “helicopter parenting.” Highly involved and risk-averse parenting approaches have been linked to higher levels of depression, anxiety, narcissism, and entitlement among young adults (Buchanan and LeMoyné 2020; Segrin et al. 2012; Winner and Nicholson 2018). Other studies suggest negative relational effects, including lower-quality parent/child communication and lower levels of satisfaction with family life (Schiffrin et al., 2014). Yet findings on these outcomes have been mixed, with other research linking intense parental involvement (financial, advice, emotional) to positive psychological adjustment, life satisfaction, and feelings of closeness to parents (Fingerman et al., 2012; Johnson, 2013).

Together, these literatures suggest diverse, complex, and contextually dependent implications of extended dependence on parents' resources and direction. One study that

considered both socioeconomic and psychological implications of parental control in the college application process explicitly highlighted this tension, arguing that middle class parents' great control offered protection from financial and academic risks but limited middle-class young adults' sense of self-efficacy (Silva & Snellman, 2018). This study underscores the importance of considering developmental and relational outcomes alongside measures of educational and occupational attainment—an insight that guides the present study.

Young Adult Support to Parents

The other direction of support—young adults' assistance to parents—has received less attention from scholars (Lanuza, 2020; Roksa & Silver, 2019). Research on young adults' assistance to parents has been largely confined to research on recent immigrant groups, particularly Asian and Latinx young adults (e.g. Covarrubias et al., 2019; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Harrington, 2022). However, there is mounting evidence that the reciprocal dynamics observed in these contexts have broader relevance among socioeconomically disadvantaged families (e.g. DeLuca et al., 2016; Napolitano, 2015). A growing body of research describes socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults from native-born Black and White households aiding parents. Nationally representative data show that among children of native-born parents, 32% of Black and 12% of White young adults (25-32) who do not live with parents report financial interdependence—that is, they both receive money from and give money to parents (Lanuza, 2020). A smaller share, 8% and 14%, respectively, only give and do not receive financial support. Across the board, these figures are higher for those who live with parents.

Recent qualitative studies offer further evidence of young adults' assistance to parents and suggest implications for stratification processes. DeLuca et al. (2016) found that Black young adults' educational and career trajectories were shaped by their sense of obligation to

support parents and other family members. This study described young adults who provided significant financial and practical support to their parents—sometimes dropping out of college, moving home, or selling drugs to do so. In a similar vein, Napolitano (2015) described lower-SES White young adults who provided significant practical and financial assistance to their families. Napolitano (2015: 346) emphasized that her respondents generally understood assistance to parents “not as a burden, but as an obvious choice,” despite the negative implications for their own financial stability or academic progress.

Most research on the subjective dimensions of young adults’ support to parents—the expectations and interactions that facilitate these processes—have focused on the role of “familism” (Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Tseng 2004) and the “immigrant bargain” among Latinx and Asian families (Louie, 2012). Although scholars have long theorized that African Americans feel an obligation to parents and co-ethnics rooted the perception of their “linked fate,” (Dawson, 1995) this literature has not focused on young adults, higher education, or class differences (but see Pattillo, 2013). Additionally, dominant narratives that focus on the downward flow of parental resources in middle-class White families obscure the experiences of White young adults who provide financial or other assistance to parents (Napolitano, 2015). Further research is needed to understand the expectations and family dynamics that give rise to such support.

METHODS

This study centers on the experiences of 48 young adults who attended a single private university during the 2019–2020 academic year. “Elite University” is a highly selective research institution on the East Coast of the United States. Although almost 20% of the students come from families in the top 1% of the income distribution, there is also a growing population of

students from poor and working-class backgrounds who benefit from the university's financial aid policy—students whose family income is below approximately \$75,000 do not pay for tuition or living expenses. The polarized economic distribution of this campus provides an ideal context to examine class variation within a single student body. However, this research site also limits the generalizability of the findings, as students who gain admission to a highly selective college likely differ from other young adults in important ways (e.g. academic ability, social capital).

Following others who study social class in the context of family life and higher education, I identify students' social class by their parents' educational attainment, occupational status, and income (Calarco, 2011; Lareau, 2014; Stuber, 2011). I elected to compare students from two social class groups, working-class students and upper-middle-class students, to maximize analytic leverage within the sample size limitations of a qualitative, interview-based study (Stuber, 2011). I focus on students from two ethnoracial groups (non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic White) and limit the study to students who have at least one parent who is an American-born citizen to minimize heterogeneity within social class groups. Although I looked for racial variation in young adults' understandings of the parent/young adult relationship, I did not find substantive differences. There were, however, dramatic racial disparities in young adults' experiences of racial violence during the pandemic; these findings naturally warrant separate discussion and are beyond the scope of this article.

Students are considered working class if neither parent has a bachelor's degree and both parents work in manual labor or low-level service sector jobs or are unemployed. Working-class students commonly described parents moving through periods of underemployment and unemployment—both before and during the pandemic. Thus, although the parents represented in this study had working-class jobs when they were employed (e.g., bartender, delivery driver,

certified nursing assistant), a handful were experiencing temporary or long-term unemployment during the study period. Five students could be considered poor rather than working-class, as neither parent was employed in a full-time job at the time of the interview. However, I found that these five students differed from the others only in the magnitude of parents' financial need. Thus, I refer to these five students as “working class” (Lareau, 2014).

Students are considered upper-middle-class if (1) both parents have a four-year college degree; (2) at least one parent has an advanced degree and works in a job that requires highly complex, educationally certified skills; and (3) the family's household income exceeds \$100,000 (Calarco, 2011; Lareau, 2014; Stuber, 2011). Seven of the upper-middle-class students in this study have parents who are corporate executives and would be considered by some to be “upper class” (Armstrong and Hamilton 2015). For brevity, and because I did not find substantial differences in parent/child dynamics, I include these students in the upper-middle class.

