

The Effects of Guilt In Latinx First Generation College Students and Their Academic
Performance

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ABSTRACT

First generation college students often experience guilt that comes from taking opportunities their parents never had or just from going to college in general. Some students experience this guilt as a positive motivator to achieve. But others experience it as a burden that can lead to higher dropout rates. How do the different experiences of guilt in first generation college students affect their academic performance? This study will utilize a survey which will gather information in regards to the student's demographics followed by an interview focusing on the student's experience in college and with guilt. The interview will allow us to utilize their experiences to understand why this may have happened and how they will move on from it. questions will revolve around what the guilt was and how they reacted to it, analyzing what patterns did it cause them to follow and how they coped. The goal of this study is to build a better understanding of guilt in first generation college students to set the foundation for the opportunity to delve into more research for this topic.

SPECIFIC AIMS

The aim of this study is to further understand and study the guilt that first generation college students face utilizing surveys, interviews, and questionnaires to analyze commonalities within feelings of guilt in students and what contributed to these feelings. The aim is to fully investigate what college campuses could contribute to aid these students based on success stories and failures.

BACKGROUND/SIGNIFICANCE

First generation college students are defined as the first person in their family to go to college. College is an experience where students come face to face with opportunities for their own personal, professional, and academic growth. With the role of being a first generation college student comes difficulties that arise past the traditional difficulties adjusting to college. This guilt is sometimes referred to as "survivor's guilt" which involves the negative emotions that surface because of the state of being in a "better position" than others. As described by Covarrubias et. al, (2014) "family achievement guilt is guilt that makes students feel uncomfortable for having more higher education opportunities and college success than their family members. As a result, students may feel that they have to minimize their academic success when with their family members." Specifically, first generation college students that receive an education/start a career that others (i.e. their parents) did not have the same opportunities to do due to the sacrifices their parents had to make to create a stable life manifest feelings of guilt within these students that can have negative effects on their mental health and performance, cause familial problems, and create difficulties for the student to continue, contributing to the growing dropout rates. This is based upon comparing your experiences to that of your parents. Currently, there are not many studies revolving around this topic. In 2017, a study was conducted by Pratt et. al. which focused on the retention of first generation college students which utilized surveys to analyze retention rates, finding that "first generation college students (FGCS) encounter more difficulty performing well academically, fitting into the campus environment, and making new friends than non-FGCS" this is due to having more added stressors like employment and issues like guilt. This study is personal to myself because I have experienced these feelings to the point where I wanted to drop out and felt like I had no help. I recognized the position I was in as a student in

certain programs and quickly realized not all students who feel similarly as me have the same knowledge of resources.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does guilt present itself in first generation college students?

What barriers does guilt create for first generation college students?

How does guilt manifest itself within Latinx first generation college students to become a motivational or detrimental factor?

What resources have been successfully utilized by students affected by guilt and how can they be implemented on college campuses nationwide?

RESEARCH DESIGNS/METHODS

The recruitment process of this study will have both an in person and online method/process. The campus process will consist of flyers shared and printed in resource areas where there are large populations of Latinx groups, and also common, populated areas of the university, specifically, the University Center, the ONDAS Student Center, and the Student Resource Building in an attempt to recruit participants for the study. The researchers will also establish contact with Latinx/multicultural campus organizations. Through social media, invitations to participate in the study will be shared on popular social media apps like Instagram and shared via email through academic departments via an infographic which will contain the requirements and a description of the study. The conditions will be shared as well and are as follows:

- 1) Identify as a first generation college student in undergrad who is living away from home
- 2) Identify as Latinx
- 3) Has surpassed their first year of college
- 4) Has experienced doubts about completing their bachelor's degree
- 5) Have experienced guilt because they went away for college.

Each flyer will have a QR code which leads to a Google Form where they will insert their contact information with the questions above, concluding with a demographic questionnaire. This will allow for researchers to keep track as well as select the participants. The demographic questionnaire will consist of questions regarding their background and general information: school year, majors/minors, cultural background, and where their parents are from. It will follow a survey format with write-in responses. Some examples of possible questions are: What is your major? What year of undergraduate are you in? What ethnicity do you identify with?

A campus experience questionnaire will also be utilized to analyze how each student felt on campus and how the campus experience affected their time here. It will also reflect on how as a first generation college student, if they felt good or bad about leaving home, and including questions regarding if certain resources were available and helpful.

The interview protocol will begin with a consent form that is to be signed by the participant to confirm confidentiality, their rights, as well as a timeline of the study. Then, they will be directed to a private space where the interview will take place with 2 of the researchers. It is important to analyze the relationship between demographics and how it connects to influential factors. The interview will have a series of questions which, as mentioned previously, will center around the experience in attending a university as a Latinx first generation college student, the Latinx background, and whether they experienced difficulties related to guilt (academic, familial,

environmental, or situational). The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Sample questions include:

- 1) What kind of differences do you think exist between you and those who are not first generation college students that create a barrier between your college experiences?
- 2) How do you think being first gen affected your experience?
- 3) Do you think that you would have felt the same way about your guilt if you were not first gen? How would having a parent who attended college affect the way you felt about your situation?
- 4) Have you ever experienced feeling guilty because you are here attending college and your parents didn't?
- 5) Did outside factors affect your level of guilt? (family, environment, situations)
- 6) How did your guilt affect your academic performance?
- 7) During your first year of college, what contributed to any doubts or motivations of college that you had?

Students at the University of California, Santa Barbara will be offered to participate in this study through flyers which will be posted throughout campus and shared digitally. The researchers will organize opportunities to share the information about the project by outreaching to groups where the Latinx population is heavily populated. 150 participants will be selected from the initial pool of participants in the entry survey/Google Form and will be given information about the next steps in participation, in which they will be given further information regarding meetings and when the interviews will be conducted. In these meetings, consent forms will be given about the study and their rights with a detailed timeline. Participants will be given two questionnaires to complete which consist of: 1 demographically based one with open write-in questions and 1 more centered on the campus experience in a scale format from 1 to 5. In total it will be around an hour with the questionnaires being approximately 25 minutes and the actual interview with open ended questions for 30 minutes. The final part will be the analysis of questionnaire and interview answers which will set the basis to understand what types of guilt each student faces, how this affected their thoughts about leaving or motivations for staying in college, and how they have essentially dealt with the guilt.

Works Cited

Covarrubias, Rebecca, et al. "Family Achievement Guilt and Mental Well-Being of College Students." *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, vol. 24, no. 7, 2014, pp. 2031–2037, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-014-0003-8>.

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