

Spring 2021

The Pressure Cooker of Higher Education: Multiple Predictors of Pressure to Succeed Among Today's College Students

John Michael Richards
Bard College, jr6759@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2021



Part of the [Developmental Psychology Commons](#), and the [School Psychology Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Richards, John Michael, "The Pressure Cooker of Higher Education: Multiple Predictors of Pressure to Succeed Among Today's College Students" (2021). *Senior Projects Spring 2021*. 314.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2021/314

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2021 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Running head: FACTORS IN PRESSURE TO SUCCEED

The Pressure Cooker of Higher Education: Multiple Predictors of Pressure to Succeed Among
Today's College Students

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Science, Mathematics, and Computing

by
John Michael Richards

Annandale-On-Hudson, New York

May, 2021

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to my senior project advisor Professor Richard Lopez. Your understanding, patience, and character have guided and inspired me throughout this year. Your constant encouragement and energy made this project possible. Thank you for dealing with my many topic changes, consoling me when I was overwhelmed, and never giving up on me.

Thank you to my academic advisor Professor Sarah Dunphy-Lelii. You make Bard the special place that it is.

I would like to further thank all of my professors at Bard for inspiring me everyday to think more critically, be present, and for all that you give to your students. I am forever grateful.

Thank you to all of my friends who have stood by my side and bring new life everyday to this world: Noah Gichan, Alex Luscher, Theo Webb, Luke Klatke, Isabel Polletta, TJ Kostecky, and my many friends on the squash team and abroad—you are all special bogans.

Additionally, I would like to thank Coach Craig Thorpe-Clark for your mentorship, friendship, and guidance throughout my time at Bard. You have done more than teach me squash; thank you for encouraging my spirit, always believing in me, and showing me what attitude and character are all about.

To Giordana, thank you for your love and support. You are a dream.

Of course, I would like to thank the hippest sister around, Ava Rose Richards. Thank you for your love, support and tea. I love you.

To my father and mother, thank you for all that you have given me. We have come so far.

To the rest of my family, thank you for your love and support. I love you all: Grandpa Jack, Grandma Leslie, Nana, Uncle Rob, and, of course, Ridley and Webster.

FACTORS IN PRESSURE TO SUCCEED

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
American University Tuition Since the 1970s.....	3
Impact of Tuition on Life Satisfaction and Well-Being In American College Students.....	5
Where the Burden Falls: The Pressure to Succeed.....	7
The Present Study.....	8
Method.....	9
Participants.....	9
<i>A Priori</i> Power Analysis.....	10
Measures.....	10
Tuition.....	10
Parental Influence.....	11
Academic Self-Concept As a Factor In the Pressure to Succeed.....	12
Procedure.....	12
Results.....	13
Figure 1.....	14
Figure 2.....	14
Discussion.....	15
Limitations and Future Directions.....	17
Conclusion.....	19
Appendix A: Survey with ASCS.....	20
Appendix B: IRB Proposal.....	22
Appendix C: Consent Form.....	25
References.....	27

Abstract

This study was aimed at understanding the various factors that affect pressure to succeed amongst American college students, with an emphasis on the financial burden of tuition. Previous research on tuition costs demonstrates that the cost to attend university has steadily and drastically increased since the mid-1970s. Student well-being and satisfaction is considered in light of the many causes of stress in a student's everyday life. The burden of tuition, familial pressure, and academic self-concept are discussed as dynamic factors in student pressure to succeed. Student well-being and the impact of stress on student learning is also introduced in the research. In this study I analyzed students' pressure to succeed using a survey that was distributed over the online platform Prolific to 78 participants. Results indicated that the most highly correlated factor with overall reported pressure was tuition cost. Second to tuition, I found that parental pressure was marginally correlated with overall pressure. Lastly, there was no correlation between academic self-concept and overall reported pressure. Possible causes for these findings are discussed. I hope that this research will create further interest into possible areas that affect students' pressure to succeed and aims at promoting equal opportunity for all students to succeed in higher education.

It feels like most university students are pressured in their academic lives—and rightfully so. Academic life at the university level, as well as in secondary school, is a never ending cycle of essays, revisions, readings, tests, presentations, problem sets, research, and class preparation. It certainly is a gruelling lifestyle for most students. In addition to the academic grind, students in higher education are also focused on necessary problems outside of the classroom: Where do I live? What do I do with my degree? How do I take care of myself for the first time on my own? These questions are what you will find buried underneath the stacks of books and papers on every dorm room desk. Pressure—internally, externally, existentially, emotionally—accompanies most students every day. There is no speculation about it: Furr et. al. (2001) conducted a study into depression rates amongst American college students which found that 53% of the students reported that they experienced depression and 9% had considered suicide since beginning college¹. It is important to note that within this study the greatest factors that contributed to depression among students since they began college were grade problems (53% of the depressed students), loneliness (51%), money problems (50%), and relationship problems with boyfriend/girlfriend (48%). Other contributing factors included hopelessness (26%), parental problems (25%), helplessness (17%), other (13%), don't know (5%), and legal problems (5%) (Furr et al., 2001). If academic issues were set aside, the factors that contributed to depression rates from outside of the classroom were exceptionally taxing. Emotional and psychological well-being is often hurt by poor academic performance, yet this study provides insight into the factors that may be contributing to overall depression that stem from factors not related to school work.

¹ Furr, S. R., Westefeld, J. S., McConnell, G. N., & Jenkins, J. M. (2001). Suicide and depression among college students: A decade later. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(1), 97–100.