Twenty-five participants are from upper-middle-class families, and 23 are from working-class families. Within each social class group, about half of the students are Black, and the other half are White. Additionally, five multiracial students each reported one Black and one White parent (Table 1). All participants were between the ages of 18 and 24 and were enrolled as full-time students during the 2019–2020 academic year. The student sample includes 30 women, 15 men, and three non-binary students (for detailed sample characteristics, see the appendix).

Table 1. *Summary of Sample Characteristics*

		Black	White	Multiracial	Total
Upper-Middle Class	Students	9	13	3	25
	Mothers	2	2	1	5
Working Class	Students	12	9	2	23
	Mothers	3	2	0	5
Total		26	26	6	58

To gain further insight into family dynamics, I selected ten focal students and interviewed their mothers. Prior research indicates that mothers are more involved than fathers in college students' personal and academic lives (Hamilton, 2016; Wolf et al., 2009), and this trend was consistent with my participants' accounts. I chose students whose accounts exemplified the classed patterns of autonomy and dependence observed across the full sample. I did not discuss students' responses in my conversations with the mothers or vice versa, following the approach outlined by Hamilton (2016). All names provided are pseudonyms.

All interviews were conducted between June 2020 and February 2021. Elite University transitioned to complete virtual instruction in March 2020 and continued virtual instruction through the following fall. Thus, except for a small share of students who were granted emergency campus housing placements, most undergraduates did not live on campus at the time of the interviews. I contacted potential participants through a variety of university networks, including department listservs, social media pages, student organizations, and personal contacts. Additionally, I asked student interviewees to recommend others who might be willing to do an interview or to share information about the project with others in their network (e.g., in a group chat). I told potential student participants that I was interested in understanding how undergraduate students were navigating the pandemic, and I offered a \$25 honorarium. During recruitment for the parent interviews, I increased the honorarium to \$50. All interviews were conducted remotely over Zoom or the phone depending on the participant's preference.

The interviews focused on students' experiences with housing, remote learning, work, and family life during the pandemic, typically lasting around two hours. After the interview, respondents completed a short demographic questionnaire. Analysis began during data collection as I read the interview transcripts closely to look for themes and disconfirming evidence (Lareau,

2021). I wrote analytic memos and created data matrices to identify patterns in students' decisions and living arrangements, modifying my focus in the interviews to test out emerging ideas. I then coded the full set of transcripts using a combination of theory-based and inductive codes (Deterding & Waters, 2018; Lareau, 2021). In the analysis presented below, some quotes have been modified to improve readability (e.g., omitting false starts and repeated words).

RESULTS

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the context of risk, uncertainty, and structural constraints that characterize the contemporary transition to adulthood, bringing into relief social class differences in the parent/young adult relationship. I found that upper-middle-class students exhibited greater dependence on parents' direction and assistance, whereas working-class students navigated pandemic-related disruptions with a greater sense of their own autonomy. These responses were shaped by classed understandings of what I term the *locus of authority* and the *balance of needs and preferences*. First, young adults in this study held different understandings of the locus of authority—whether the young adult or the parent had the power to make decisions about the young adult's actions. Second, young adults' decisions were informed by different criteria, which I conceptualize as the balance of needs and preferences among family members. Together, these understandings shaped students' actions by leading them to envision different realms of possible strategies for dealing with pandemic-related disruptions.

The Locus of Authority

Across class, young adults demonstrated different understandings of who had the authority to make decisions about the young adult's actions. In upper-middle-class families, parents were commonly understood to possess authority over major decisions—including where

to live during the pandemic. In contrast, working-class young adults were more likely to see themselves as having the authority to make such decisions. These understandings were rooted in parents' differential financial power and young adults' perceptions of parents' knowledge.

Parents' financial leverage. First, upper-middle-class parents' authority was rooted in financial power. When parents and young adults agreed on the students' decisions, parents' financial leverage was largely implicit and did not appear to produce strong feelings of bitterness or resentment. For example, Claire (UMC, Black) jokingly explained that her mom always gave her money for textbooks, birth control, Uber rides, and groceries to incentivize these purchases—contributions that Claire was glad to accept. Similarly, Alice (UMC, White) noted that she did not resent her mom's authority over her budget: "I go along with whatever because it's her money—I'm going to follow what she wants to do with it." Although Claire and Alice both indicated that their financial dependence gave their parents more power over their actions, they did not express resentment.

In other cases, upper-middle-class students experienced their parents' financial power as overly controlling. All upper-middle-class students relied on parental assistance for tuition and most received additional support for housing and other living expenses. This position of financial dependence meant that parents had powerful financial leverage to influence students' decisions. Bradford's (UMC, Biracial) experience illustrates the power of parents' financial leverage, as well as the potential for negative relational consequences. When Bradford was forced to vacate his dorm in March, he initially turned to his parents for direction and material support. Bradford assumed that he would return to his parents' home and described many factors that made this plan appealing: "Being taken care of, cooked for, and not having to pay for or do anything myself [was] very attractive," he explained. As time went on, however, Bradford started to resent

his parents' control—particularly with regards to COVID-19 safety precautions. For example, he described his frustration when his parents would not let him order take-out through Uber Eats or spend time with his high school friends. Thus, as the fall semester approached, Bradford began to crave more freedom and wanted to find an off-campus apartment near the university. However, his parents were convinced that it would not be safe for him to do so. Bradford described a 36-hour negotiation period in which he tried, in vain, to convince his parents to let him live off-campus. His parents offered a compromise with a financial incentive: if Bradford lived in the family's second home (which they perceived to be safer than living near the university), they would pay him a monthly stipend equivalent to room and board on campus. If Bradford defied their wishes, he would be responsible for his living expenses.