When one considers the outstanding opportunity students have when they attend university, why should any student be troubled with such problems? After all, students spend their time in lectures, discussing, reading, and filling themselves with new ideas. Students at university still struggle with the everyday pressures of student life: tuition and loan debt, social pressure and the everyday stress of living. Depression has been studied amongst the American college student population. Financial stress has been studied, documented, and recognized as a stressor on college students. Further questions are still worth investigating: Do students in four-year colleges face greater pressure to succeed because of their rigorous academic lifestyle? What is the emotional—if any—impact on the students' ability to learn and study without the fiscal and social pressures that often confine them? What do students think of themselves as they go through the college process and does this have any affect on their learning? This study aims to address these questions through the lens of three different perspectives: pressure to succeed because of the huge price tag universities have as their sticker price, familial pressure and influence, and internal pressure stemming from academic self-concept. To clarify, academic self-concept is the belief one has about themselves as a student. Beyond 'I'm a good student' or 'I'm a bad student,' academic self-concept encompasses how a student perceives themselves in every aspect of their academic life. Do they feel they are better at writing essays than solving math problems or vice versa? Self-concept is how one has conceptualized their own belief—or set of beliefs—about themselves.

American University Tuition Since the 1970s

College students today face the largest financial burden than ever before in history starting with skyrocketing tuition rates since the mid-1970s. For the 1976-77 academic year, the average cost of tuition and fees for a four-year public university was \$2,600; the average cost of

tuition and fees for the same schools in 2016-17 was \$9,650². For a private, non-profit, four-year university the average cost of tuition in 1976-77 was \$10,680 compared to the average cost of tuition now which stands at \$37,650 (College Board, 2021). If we consider this in perspective between *then* and *now*, some estimates show that state and local government used to cover up to 60% of tuition and fees, now they only cover less than 40% as of 2012 (Cahalan & Perna, 2015). The burden of tuition has shifted heavily onto students and frequently, their families. Students today are no longer able to ‘work their way through school.’ Hemelt and Marcotte (2011) found that an increase of \$100 to the tuition mean would reduce college admission up to 25% (Hemelt and Marcotte, 2011). With the accumulation over the years of rising tuition costs, the burden on families and students makes student debt \$739 billion more than the entire credit card debt in the U.S.³ Today, student debt has soared above \$1.6 trillion.

Since 2001, there has been a 19% decrease in student support in higher education from state funding; furthermore, the Pell Grant, which covered 76% of tuition in the 1970s, now covers only 28% of all college costs⁴. Considering these statistics, there quickly becomes a visible gap in the overall accessibility to higher education. Consider this: the total amount spent on tuition for the American senate in 2018 was \$948 thousand (in today’s dollars) and the price for students in 2018 to attend the same universities was \$2.9 Million (Demos, 2018). What is the outcome for students? A debt system that forces newly graduated students into a position where they have to worry about paying off their college debt, which makes early career advancements incredibly difficult. Many students find themselves looking for job opportunities that help with debt relief. There is a sense of ‘restrained freedom’ as if there are barriers to being a fully

² Research collected from Demos (2018). *When Congress Went To College*.

³ U.S. Student Loan Debt Statistics for 2021. (2021, January 27). Retrieved from <https://studentloanhero.com/student-loan-debt-statistics/>

⁴ State Higher Education Executive Officers; College Board

independent, functioning adult. A student's future may be on hold. In a broad sense, students start their lives with a looming shadow over their future. In a study that was conducted in 2008 to assess the relationship between financial stress and student persistence, Joo, Durband, and Grable (2008) found that self reported financial stress was highly correlated with students that reduced their course load or took time off of school to spend more time working so they could pay off student and credit card debt (Joo, Durband & Grable, 2008). A trend of this nature placed unprecedented stress on students to succeed, which in turn may have larger implications than simply loan debt.

Impact of Tuition on Life Satisfaction and Well-Being In American College Students

Tuition stress often plays a large role in a student's academic life, which is coped with differently by every student. One's sense of satisfaction with their life is completely *subjective*, so it is unrealistic to set a strict criteria for which everyone will be measured against. Defining life satisfaction thus becomes a far more nuanced task because one cannot sacrifice the individuality that comes with a personal judgment of one's own life. Life satisfaction is best defined as a "cognitive judgmental process in which individuals assess the quality of their lives on the basis of their own unique set of criteria. A comparison of one's perceived life circumstances with a self-imposed standard or set of standards is presumably made, and to the degree that conditions match these standards, the person reports high life satisfaction. Therefore, life satisfaction is a conscious cognitive judgment of one's life in which the criteria for judgment are up to the person" (Pavot & Diener, 1993, 164). Based on individual preferences, there are a number of behaviors and activities that one might find fulfilling and any of which can therefore count as contributing to life satisfaction. In regards to this study, this understanding of life satisfaction is important because it provides insight into the interior perspective of tuition stress

that students grapple with. Every student will perceive tuition stress differently and every student will perceive the extent to which tuition plays a role in their overall pressure to succeed.

Subjective well-being consists of the affective component (pleasant and unpleasant affect) and the cognitive component (understood as life satisfaction). These components are separate, but *somewhat* correlated: “there should be a degree of convergence between life satisfaction and emotional well-being because both depend on evaluative appraisals” (Pavot & Diener, 1993, 165). Several approaches to satisfaction are worth discussing as they will most likely be relevant to this study. Family satisfaction is considered to be a fundamental factor in life satisfaction. Bowen (1988) discusses a value-based approach to family satisfaction that claims that the family unit is essentially an emotional network that spans several generations. Bowen’s approach provides a familial perspective, one that bases “satisfaction” on the health and well-being of one’s familial relationships. Familial pressure to succeed can be informed by the family history that one comes from. For example, students with parents that are both PhD recipients and teach at Yale may feel differently about their academic success than students who have parents that view education not as a lifestyle, but as a means to an end.

An important perspective to consider on well-being is that well-being is a feeling of “whole” versus “empty,” which also implies a value judgement. Peterson (2005) focussed on an orientation to happiness and life satisfaction through a personal, evaluative judgement on the overall *feeling* one has of their life—one that is whole or ‘empty.’ Emotional well-being and individual perspective are equally important components making up the whole of one’s outlook on life. Emotional life, as it is informed by our family histories and early development, is dynamic. Subjective well-being is often associated with our familial influences and should be considered as a dynamic factor that may contribute to a student’s overall pressure to succeed.

Where the Burden Falls: The Pressure to Succeed

Considering high tuition costs, social and family pressure, where can we say the burden falls? Obviously, the burden falls on the student. How? Britt et al. (2017) conducted a study into student loans, financial stress, financial counseling and college retention rates. The study concluded that students with higher financial stress were more likely to discontinue college; students that ended up taking time off from school were also more likely to do so the following year after seeking financial counseling (Brett et al., 2017). This study only included current students and did not include the students that dropped out of university entirely. Tuition rates are hard to accommodate for many students and families. It is clear, even with students that seek financial guidance or help, are often at the mercy of systemic problems.

Research has been conducted into the nature of pressure from a social perspective. Benoit (2019) conducted a study into the nature of the pressure from several social factors: parents, coaches, teachers, the self, and friends. Benoit's examination accounted for the number of hours in sleeping, homework, extracurricular activities, associated strain and enjoyment. Results found that overall pressure was most highly associated with pressure from the self, which stemmed from internalized pressure from school work and commitments (Benoit, 2019). Overwhelmingly, students find themselves burdened with the many commitments that they feel they need to make. Consequently, students, according to the results found in Benoit (2019), seem to internalize these pressures and make a value judgement upon themselves. Student's that desire to work hard and achieve high are surely often left with a sense of inadequacy due to the excessive pressures placed on them to academically succeed in the classroom and after school.

Adding to already significant work into the relationship between pressure and school performance, (Davis 2014) ran a study into the pressure to succeed and memory performance.

Davis split 67 college students into two groups, a pressure group and a non-pressure group, and had them complete a memory examination. Results showed that participants with low-trait anxiety performed much better than the pressure group on the memory test. Davis further hypothesized that students who performed well on the memorization test were more likely to do so because they were more motivated to perform better (Davis, 2014). Davis reasons that a slight amount of pressure is a good thing. Stress is not always negative and often leads individuals to be motivated to work harder and achieve more. But, it should also be noted that these students that performed well were motivated by doing well. Students that are hampered by goals that are too high may not feel the same need to perform well.

The Present Study

Pressure to succeed is defined in this study as the external and internal stress to perform well a student perceives in their life. The factors examined in this study are certain contributing indicators that may contribute to a student's pressure to succeed. The present study poses the following research questions: Is there a correlation between tuition cost and pressure to succeed? Is there a correlation between familial pressure and the pressure to succeed? Is there a correlation between self-perceived abilities and the pressure to succeed? If there are correlations found, which factor is the highest contributing to a student's pressure to succeed: socioeconomic pressure, familial pressure, or the perception of one's own abilities? Positing these questions, I hypothesize that one's abilities are at the forefront of one's work and will be a significant finding in this study. 'One's abilities' refers to a student's intuition and belief about their own talents. 'Talent' is a broad statement, but 'talent' or 'talents' may be perceived in many ways. Everyone has perception of their own abilities and these subjective perceptions are tied to the belief of one's abilities. Tuition often falls on the burden of the student. Tuition stress is likely to have an

effect on a student's pressure to succeed, yet our perception is that a student's perception of themselves in the classroom will contribute more wholly to a student's overall pressure to succeed. Third, once students reach the level of college, parental influence may be significant, but matters less at this point in their lives than when students are not in college. My hypotheses are as follows: the highest contributing factor to a student's pressure to succeed is the perception of one's own abilities because the subjective experience of pressure will presumably guide beliefs about other potential factors of pressure. The second highest contributing factor is presumed to be the potential burden of tuition. Concisely, with tuition as a given necessity to attend university, students will focus their success on achievement in the classroom, not tuition. Tuition is often a burden, yet not all families are hampered by a high price tag, whereas some families are extremely hampered by the cost. With varying degrees of tuition stress, I assume that it will be a relevant concern and may contribute a considerable amount of stress for students, yet I do not believe that tuition will be at the forefront of the overall pressure to succeed. Lastly, I hypothesize that familial pressure will be the thirist largest factor contributing to a student's pressure to succeed. This is hypothesized to be last because classroom experience and tuition cost are believed to be more readily present in the day-to-day lives of students. Students at school are often away from home, making familial pressure simply less relevant to a student's academic success than tuition and self-concept.

Method

Participants

An online survey was used to collect information for this project using the online Prolific platform. All participants were current college students and there will be no restrictions placed on the students that can participate: all genders, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, etc, will all be

able to take part in this study. All participants were compensated according to the prorated rate for their participation through Prolific.

In order to achieve sufficient statistical power (see *a priori* analysis below), I recruited seventy-eight eligible participants ($N = 78$) on the Prolific platform. All 78 participants completed the survey in its entirety. Prior to analysis, a further four (4) participants were removed from the study because they did not complete the survey in its entirety. The number of participants needed for the survey were met at 78, which is higher than deemed necessary from my *a priori* power analysis (below).

A priori power analysis

An *a priori* power analysis was conducted prior to the survey was released online to determine the number of participants that were needed to attain an 80% power level. My test yielded that in order to attain a .08 power level, a .35 effect size and a significance level at .05, I will need a minimum of 60 participants.

Measures

Tuition

Tuition was a main focus of the study. I focused on the pressure to succeed on students that amounted from the burden of tuition. To assess this, I used four survey questions to assess the pressure of tuition on students. First, I asked the amount participants paid to attend university. Second, I took several questions from Joo et al. 2008 and asked these three questions: “Do you think about your tuition cost while attending school? (Y/N);” “Does thinking about tuition make you stressed? (Y/N);” “Do you believe that the cost of your tuition influences your pressure to succeed? (Y/N).” Joo et al. 2008 was a study conducted to specifically assess financial stress on

college students with questions pertaining to financial satisfaction, stress, knowledge, and credit card use.