Bradford reported that he ultimately caved to his parents' financial ultimatum: even though he had enough money to pay for his housing, Bradford decided that this freedom would not be worth the financial cost or relational fallout. Reflecting on this conflict, Bradford explained how his parents' financial support gave them authority over his housing decisions: "As people who are paying for my education, [they] had all the power to dictate what I could and couldn't do. . . One of the major things that I realized [from this situation] is that financial control—even if it's not *real* control—the power my parents have over me, even though legally they can't do anything to dictate my life, they're paying." Bradford's experience reveals a key drawback of extended dependence on parents: financial support often comes with strings attached. As the initial panic of the pandemic subsided, other upper-middle-class students similarly described resentment regarding their parents' control—particularly regarding COVID-19 safety precautions and fall housing decisions.

In contrast, working-class parents had less financial leverage. Although a few working-

class parents provided financial assistance for tuition or living expenses, the gap between parents' and young adults' financial power was smaller. Many working-class students were completely financially independent, and some reported that they were in a better financial situation than their parents. As a result, they experienced more decisional autonomy. As one working-class student said about her dad, "It all just comes back to this incredible thing, which is: if you don't give me money, then I don't have to listen to you." Other working-class students similarly indicated that being financially independent of parents gave them the authority to make their own decisions—a freedom that many realized their more affluent peers did not share. As Elise (WC, White) explained, "taking my own financial responsibility means that I'm responsible for my own actions. I will call [my parents] for advice but if they disagree, and I want to do something else, I'll do it. I know that's different from a lot of my peers."

However, this freedom came at a cost. Working-class students did not have the luxury to assume a child-like position of dependence. Jayla (WC, Black) explained that although her affluent (and financially dependent) friends were "missing out on having full independence," these friends had the security of knowing that their parents could take care of them if needed. "If it's a good relationship and they know they can ask [their parents] for money," Jayla explained, "Then they [don't] have to stress about, 'Oh, I can't afford this meal, or deodorant, or pads, or new clothes.'" Jayla's comments capture a key tension between freedom and security described by other participants from both class groups.

Perceptions of parents' knowledge. Young adults' understandings of parental authority were also rooted in their perceptions of their parents' knowledge. Those from upper-middle-class families often described seeking parental advice or complying with parental demands because they perceived that their parents possessed more information. In contrast, working-class young

adults did not describe parents as possessing unique or authoritative knowledge. In some cases, working-class young adults indicated that they knew more than their parents—particularly regarding higher education.

Students' confidence in parents' knowledge was especially strong in families where parents worked in medical professions. For example, Noah (UMC, Black) explained why he followed his parents'—two physicians'—advice to stay in the family home:

I contemplated [moving near the university]. I was talking to [my parents] about it but their main problem was that, here at home, if I got sick, they could get me in a spot where they know I will be able to survive and be able to give me the help I need . . . I understood it. I wasn't pissed off. I'm like, "You guys are the experts, I'm not gonna go against [you]."

Other students whose parents worked in nonmedical professions also expressed confidence and relief regarding parents' decisions about their health and safety. For example, Margot (UMC, White) described the relief she felt when she could relinquish the responsibility of making decisions about her own safety to her parents, a college dean and a humanities professor:

I remember getting home and feeling such a weight taken off of my shoulders because I was like, "This is such a controlled space. I'm very happy weathering it out here because I feel like my parents know what's up." It was kind of scary, it was sort of weird [in my off-campus house] being like, "We're literally six 20-year-olds in a house, debating what is safe and none of us have any idea." And obviously neither of my parents are doctors or anything but, I just like got home and felt like, "Okay, I can do this. I know how to function at home, this will be fine."

Here, Margot indicated that she, as a 20-year-old, was too young to make decisions about the pandemic on her own. Like Noah, Margot saw her parents as more capable of making decisions about her safety.

In contrast, working-class students typically saw themselves as having the authority to make their own decisions about housing and safety. With very few exceptions, working-class students did not expect their parents to tell them what to do or think it was necessary to gain

parents' approval. In turn, this greater sense of their own decisional autonomy led working-class students to consider a different range of housing options. For example, Hannah (WC, Black) decided to stay with her cousin. Like Margot's mother, Hannah's mother wanted her daughter to return to the family home. However, Hannah knew she would have more privacy, fewer disruptions, and faster WiFi than if she were to stay with her parents and siblings. "I think that [my mom] was kind of hurt that I decided to not stay at home," Hannah said, explaining that "sometimes it feels like she doesn't understand why I need to be in a quiet space or why it's a big deal that people are running and screaming while I'm in class." As Hannah's description indicates, her housing options were vastly different from Margot's—Hannah's home would be much less conducive to remote learning. Yet Hannah's response also reveals an important difference in relational dynamics: Hannah felt she knew more than her mother and that she had the authority to make her own decisions. Indeed, Hannah explained that it was common for her to act on decisions with which her mom did not agree: "I think that what's very common in [our] relationship is that I'll tell her that I'm going to do something and she's like, 'You probably shouldn't.' And I'm like, 'Well, I'm gonna do it anyway.'"

Although Hannah consulted with her parents in the decision-making process, it was more common for working-class students to update parents after plans were finalized. Working-class parents typically did not have institutional connections or social networks that provided advance warning of the campus shutdown. As a result, working-class students could strategically withhold information to avoid unwanted input or to protect parents from stress. For example, Shelton (WC, Black), explained that he did not consult his parents about housing decisions because he did not want to put additional stress on them:

I feel like I've become very autonomous since coming—honestly, before coming to Elite University, too. I don't want to add more stress to [my parents] because they're already

very stressed out. So, I didn't want to add more to that. I usually handle everything on my own, and I have done so pretty much since I started college.

This explanation indicates consistency between the strategies Shelton employed to cope with the pandemic and his approach to navigating college over the previous four years. Although he was responding to a new situation, Shelton's understanding of his authority to make his own housing decisions, along with his sense of responsibility to protect his parents from stress, led Shelton to demonstrate further autonomy in the face of this new challenge. As I discuss in the following section, sensitivity to parental stress was a common theme among working-class (but not upper-middle-class) students. The former group frequently indicated that their parents' challenges—which commonly included unemployment, financial struggles, health concerns, substance abuse, and care for other family members—were larger than their own.