Parental Influence

My second approach to understanding pressure to succeed was through parental influence. There are several factors to consider that fall under the umbrella of ‘parental influence.’ Urdan et al. 2007 examined parental pressure from several points of view: Family obligation, pleasing, support, aversive influence, and no influence. Most influencing of these factors was family pleasing and family and family obligation (Urdan et al., 2007). Considering these factors, there is obviously an effect on the student that drives them to feel obligated to please their parents. Students continued to report that their work was reflective of their parents’ influences. Furthermore, when students reported aversive effects from their parents they reported two distinct patterns, both negative; one pattern was that their family members did not expect them to succeed and the second reported pattern involved negative family role models (Urdan et al., 2007). With these factors in mind, I formulated several questions that would provide a glimpse into this dynamic. Questions in this section were “‘Do you talk about school much with members of your family? (Y/N);”” ‘Do you think that your family has influenced how you feel about school or how hard you try? (Y/N);’ An important reason that I try to do well in school is to please my parents/guardians. [1 (not at all true) 2 (somewhat true) 3 (very true)].” Direct questions on the mentioned factors would allow me to measure overall pressure (my dependent variable) against the reported influence of parental pressure from these specific variables. Lastly, I asked as an initial proxy: “Do your parents pay for your tuition costs? (Y/N);” this allowed us to better understand where the burden of tuition fell: student or family.

Academic Self-Concept As a Factor In the Pressure to Succeed

My first hypothesis predicts that self-assessment will be the largest contributing factor to student's pressure to succeed. To measure academic self assessment, we used the Academic Self Concept Scale (ASCS) created by William Reynolds in 1980 (Reynolds 1980). The ASCS has been used to assess students at various levels of education. The ASCS was designed to measure self assessment in college students. Reynolds 1980 is an early published paper on the validation of the ASCS and was specifically chosen for this study because of the multiple-factor approach inherent to the ASCS. Reynolds 1980 accounted for "situational and environmental variables" that may contribute more specifically to the self-concept as a student. Reynolds published a second article in 1988 to re-assess the validity of the ASCS as a tool for measuring student self concept. Again, in 2010, the same article was published as a valid tool for measuring student self concept. The ASCS is a 40 question survey ranging over a number of topics from failure, academic satisfaction, and academic goals to test taking and time management. I believed that using the ASCS would be a valid, reliable, and comprehensive measurement tool to measure academic self concept in college students.

Procedure

A self-report survey will be distributed to 78 participants over Prolific, an online platform for administering surveys. In the survey I will be asking individual students about their pressure from tuition, familial and parental pressure, as well as the perception of the student's own academic abilities. Socioeconomic status will be measured using a one-question scale on the Prolific website (this is a part of the online registration process). Familial and parental pressure will be measured using questions used to assess family pressure in Urdan et. al. (2007); for example, "An important reason that I try to do well in school is to please my parents/guardians (Y/N)." Academic self-assessment will be measured using the Academic Self-Concept Scale

(ASCS) created by William M. Reynolds in 1980 (Reynolds et. al. 1980)⁵. Once the surveys are completed and returned, I will complete three data analysis tests on the returned survey responses. I will run three independent correlation regression tests to examine tuition versus overall pressure, familial pressure versus overall pressure, and ASCS results versus overall pressure. ‘Overall pressure’ is my dependent variable, which will be examined against my three factors of interest. Running correlation regression tests reflects the design of the study as a cross-sectional examination of factors as they relate to pressure. As far as this study is confined, the results of each section are measured against results that are only collected from the survey data. This is cross-sectional study as the study is concerned with the result at a specific moment in time. I expect that participants will be able to complete the questionnaires on their own time without any time restraints.

Results

To assess which contributing factor was the highest in its contribution to a student’s pressure to succeed, I ran several correlation tests to examine associations between predictors of interest and our primary outcome measure (i.e., overall self-reported pressure to succeed in college). We set the alpha level to $\alpha = .05$ for all statistical tests. First, I measured the pressure of tuition and the overall reported pressure and found a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($N = 78, r(78) = .457, p = .001$).

⁵ The ASCS can be found in *Testing Performance as it Relates to Academic Self- Concept and Test Anxiety in Students with and without ADHD* by Krystin Sutton-Davis (2018) as “Appendix C” and as “Appendix A: Survey with ASCS” at the end of this document.

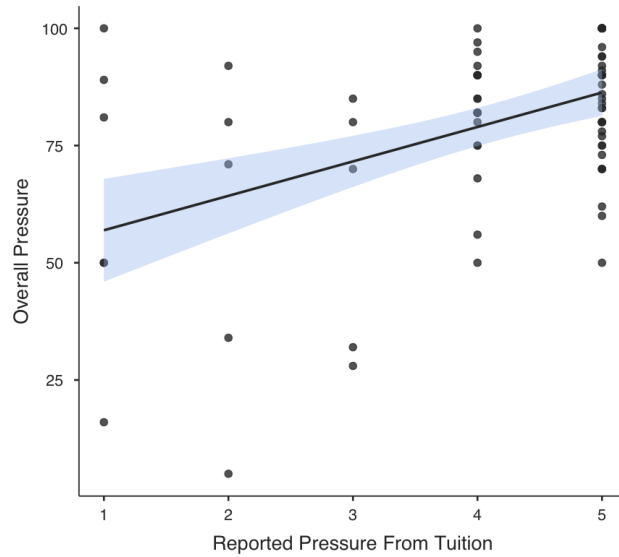


Figure 1. Scatter plot of pressure from tuition versus overall reported pressure.

Second, I computed the correlation between parental pressure and overall reported pressure and found a significant correlation ($N = 78$, $r(78) = .222$, $p = .05$). Third, I measured overall reported pressure and the sum results of the ASCS and found no significant correlation ($N = 78$, $r(78) = .094$, $p = 0.413$).

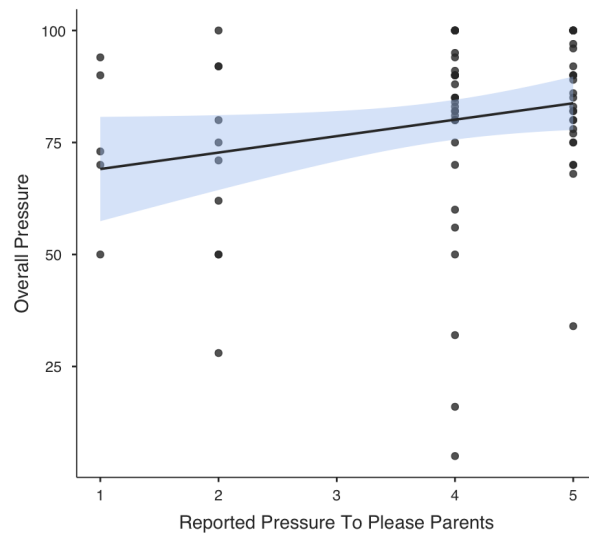


Figure 2. Scatter plot of pressure to please parents versus overall reported pressure.

Further, I conducted an independent samples t-test to assess if there was a difference in means between students that reported that tuition made them stressed versus those that reported that tuition did not. I found that students that reported that thinking about tuition *did make* them stressed ($N = 61$, $M = 82$, $SD = 17.9$) compared to students that reported tuition *did not make* them stressed ($N = 17$, $M = 71.9$, $SD = 25.5$) found a marginal significance between groups, $t(78) = -1.87$, $p = .065$.

Discussion

Overall, this study was aimed at understanding the various factors that affect pressure to succeed amongst American college students, with an emphasis on the financial burden as a significant factor. It should hopefully provide insight into possible factors that contribute to already existing pressure amongst college students. I analyzed student's pressure to succeed from three different perspectives: tuition, familial pressure, and the pressure from self-assessment. To conduct this study, I used a survey using the online platform Prolific.

Results yielded from the analysis found that all of my hypotheses were incorrect. In contrast to the initial hypothesis that tuition would be the least correlated with overall pressure I found that tuition was the most strongly correlated factor against overall pressure. This finding came as the greatest surprise in the overall course of the study. Financial stress may be a leading cause of stress for students given the immediate implications with a lack of financial stability. For instance, students that do not have support from their families may be more keen to focus on tuition and everyday living. Compared to self-concept, tuition plays a larger role in the ability for students to even apply themselves to their schoolwork. Without the stability and freedom that comes from financial security, students may weigh the cost of tuition and consider tuition cost too large of an investment to justify attending a four year university. Tuition was the largest

contributing factor that students reported that affected their overall pressure to succeed, which makes it a priority for students above other significant factors.

Following tuition I found that parental pressure was the second most significant factor in predicting overall pressure. My initial hypothesis was that parental pressure would be the least significant contributing factor due to the distance many students have from their parents while attending university. This finding, compared to tuition, was not as strongly correlated, but it does point to an overall trend that is significant for this study. Parental influence plays a strong role in a student's education, especially before university. My study shows that there is a possibility that parental influence may play a larger role in academic self-concept than previously realized. Student's potentially base their own success more heavily on family expectations, which may contribute to the significant findings in this study. By the point most students are in college they are between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, which, given my results, may be an indication that student's are not fully independent and self-concept is still dominated by parental influence. Parental influence may or may not reflect general attitudes toward their children in university. Parental pressure can be extremely grueling and if students feel that their academic rank is not satisfactory, their internalized pressure may be at the forefront of their own academic assessment.

Lastly, I found that there was no correlation between pressure to succeed and the results from the academic self-concept scale (ASCS). Surprisingly, my initial hypothesis was incorrect. I predicted that internal pressure (measured using the ASCS) would be the largest contributing factor to overall pressure to succeed, yet my findings did find any connection between overall pressure and academic self-concept. This may be significant because it points to the fact that the main influences on pressure are external factors. Perhaps this study reflects an overall trend in

higher learning where the external pressures are so overwhelming that students consider their own self-assessment less important—or even valid—in the face of tuition and familial pressure.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations that are important to mention for the study. First, the survey questionnaire contained four questions pertaining to tuition. A larger number of questions that encompassed a more comprehensive look into tuition and financial stress may have been helpful and would certainly be helpful to further research. Although the questions pertaining to tuition were very direct, it would have been helpful to account for possible confounding variables influencing the financial stress, namely maintaining scholarships and academic rank. Some universities will withhold scholarships for students that change their intended major. If a student received a scholarship for psychology, but changes to chemistry, some universities will revoke their scholarship funding. Also, credit card costs and the cost of living may be intertwined with tuition spending for a student, which would require more investigation to uncover possible confounds that are linked to tuition cost. Further research should assess factors that make up the ‘whole of tuition’—factors such as cost of living, travel, and scholarships that influence tuition costs.

Similarly section one on tuition, there were only four questions used to assess familial pressure in section two. Like tuition, family influence can be dynamic and complex. Including questions that broaden the range of parental influence may help to eliminate any possible confounding factors. Concisely, section 1 and 2 may have limited the study by the few number of questions in each section, simply by the lack of comprehensive understanding found in four questions. Possibly limitations may provide a starting point for studies that may dig deeper into the pressure of tuition and parental influence. Assessing parental influence would require further

inquiry such as family involvement in cost of living and academic inquiry. Do students face more pressure to succeed from parents due to tuition costs, cost of living, or nagging influence?

It would be helpful to provide a comprehensive enquiry into the background of each participant to find the ways in which familial pressure influences them. Further research into parent/student stigma surrounding university attendance may provide a roadmap towards productive, future research and design study. For instance, a longitudinal study conducted over the course of a student's time at university may provide insight into how parental influence and self-concept change over time. A cross-sectional study provides surface insight into factors that can be measured against each other. A longitudinal can give researchers the opportunity to measure change over time, given that attitudes will most likely change for students as they move closer to their year of graduation.