The Balance of Needs and Preferences

In addition to perceptions of parental authority, young adults' responses were also informed by the relative weight given to family members' needs and preferences. In upper-middle-class families, students generally assumed that their comfort and safety while learning were of central importance and that their parents were responsible for protecting them. Although upper-middle-class parents were understood to have authority over students' housing decisions, the criteria weighted in these decisions typically centered on the young adult's interests. In contrast, although working-class students had more decisional autonomy, their decisions were typically shaped by a greater awareness of parents' needs and vulnerabilities. These patterns persisted beyond the initial decision of where to live during the pandemic and continued to shape patterns of family interaction throughout subsequent months of remote instruction. In the following sections, I describe how these differences shaped young adults' orientations toward parents' material resources, health, and academic involvement.

Material resources: Whose house? Whose bills? Students' narratives about returning to a parents' home revealed striking class differences in terms of feelings of entitlement to parents' material resources. Many upper-middle-class students were already completely financially dependent on their parents; for these students, moving home did not substantially alter the financial equation. Others who had been responsible for "extras" while living at college mentioned that their savings had increased during the time spent at their parents' home. For example, Claire (UMC, Black) explained that although she was expected to put personal take-out orders on her own credit card at college, while living at home she could charge food for the family to her parents' card. "I try to always leverage that," she said. Bella (UMC, White) described a similar arrangement, explaining that: "It didn't hurt that [my parents] were going to pay for all of my food and stuff for that time."

In contrast to Claire and Bella, working-class students felt far less entitled to parents' more limited resources. In some cases, the prospect of imposing a financial burden on parents motivated working-class students to avoid going home in the first place. For example, Shelton (WC, Black), the student who described making independent decisions to protect his family from stress, explained that he also tried to be "self-sufficient" to protect them from financial strain. Likely referring to his impact on the family's utility bills and grocery expenses, Shelton explained that he didn't want to put an "undue burden" on his mom by living with her.

Whereas Shelton tried to help out his parents by being self-sufficient, other working-class students made significant financial contributions to their parents—both before and during the pandemic. This group included some students who were not physically present at the family home yet nonetheless still felt responsible for making sure their parents could get by. Sophie (WC, Black), for example, explained that she continued to pay her dad's phone bill periodically

while living with her partner during the pandemic.

Concern for parents' financial well-being was not unique to working-class students who sought independent housing arrangements. Even students who returned to a parent's home were typically aware of their parents' finite resources and cognizant of their own impact in ways their upper-middle-class peers were not. For example, Elise (WC, White) explained that she "felt really bad and guilty" for her impact on the family's utility bills. Another student, Ariel (WC, Black), recalled that she picked up an extra job as a teaching assistant so that she could cover more of her own expenses while living at home. Overall, these examples illustrate how working-class students' approaches to navigating life during the pandemic were shaped by their recognition of their parents' needs—whether or not they were living with their parents.

Exposure to COVID-19: Who needs to be protected? Second, the weight given to students' and parents' risk of exposure to COVID-19 shaped students' decisions about housing. Whereas many working-class students described fear of exposing parents to the virus as a key reason for avoiding returning home, this perspective was notably absent among the upper-middle-class students. Instead, upper-middle-class students typically emphasized the protection that parents could provide for them. For example, even though Bella (UMC, White) could have remained in her off-campus apartment, she explained that it was more appealing to return to her parents' house because she knew they would take care of her: "Because it was such a scary virus, I was like, 'Okay, I'll just come home and let you guys take care of me,'" Bella said. Other upper-middle-class students voiced confidence in their parents' ability to ensure their physical health, describing how they could depend on parents to assess risks, minimize exposure, provide care if they were to fall ill, and ensure access to the best medical care. Madison (UMC, Black) explained how thankful she was to have "a place to run to when the world is ending and I don't

feel safe.” Even though many upper-middle-class students had been traveling over spring break, they did not describe parents’ vulnerability to the virus as a reason to avoid returning home.

In contrast, it was more common for working-class students to describe concern for parents’ health as a factor when considering where to live. For example, Sophie (WC, Black), who moved to her partner’s off-campus apartment, explained, “I couldn’t go back home because my mother would be a vulnerable person to this virus. She has two lung diseases.” Lexie (WC, White), a junior living on campus before the pandemic, similarly explained that she refused to return home out of concern for her parents’ health, despite her mother’s pleas to the contrary:

My parents are 75 and 63. They both have every single health condition you could think of . . . Once quarantine started in March, one of my first thoughts was, “Shit, I’m not going to see my parents for a long time.” Because even if I get tested. . . I’m paranoid about bringing it into my house. . . My mom is just gonna keep asking me [to come home]. I don’t know what [she’s thinking], because my mom knows that I’m a very stubborn person. When I make a decision about something, especially when it regards her safety, I’m not going to budge on that. I can’t.

As the above comment illustrates, Lexie’s concern for her parents’ physical health and her sense of responsibility to protect them from the virus was a pivotal factor in her decisions regarding housing. In Lexie’s housing equation, her parents’ vulnerabilities and needs were given a great deal of weight. Lexie’s comment also indicates that she saw herself as having the authority to make decisions to protect her parents from harm—even when her parents did not agree.

A handful of upper-middle-class students also expressed concerns about parents’ vulnerability to the virus, yet none of these students described this as a reason to avoid returning home. For example, Aubrey (UMC, White) shared that she was worried about her father, a cancer survivor on immunosuppressant medication: “If he got it, I think he would survive, but it’s always a question because it’s such a severe virus. So, we’re really protective of him,” Aubrey said. Because of her father’s vulnerability, Aubrey questioned whether she should

quarantine from her boyfriend when he came to visit her family. However, she admitted that she probably wouldn't: "I'm having to think about, 'Okay, my boyfriend's coming back in two, three weeks, he's gonna get off a plane coming from California, like, am I not gonna kiss him? Are we going to quarantine from each other for two weeks?' I don't—probably not, if I'm being completely honest." Concern for her father's health did not cause Aubrey to question whether she should return to her parents' home in the first place, or whether her boyfriend should stay with them. Similarly, though other upper-middle-class students stated that their parents were vulnerable to the virus, they did not describe taking precautions beyond their parents' instructions.

Academics: Whose objectives are prioritized? Who is involved? Finally, there were class differences in family dynamics surrounding undergraduates' academic responsibilities. These differences included the extent to which students' academic performance was prioritized (by students as well as parents) and the extent to which parents were involved. Upper-middle-class students described learning environments in which students' comfort and achievement were prioritized by the entire family. And although many of these students mentioned that it was more difficult to focus while at their parents' homes, they rarely described family-related disruptions. For example, Chelsea (UMC, Biracial) explained that her parents, a physician and a business executive, would monitor their children's academic schedules to ensure that household chores didn't interfere with schoolwork. Chelsea explained that this was a system they had worked out when she was in middle and high school: "So if I was ever like, 'I have an assignment due the next day, and I'm going to be up really late at night,' my parents or my sisters would just take over [my chores]."

For many upper-middle-class students, life at home felt "easier" and more "comfortable"

than living independently at college. Levi (UMC, White) captured this sentiment when he described the benefits of living with his parents during the pandemic: “Life is comfortable here. Life's a lot easier here. . . I mean, the food is better. I definitely just have to work less hard, not living independently [at college].” He went on to explain how his mom made his life easier by doing his laundry and cooking dinner for the family. As a result, there was ample time for students like Levi to focus on their college classes: “My schedule right now is just: work until you're called down [for dinner] and then don't.”

Upper-middle-class students also described requesting and/or receiving academic advice from parents. For example, Kyle (UMC, White) recalled how he talked through the decisions about which courses to take with his parents:

I was like, “This is what all my grades look like, now, this is how I could possibly improve them on the final. Do you think it's worth it for me to go pass/fail?” And actually, it was good because we talked about that, we went through every class, and then [my parents] actually helped me decide that I didn't want to pass/fail anything.

Others similarly described seeking parents’ advice in academic concerns, both during and prior to the pandemic. Although Kyle’s conversation about pass/fail was typical, there were also cases in which parents provided more extensive assistance. Noah (UMC, Black) explained that his parents also provided a great deal of hands-on support. Affirming this account, Noah’s mother recalled that she “spent a lot of time helping him organize himself and get up on his assignments and everything.” As time went on, however, she decided that he needed more help than she had the bandwidth to provide and employed a tutor to manage Noah’s remote schooling:

I kind of diagnosed that he needed much more close, frequent touchpoints. . . And so that's really what [the tutor] was—she was a human interaction. She used to come to the house once a week. So she comes live, in-person, and works with him. And then twice a week or two or three times, he talks to her and talks about his classes and where he is. . . I know he's a trooper, but just focusing on your screen every day, I think it's a lot. And so I just—as a mother—made an executive decision on that.

This scenario is consistent with Noah’s description of his parents’ “hands-on” approach to his schooling in elementary school, high school, and college. Noah explained that he knew that if he articulated his needs to his parents, they would either provide direct support or connect him to someone who could:

Since my parents are very active in my learning journey—I guess that’s the best way to put it—they knew what I needed. But if I knew I needed something else as well, or something additional, they would also find a way to provide it. If I knew, “Hey, I need this tutor, I need this type of tutor.” It is like, “Okay, we can find you that.”

As the above quotations illustrate, Noah was not merely a passive recipient of parental assistance. Rather, Noah viewed his parents as capable of and responsible for providing the academic resources he felt he needed. Thus, when challenges arose during the pandemic, Noah once again reached out to his parents for support.

In contrast, working-class students did not typically expect family life to revolve around their academics. Additionally, they did not expect parents to provide academic advice or assistance. First, some working-class students pursued alternative housing arrangements because they anticipated that the physical and relational environments of their parents’ homes would not be conducive to remote learning. Ainsley (WC, White), for example, explained that going home was “never an option” because she knew she would have significant caregiving responsibilities:

I feel like I would revert to more of like my high school maternal role than being a student, and I have not yet found a good balance of those two things. I can either be at home and like, “do home,” or I can be a student, and I don't really do both at the same time. . . . Anytime I visit home, I feel kind of like . . . I want to take better care of [my brothers] and do better. So I'm like, “I'll take you to make sure you're on time for practice” and “I'll cook a dinner with vegetables” and “The house is really messy, so I'm going to organize it.”

Working-class students who stayed with family often indicated that parents were either unaware of their academic needs or had more important issues to deal with. For example, Diamond (WC, Black) explained that although she felt fortunate to have a relatively “fit learning environment”

at her mom's house, family members' interruptions and requests made it difficult to focus on schoolwork. "They don't understand, so I can't blame them for bothering me."

Diamond's acceptance of her familial responsibilities while at home reflects a broader trend among working-class students who returned home. Weighing their own needs and preferences against those of their parents and other family members, working-class students sometimes willingly put their own academics on the back burner to tend to needs they felt were more important, such as caring for a sibling or elderly family member. For example, though Ashley (WC, Black) had initially tried to secure emergency housing to avoid household responsibilities, she realized in retrospect how important her presence had been for her siblings: "I guess I'd be doing more of a disservice by not being here," Ashley concluded. Even so, she was acutely aware of the juxtaposition between her experience and that of her more privileged peers. Ashley described her shock at the interactions she viewed between her peers and their parents in the background of the Zoom screen, in which the college student's comfort while learning seemed to be the forefront of parents' concerns. Ashley explained that she saw herself as a "side character" in her family whereas it seemed like her more affluent peers were the main characters in theirs. Ashley went on to articulate how her more privileged peers, whom she characterized as "kids," saw themselves as being at the center of their parents' universe:

[My peers are] still considered kids. . . . it's still very much a position of like, "I'm your parent, what can I do to help you?" . . . There are other people [like me] who are like, "What can you do to help your parents?" because *they're* the ones experiencing the difficulty and all you have to do is log onto this online class and do X amount of reading or whatever it is you have to do for your class.