I found that overall pressure was significantly correlated with tuition costs may help us to better understand the relationship students have with their work and the institutions they attend. Further research in this area would benefit from studies on specific populations. For example, focussing a survey study on first year students at a university, say Bard College, might provide better insight into the underlying stressors that affect students' overall pressure to succeed.

My survey was limited in the number of questions that pertained to tuition and familial pressure in comparison to the ASCS. A more comprehensive survey that incorporated more detailed questions about financial stress, such as credit card debt, cost of living and housing, might provide a clearer picture of the role tuition plays in the general realm of financial pressure. Are students pressured from tuition because the cost of living is stressful and more immediate resources allocated to covering home and living expenses? Mentioned earlier in the introduction of this paper, Joo, Durband and Grable (2008) broadened the scope of tuition pressure into other

financial pressures: credit card debt, student loans, and hours spent working at a non-academic job. Also, they found that if the student had parents that struggled financially, then the students were more likely to struggle financially as well and take time away from school to go work. This point leads to another point of interest: the point to which students are faced with financial and tuition stress because of the relationship between tuition funding and parent support. This may be a possible confounding factor in the results for this study. Further research should focus on expanding research questions into family involvement in tuition and family involvement in expense of living.

Conclusion

My study was aimed at understanding how the burden of tuition, familial pressure, and academic self-concept influenced pressure in students' lives. There is still a great amount of research that must be done into these various areas of interest. My hope is that this study may generate openings for further interest into specific demographics within the college student population, the effects of non-subsidized education on the American public, as well as sociological and historical interpretations of student life and high tuition costs. Now, more than ever, many students (and their families) are faced with a great burden to get themselves through college. Through study of various factors that influence pressure to succeed among American college students, my hope is that this research will help change the landscape of higher education in the United States so that all students, no matter their background, can all have an equal opportunity to succeed in higher education.

Appendix A: Survey with ASCS

Section 1:

How much do you pay each year, in total, to attend your college/university? _____

Do you think about your tuition cost while attending school? (Y/N)

Does thinking about tuition make you stressed? (Y/N)

Do you believe that the cost of your tuition influences your pressure to succeed? (Y/N)

Section 2:

Do you talk about school much with members of your family? (Y/N)

Do you think that your family has influenced how you feel about school or how hard you try? (Y/N)

An important reason that I try to do well in school is to please my parents/guardians.

1 (not at all true) 2 (somewhat true) 3 (very true)

Do your parents pay for your tuition costs? (Y/N)

Section 3:

Listed below are a number of statements concerning school-related attitudes. Rate each item as it pertains to you personally. Base your ratings on how you feel most of the time.

Use the following scale to rate each statement:

SD. Strongly Disagree D. Disagree A. Agree SA. Strongly Agree

INDICATE YOUR RESPONSE BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE LETTER(S). Be sure to answer all items. Please respond to each item independently, do not be influenced by your previous choices.

1. Being a student is a very rewarding experience. SD D A SA
2. If I try hard enough, I will be able to get good grades. SD D A SA
3. Most of the time my efforts in school are rewarded. SD D A SA
4. No matter how hard I try I do not do well in school. SD D A SA
5. I often expect to do poorly on exams. SD D A SA
6. All in all, I feel I am a capable student. SD D A SA
7. I do well in my courses given the amount of time I dedicate to studying. SD D A SA

8. My parents are not satisfied with my grades in college. SD D A SA
9. Others view me as intelligent. SD D A SA
10. Most courses are very easy for me. SD D A SA
11. I sometimes feel like dropping out of school. SD D A SA
12. Most of my classmates do better in school than I do. SD D A SA
13. Most of my instructors think that I am a good student. SD D A SA
14. At times I feel college is too difficult for me. SD D A SA
15. All in all, I am proud of my grades in college. SD D A SA
16. Most of the time while taking a test I feel confident. SD D A SA
17. I feel capable of helping others with their class work. SD D A SA
18. I feel teachers' standards are too high for me. SD D A SA
19. It is hard for me to keep up with my class work. SD D A SA
20. I am satisfied with the class assignments that I turn in. SD D A SA
21. At times I feel like a failure. SD D A SA
22. I feel I do not study enough before a test. SD D A SA
23. Most exams are easy for me. SD D A SA
24. I have doubts that I will do well in my major. SD D A SA
25. For me, studying hard pays off. SD D A SA
26. I have a hard time getting through school. SD D A SA
27. I am good at scheduling my study time. SD D A SA
28. I have a fairly clear sense of my academic goals. SD D A SA
29. I'd like to be a much better student than I am now. SD D A SA
30. I often get discouraged about school. SD D A SA
31. I enjoy doing my homework. SD D A SA
32. I consider myself a very good student. SD D A SA
33. I usually get the grades I deserve in my courses. SD D A SA
34. I do not study as much as I should. SD D A SA
35. I usually feel on top of my work by finals week. SD D A SA
36. Others consider me a good student. SD D A SA
37. I feel that I am better than the average college student. SD D A SA
38. In most of the courses, I feel that my classmates are better prepared than I am.
SD D A SA
39. I feel that I do not have the necessary abilities for certain courses in my major.
SD D A SA
40. I have poor study habits. SD D A SA

Appendix B: IRB Proposal

Richards IRB Revised Proposal Form 2021

Section 1

Please enter the following information about yourself:

Today's date:	Feb 05, 2021
Name:	John Michael Richards
Email:	jr6759@bard.edu
Your Academic Program/Department/Office:	Psychology
Your status (faculty, staff, graduate or undergraduate student):	Student
Adviser or Faculty Sponsor (if applicable):	Richard Lopez
If you are a graduate or undergraduate student, has your Adviser or Faculty Sponsor seen and approved your application?	Yes
Your Adviser's or Faculty Sponsor's email address (if applicable):	rlopez@bard.edu
Please list all individuals (full name and status, i.e. faculty, staff, student) involved in this project that will be working with human subjects. Note: Everyone listed must have completed Human Subject Research Training within the past three years. JM Richards (student); Richard Lopez (faculty).	
Do you have external funding for this research?	No
What is the title of your project?	The Burden of Privilege: Economic Pressure on Success, Life Expectations, and Well-Being In American College Students
When do you plan to begin this project? (Start date):	Mar 01, 2021
Describe your research project: The project's aim is to understand various predictors that may contribute to college student's pressure to succeed. There are four main predictors of interest that will be studied: socioeconomic pressure, familial/parental pressure, perception of peer success, and perception of self-ability.	
Describe the population(s) you plan to recruit and how you plan to recruit participants. Please submit all recruitment material, emails and scripts to IRB@bard.edu The population will be current college students.	
Will your participants include individuals from vulnerable or protected populations (e.g., children, pregnant women, prisoners, or the cognitively impaired)?	no

Approximately how many individuals do you expect to participate in your study?	100
<p>Describe the procedures you will be using to conduct your research. Include descriptions of what tasks your participants will be asked to do, and about how much time will be expected of each individual. NOTE: If you have supporting materials (printed surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, etc.), email these documents separately as attachments to IRB@bard.edu. Name your attachments with your last name and a brief description (e.g., "WatsonSurvey.doc").</p> <p>Self-report surveys will be distributed to 100 participants recruited via the Prolific platform. Socioeconomic status will be measured using a one-question scale (Singh et. al. 2017) [Please see attached surveys, sent to irb@bard.edu under separate cover. Familial and parental pressure will be measured using questions used to assess family pressure in Urdan et. al. (2007) like "An important reason that I try to do well in school is to please my parents/guardians" (Y/N). Academic self-assessment will be measured using the Academic Self-Assessment Scale (ASAS) created by William M. Reynolds in 1980 (Reynolds et. al. 1980). The survey will take participants no longer than a half hour to complete, and participants will be compensated at a rate of at least \$6.50 an hour (prorated). Once the surveys are completed and returned, we will conduct data analysis on the returned surveys.</p>	
<p>Describe any risks and/or benefits your research may have for your participants. No risks for the participants. The participants will be compensated for their contribution.</p>	
<p>Describe how you plan to mitigate (if possible) any risks the participants may encounter. Through direct contact with the participant. Richard Lopez (advisor) would be present in these circumstances.</p>	
<p>Describe the consent process (i.e., how you will explain the consent form and the consent process to your participants): The content process will be administered using a form online. See attached document in email sent to irb@bard.edu.</p>	
Have you prepared a consent form(s) and emailed it as an attachment to IRB@bard.edu ?	Yes
<p>Note: You must submit all necessary consent forms before your proposal is considered complete.</p>	
If you are collecting data via media capture (video, audio, photos), have you included a section requesting consent for this procedure(s) in your consent form(s)?	Not applicable
<p>What procedures will you use to ensure that the information your participants provide will remain confidential and safeguarded against improper access or dissemination? While you will be providing your name to the research team for some aspects of the study's data collection, you will also be assigned a random alphanumeric code Only authorized research personnel will be able to link your name to your data. However, in the interest of open and reproducible science, de-identified data from this study may also be posted on the Open Science Framework. All data will be stored securely on password-protected computers with encrypted hard drives, as well as secure, encrypted cloud-based storage.</p> <p>If you have questions about this study, please contact Richard Lopez, Department of Psychology, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504 at rlopez@bard.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Bard College Institutional Review Board: irb@bard.edu.</p>	
Will it be necessary to use deception with your participants at any time during this research? Withholding details about the specifics of one's hypothesis does not constitute deception, this is called incomplete disclosure. Deception involves purposefully misleading participants about the nature of the research question	No

or about the nature of the task they will be completing.

For all projects, please include your debriefing statement. (This is information you provide to the participant at the end of your study to explain your research question more fully than you may have been able to do at the beginning of the study.) All studies must include a debriefing statement. Be sure to give participants the opportunity to ask any additional questions they may have about the study.

Thank you for your participation in this study. The aim of this project was to understand various predictors that may contribute to college student's pressure to succeed. Your answers will be used to determine the main causes of interest: socioeconomic pressure, familial/parental pressure, perception of peer success, and perception of self-ability. If you have any further questions, please contact Richard Lopez (rlopez@bard.edu) or the Bard College Institutional Review Board (irb@bard.edu).

If you will be conducting interviews in a language other than English, will you conduct all of the interviews yourself, or will you have the assistance of a translator? If you will be using the assistance of a translator, that individual must also certify that he or she is familiar with the human subject protocol and has completed the online training course.

Not applicable

If your recruitment materials or consent forms will be presented in languages other than English, please translate these documents and email copies to IRB@bard.edu. I have submitted all of my translated materials.

Not applicable

Appendix C: Consent Form**INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT (to be administered online)**

Title: Longitudinal, comparative assessment of multiple regulatory strategies to promote healthier eating patterns

Principal Investigator: John Michael Richards

Institution: Bard College

Background. In the present study, we are generally interested in people's daily eating behaviors and whether various self-regulatory strategies may promote healthier eating patterns.

What you will do in the study. You will participate in an online survey consisting of various questions that will assess psychological variables and traits that will contribute to the main focus of this study. Lastly, after you have completed the survey, you will be given a debriefing statement that will clarify the purpose of the study.

Risks and Benefits. It is possible that some participants may experience slight discomfort when reflecting on and reporting their general thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and/or as they generally occur in their lives. There is the risk that participants could experience slight discomfort when thinking about their academic performance. Such discomfort is unlikely to be any greater than what participants usually experience. As far as potential benefits, participants may indirectly benefit from learning about the potential usefulness of particular self-regulatory strategies in the eating domain. Following debriefing, they may also appreciate learning about the research process more generally and various topics under study in the Regulation of Everyday Affect, Craving, and Health (REACH) Lab at Bard College.