This description captures how the different weight given to family members' needs and preferences informed different strategies of action. Ashley saw her parents as "the ones experiencing the difficulty." In turn, Ashley's recognition of her parents' vulnerability guided

her actions during the pandemic, leading her to take on more adult responsibilities.

Finally, working-class students like Ashley did not expect parents to be involved in their academics. Although working-class students reported asking parents for advice on a variety of other topics such as romantic relationships and friendships, many laughed at the idea of asking their parents for advice about an assignment or career-related decision. Ashley joked that she could tell her mom that she was majoring in “strawberries” and her mom would be happy, explaining that she felt a strong “separation of school and home.” Similarly, when asked whether she asked her mom for advice about anything while in college, Lexie (WC, White) replied:

If I were to call [my mom] right now and ask her, “Hey, do you have any advice for like, how to get As in all my classes?” she would have no idea. Or, “Do you have any advice for what career I want to do?” Like, she would just say, like, “Do what makes you happy, you'll be successful.” Which is great. Sure. That's great advice. But like, I already know that, you know what I mean?

These findings demonstrate how differences in parents’ educational backgrounds shaped students’ understandings of the parent/young adult relationship over time, ultimately producing different relational expectations and patterns of interaction.

DISCUSSION

Like other crises, the large-scale disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic offer a novel opportunity to examine social processes often hidden from view (Klinenberg, 2003). This study examined the relational understandings underlying the intergenerational transfer of class advantage in a time of crisis. Across class, young adults employed different strategies to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Their strategies were guided by classed understandings of the parent/young adult relationship. These understandings shaped what students felt they deserved from or owed to their parents, how they perceived their parents’ level of control or vulnerability,

and whether returning to the family home was “the only option” or “never an option.”

Upper-middle-class students assumed a privileged position of dependence as they sought direction and material assistance from parents. In these families, parents’ greater socioeconomic resources and the shared assumption that students would continue to rely on parents’ resources during college made dependence seem not only possible but natural. Parents were typically understood to possess authority over the students’ actions and to be responsible for ensuring all family members’ well-being. These relationships were distinctly child-centered, as both parents and students prioritized the student’s learning, comfort, and safety. Bradford’s (UMC, Biracial) experience, as discussed above, illustrates this pattern well—the family’s conflict over fall housing stemmed from conflicting opinions about what was best for Bradford.

In contrast, working-class students displayed precarious autonomy. They typically assumed more responsibility for their own—and sometimes other family members’—well-being. Working-class students frequently indicated that they had both the authority to make their own decisions and the responsibility to figure things out on their own. Overall, they demonstrated greater awareness of parents’ needs and often provided significant financial and practical assistance to other family members. For example, Shelton’s process of securing emergency campus housing both illustrates his expectation for decisional autonomy and reveals his sense of responsibility to protect his parents from stress and financial strain.

Students’ options for dealing with educational disruptions were clearly constrained by their immediate circumstances at the onset of the pandemic. Yet, this study goes beyond documenting resource constraints to reveal how inequality also shapes relational understandings, emotions, and interactions—the subjective dimensions of social class (Cooper, 2014; Kim et al. 2016). To be sure, the availability of parents’ financial resources was a necessary condition for

the material dependence among upper-middle-class students. However, the mere existence of these resources was not a sufficient condition for this dependence. The direction and assistance that upper-middle-class young adults received from parents during the pandemic required both parents and young adults to see strategies of dependence as natural, desirable, and/or necessary.

Working-class students, of course, did not have the option to be dependent on parents—at least, not to the extent of their more-resourced peers. Already economically vulnerable, many working-class families suffered further financial strain during the pandemic. Additionally, working-class parents' lack of familiarity with higher education and professional career paths meant that they were less equipped to assist in these areas. In addition to these factors, relational understandings of authority, needs, and responsibility also shaped students' decision-making processes in ways that cannot be reduced to economic calculations based on immediate resource constraints. Consider the case of Lexie (WC, White), who refused to return to her parents' home despite her mother's pleas to the contrary. Although Lexie theoretically had the option to return to her parents' home after the campus shut down, this was never an option that Lexie herself considered. Instead, Lexie attempted to secure alternative housing arrangements through university resources and peer networks. The strategies Lexie employed to cope with the pandemic reflect a class-specific understanding of the parent/young adult relationship. Lexie believed she had the authority to make her own decisions; she felt a duty to protect her parents from exposure to the virus; and she saw herself as responsible for managing her own schooling, housing, and finances.

These findings have important implications for understanding class inequality. In upper-middle-class families, greater socioeconomic resources and the shared expectation for substantial dependence on parents insulated students from many negative effects of the pandemic.

Privileged dependence allowed these young adults to focus on schoolwork and other resume-building activities; take unpaid internships; and save money for the future. These short-term advantages may yield further profits as young adults pursue graduate education, enter the labor market, and start their own families.

In working-class families, in contrast, students' academic progress and financial stability often took a backseat to others—including parents'—needs. Students who pursued independent living arrangements typically described significant stress and academic distractions as they struggled to find a place to live, secure adequate technology for remote learning, and pay for basic living expenses on their own. Additionally, some who returned home tried to be as self-sufficient as possible to avoid being a “burden” to their parents. Further, many provided significant financial and practical assistance to parents and other family members. These findings echo Estrada's (2019) description of “economic empathy” among children of Latinx street vendors, suggesting that the experience of parents' economic vulnerability also foster greater empathy among young adults with native-born parents. They provide further evidence that the reciprocal parent/young adult relationships traditionally observed within recent immigrant groups (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002) have broader relevance among socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

These findings are relevant to stratification processes because young adults' assistance to parents and other family members may compound social inequalities in families that are most vulnerable. If disadvantaged young adults are investing time and money to meet parents' and other family members' needs while their more privileged counterparts are the recipients of parental investments, they may be at a double disadvantage. Though there are similar hints in previous studies (DeLuca et al., 2016; Napolitano, 2015), this potential mechanism of social

reproduction warrants further attention from family and stratification scholars.

However, we should not assume that middle-class cultural repertoires are inherently or uniformly advantageous. The findings also suggest tensions in the socioeconomic, developmental, and relational consequences of prolonged material and social-psychological dependence on parents. Consistent with prior research that links overparenting to poor parent/child communication and lower relational satisfaction (Segrin et al., 2012), I found that parental control sometimes produced resentment and conflict. Psychologists have argued that healthy development and functioning are contingent upon the fulfillment of three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People must feel free to make their own choices (autonomy), be confident in their abilities (competence), and be relationally close to others (relatedness). To the extent that the patterns of dependence described above undermine these conditions, they may inhibit well-being even as they enable upper-middle-class young adults to maintain their parents' privileged class status. Though measuring these outcomes is beyond the scope of the present study, my findings indicate that understanding the context and consequences of autonomy and dependence will be crucial to understanding young adults' pathways through the transition to adulthood.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Laurin Bixby, Alec Gershberg, Emily Hannum, Lauren Harris, Olivia Hu, Joyce Kim, Barbara Kiviat, Demie Kurz, Annette Lareau, Hyunjoon Park, Wendy Roth, Jennifer Silva, Jack Thornton, Andres Villatoro, and the members of the University of Pennsylvania's Education and Inequality workshop for their helpful advice and feedback on this project. I am also deeply grateful for the research assistance of Karolyn DeKam, Kirstin Montsma, Kassandra Schwartz, Melissa VanDerHart, Susan Van Winkle, David Van Winkle, Victoria Verhulst, and Rebekah Yurschak. This project was supported by grants from Penn's Center for the Study of Ethnicity, Race, and Immigration and Penn's School of Arts and Sciences Student Government (SASGov), as well as by a scholarship from the Bassi Foundation. I am also grateful for Kate Epstein's editorial assistance and for the financial support of the Institute of Education Sciences Predoctoral Training Fellowship Program under award #3505B200035 to the University of Pennsylvania. The opinions expressed are my own and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. T. (2015). *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, T., & LeMoyne, T. (2020). Helicopter Parenting and the Moderating Impact of Gender and Single-Parent Family Structure on Self-Efficacy and Well-Being. *The Family Journal*, 28(3), 262–272. doi:10.1177/1066480720925829
- Calarco, J. M. (2011). “I Need Help!” Social Class and Children’s Help-Seeking in Elementary School. *American Sociological Review; Washington*, 76(6), 862–882. doi: 10.1177/0003122411427177
- Cooper, M. (2014). *Cut adrift: Families in insecure times*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Covarrubias, R., Valle, I., Laiduc, G., & Azmitia, M. (2019). “You Never Become Fully Independent”: Family Roles and Independence in First-Generation College Students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 34(4), 381–410. doi:10.1177/0743558418788402
- Dawson, M. C. (1995). *Behind the mule: Race and class in African-American politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- DeLuca, S., Clampet-Lundquist, S., & Edin, K. (2016). *Coming of age in the other America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Deterding, N. M., & Waters, M. C. (2018). Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 1–32. doi:10.1177/0049124118799377
- Fingerman, K. L., Cheng, Y.-P., Wesselmann, E. D., Zarit, S., Furstenberg, F., & Birditt, K. S. (2012). Helicopter Parents and Landing Pad Kids: Intense Parental Support of Grown Children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(4), 880–896. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00987.x
- Fuligni, A. J., & Pedersen, S. (2002). Family obligation and the transition to young adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 38(5), 856–868. doi:10.1037//0012-1649.38.5.856
- Hamilton, L. T. (2016). *Parenting to a degree: How family matters for college women’s success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamilton, L. T., & Armstrong, E. A. (2021). Parents, Partners, and Professions: Reproduction and Mobility in a Cohort of College Women. *American Journal of Sociology*, 127(1), 102–151. doi:10.1086/714850
- Harrington, B. (2022). “It’s More Us Helping Them Instead of Them Helping Us”: How Class Disadvantage Motivates Asian American College Students to Help Their Parents. *Journal*

of Family Issues, 0192513X211064867. doi:10.1177/0192513X211064867

- Hurst, A. L. (2020). *Amplified advantage: Going to a “good” college in an era of inequality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Johnson, M. K. (2013). Parental Financial Assistance and Young Adults’ Relationships With Parents and Well-being: Parental Financial Assistance. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75(3), 713–733. doi:10.1111/jomf.12029
- Kim, B.H., Lee, J. K., & Park, H. (2016). Marriage, Independence, and Adulthood among Unmarried Women in South Korea. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 44(3), 338–362.
- Klinenberg, E. (2003). *Heat wave: A social autopsy of disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kurz, D. (Forthcoming). *Letting Go: Mothers and Teenagers Negotiate Adolescence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lanuza, Y. R. (2020). Giving (Money) Back To Parents: Racial/Ethnic and Immigrant–Native Variation in Monetary Exchanges During the Transition to Adulthood. *Sociological Forum*, 35(4), 1157–1182. doi:10.1111/socf.12642
- Lareau, A. (2014). Schools, Housing, and the Reproduction of Inequality. In K. Goyette & A. Lareau (Eds.), *Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools* (pp. 169–206). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant-Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lareau, A., & Cox, A. (2011). Social Class and the Transition to Adulthood. In M. J. Carlson & P. England (Eds.), *Social Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America* (pp. 134–164). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Louie, V. S. (2012). *Keeping the immigrant bargain: The costs and rewards of success in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Napolitano, L. (2015). “I’m Not Going to Leave Her High and Dry”: Young Adult Support to Parents during the Transition to Adulthood. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 56(2), 329–354. doi:10.1111/tsq.12088
- Pattillo, M. E. (2013). *Black picket fences: Privilege and peril among the black middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roksa, J., & Silver, B. R. (2019). “Do-It-Yourself” University: Institutional and Family Support in the Transition Out of College. *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(3), 1051–1071. doi:10.1353/rhe.2019.0029