Compensation. You will be compensated accordingly for each part of the study you complete, at a rate of \$6.50 per hour (prorated), as set by Prolific's fair and humane policy for compensating human participants.

Your rights as a participant. Your participation in this experiment is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the experiment at any time without penalty. You will still receive prorated cash payment for the amount of time you were enrolled in the study. You may withdraw by notifying the experimenter that you no longer wish to participate, and no questions will be asked. At the conclusion of the study, a debriefing session will take place in which the experimenter will tell you more about the study's aims and hypotheses in greater detail.

Contact: If you have questions about this research, please contact John Michael Richards, Bard College, at jr6759@bard.edu.

Confidentiality. Only authorized research personnel will be able to link your name to your data. However, in the interest of open and reproducible science, de-identified data from this study

may also be posted on the Open Science Framework. All data will be stored securely on password-protected computers with encrypted hard drives, as well as secure, encrypted cloud-based storage.

If you have questions about this study, please contact John Michael Richards, Department of Psychology, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504 at jr6759@bard.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Bard College Institutional Review Board: irb@bard.edu.

Agreement. The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty. **I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.**

By providing my digital signature in the box below, I am indicating that I am in agreement with the above statement of consent.

Participant signature

Date

Debriefing statement:

Thank you for your participation in this study. The aim of this project was to understand various predictors that may contribute to college student's pressure to succeed. Your answers will be used to determine the main causes of interest: socioeconomic pressure, familial/parental pressure, perception of peer success, and perception of self-ability. If you have any further questions, please contact John Michael Richards (jr6759@bard.edu) or the Bard College Institutional Review Board (irb@bard.edu).

References

- Aselton, P. (2012). Sources of Stress and Coping in American College Students Who Have Been Diagnosed With Depression: Sources of Stress and Coping in American College Students Who Have Been Diagnosed With Depression. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 25(3), 119–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2012.00341.x>
- Bailey, R. C., & Miller, C. (1998). LIFE SATISFACTION AND LIFE DEMANDS IN COLLEGE STUDENTS. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 26(1), 51–56. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.1998.26.1.51>
- Benoit, R. L. (2019). *The Need to Succeed: Pressure and Overextension in High Achieving Schools* (Master's thesis, Arizona State University).
- Britt, S. L., Ammerman, D. A., Barrett, S. F., & Jones, S. (2017). Student Loans, Financial Stress, and College Student Retention. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 47(1), 3.
- Cahalan, M., & Perna, L. (2015). Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 45 Year Trend Report. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*.
- Davis, J. R. (2014). A Little Goes a Long Way: Pressure for College Students to Succeed. *The Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 12(1), 2. <http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/jur/vol12/iss1/2>
- Edman, J. L., & Brazil, B. (2009). Perceptions of campus climate, academic efficacy and academic success among community college students: An ethnic comparison. *Social Psychology of Education*, 12(3), 371-383. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-008-9082-y>

- Furr, S. R., Westefeld, J. S., McConnell, G. N., & Jenkins, J. M. (2001). Suicide and depression among college students: A decade later. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(1), 97–100. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.32.1.97>
- Furlong, M. J., Gilman, R., & Huebner, E. S. (Eds.). (2009). Handbook of positive psychology in schools.
- Heckman, S., Lim, H., & Montalto, C. (2014). Factors Related to Financial Stress among College Students. *Journal of Financial Therapy*, 5(1).
<https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-9771.1063>
- Hemelt, S. W., & Marcotte, D. E. (2011). The Impact of Tuition Increases on Enrollment at Public Colleges and Universities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(4), 435–457. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373711415261>
- Hong, J. H., Charles, S. T., Lee, S., & Lachman, M. E. (2019). Perceived changes in life satisfaction from the past, present and to the future: A comparison of US and Japan. *Psychology and aging*, 34(3), 317.
- Huelsman, M. (2018). The unaffordable era: A 50-state look at rising college prices and the new American student.
- Mishory, J., Huelsman, M., & Kahn, S. (2019). How Student Debt and the Racial Wealth Gap Reinforce Each Other.

- Joo, S.-H., Durband, D. B., & Grable, J. (2008). The Academic Impact of Financial Stress on College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 10(3), 287–305. <https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.10.3.c>
- Li-Ping Tang, T., Shin-Hsiung Tang, D., & Shin-Yi Tang, C. (2004). College tuition and perceptions of private university quality. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 18(5), 304–316. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540410543457>
- Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (2009). Review of the satisfaction with life scale. In *Assessing well-being* (pp. 101-117). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of happiness studies*, 6(1), 25-41.
- Reynolds, W. M., Ramirez, M. P., Magriña, A., & Allen, J. E. (1980). Initial development and validation of the academic self-concept scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 40(4), 1013-1016.
- Reynolds, W. M. (1988). Measurement of Academic Self-Concept in College Students. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52(2), 223–240. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5202_4
- Gillen, A. (2020). Trends in State Funding and Tuition Revenue for Public Higher Education.
- Singh, T., Sharma, S., & Nagesh, S. (2017). Socio-economic status scales updated for 2017. *Int J Res Med Sci*, 5(7), 3264-7. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-6012.ijrms20173029>
- Sutton-Davis, K. (2018). Testing Performance as it Relates to Academic Self-Concept and Test Anxiety in Students with and without ADHD.

Ma, J., & Baum, S. (2016). Trends in community colleges: Enrollment, prices, student debt, and completion. *College Board Research Brief, 4*, 1-23.

Urdan, T., Solek, M., & Schoenfelder, E. (2007). Students' perceptions of family influences on their academic motivation: A qualitative analysis. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 22*(1), 7-21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03173686>

Demos (2018). *When Congress Went To College: Comparing Tuition Then and Now At Our Elected Officials' Alma Maters* .