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68
- Schiffrrin, H. H., Liss, M., Miles-McLean, H., Geary, K. A., Erchull, M. J., & Tashner, T. (2014). Helping or Hovering? The Effects of Helicopter Parenting on College Students' Well-Being. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *23*(3), 548–557. doi:10.1007/s10826-013-9716-3
- Segrin, C., Woszidlo, A., Givertz, M., Bauer, A., & Murphy, M. T. (2012). The Association Between Overparenting, Parent-Child Communication, and Entitlement and Adaptive Traits in Adult Children. *Family Relations*, *61*(2), 237–252.
- Silva, J. M., & Snellman, K. (2018). Salvation or Safety Net? Meanings of “College” among Working- and Middle-Class Young Adults in Narratives of the Future. *Social Forces*, *97*(2), 559–582. doi:10.1093/sf/soy050
- Stuber, J. M. (2011). *Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Swartz, T. T. (2008). Family capital and the invisible transfer of privilege: Intergenerational support and social class in early adulthood. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *119*, 11–24. doi:10.1002/cd.206
- Swartz, T. T., Kim, M., Uno, M., Mortimer, J., & O'Brien, K. B. (2011). Safety Nets and Scaffolds: Parental Support in the Transition to Adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *73*(2), 414–429. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00815.x
- Tseng, V. (2004). Family Interdependence and Academic Adjustment in College: Youth From Immigrant and U.S.-Born Families. *Child Development*, *75*(3), 966–983. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2004.00717.x
- Winner, N. A., & Nicholson, B. C. (2018). Overparenting and Narcissism in Young Adults: The Mediating Role of Psychological Control. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *27*(11), 3650–3657. doi:10.1007/s10826-018-1176-3
- Wolf, D. S., Sax, L., & Harper, C. E. (2009). Parental Engagement and Contact in the Academic Lives of College Students. *NASPA Journal*, *46*(2), 325–358. doi:10.2202/1949-6605.6044

APPENDIX

Table 2. *Detailed Sample Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Class	Race	Gender	Grad year	Mother's Education	Father's Education
Chad	UMC	Black	Man	2021	MBA	MA
Christopher	UMC	Black	Man	2023	BS	JD
Oliver	UMC	Black	Man	2021	JD	JD
Claire	UMC	Black	Woman	2022	JD	MBA
Noah*	UMC	Black	Man	2023	MD	MD
Cassidy	UMC	Black	Woman	2021	BA	MSW
Madelyn	UMC	Black	Woman	2021	PhD	BA
Kassandra*	UMC	Black	Woman	2021	MD	MD
Natasha	UMC	Black	Woman	2022	MBA	MBA
Bradford	UMC	Multiracial	Man	2023	PHD	PHD
Chelsea*	UMC	Multiracial	Woman	2021	MD	MBA
Bridget	UMC	Multiracial	Woman	2023	MBA	JD
Brennan	UMC	White	Man	2022	MA	MA
Alice	UMC	White	Woman	2021	BS	PhD
Aubrey*	UMC	White	Woman	2020	MA	MA
Caitlin	UMC	White	Woman	2022	BS	MBA
Ben	UMC	White	Man	2020	JD	MBA
Maria*	UMC	White	Woman	2021	MA	MS
Margot	UMC	White	Woman	2021	PhD	PhD
Kyle	UMC	White	Man	2021	BA.	MS
Olivia	UMC	White	Nonbinary	2021	PhD	MA
Bella	UMC	White	Woman	2021	MA	MA
Levi	UMC	White	Man	2023	PhD	MBA
Esty	UMC	White	Nonbinary	2022	PhD	MBA
Amanda	UMC	White	Woman	2021	BS	MBA
Shelton	WC	Black	Man	2021	Some college	< HS
Sophie	WC	Black	Woman	2020	HS/GED	HS/GED
Malik	WC	Black	Man	2020	Vocational	HS/GED
Hannah	WC	Black	Woman	2021	HS/GED	HS/GED
Zeke*	WC	Black	Man	2023	HS/GED	HS/GED
Diamond	WC	Black	Woman	2023	HS/GED	HS/GED
Ashley	WC	Black	Woman	2023	HS/GED	Absent
Jayla	WC	Black	Woman	2021	Some college	Absent

SUBMITTED VERSION

Ariel*	WC	Black	Woman	2023	HS/GED	HS/GED
Jasmine*	WC	Black	Woman	2021	Associate's	Absent
Harvey	WC	Black	Man	2021	Less than HS	HS/GED
Zoe	WC	Black	Woman	2022	Vocational	Absent
Deja	WC	Multiracial	Woman	2023	HS/GED	HS/GED
Jackson	WC	Multiracial	Man	2022	HS/GED	Deceased
Elise*	WC	White	Woman	2021	Associate's	Vocational
Leslie*	WC	White	Nonbinary	2020	HS/GED	HS/GED
Quinn	WC	White	Woman	2023	Some college	Absent
Ainsley	WC	White	Woman	2021	HS/GED	HS/GED
Jana	WC	White	Woman	2021	HS/GED	Absent
Taylor	WC	White	Woman	2021	Deceased	HS/GED
Lexie	WC	White	Woman	2022	HS/GED	HS/GED
Jennifer	WC	White	Woman	2022	Deceased	HS/GED
Shawn	WC	White	Man	2021	HS/GED	HS/GED
