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## **New Study on College-Going Rates Gives Mom Something Else to Worry About**

By Peter Schmidt

Here's a novel line for a Mother's Day card: "Thanks, Mom, for loving me so much I never earned a college degree."

Implausible as it might seem, a new study suggests that there might be some truth to such a sentiment. Based on the survey responses of more than 13,800 young Texans polled during their senior year of high school and then again a year later, the study concludes that seniors who reported having good relationships with their mothers and fathers were actually less likely than others to enroll in a four-year college.

Yep, it's true: Parents just can't win.

One reason such findings are counterintuitive is that a large body of other research shows that children who have good relationships with their parents do better at school. The new study — by Ruth N. López Turley, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and Matthew Desmond, a doctoral student in the department — reached the same conclusion, finding that students who reported getting along well with the folks generally reported having better grades and higher class rankings than their peers did.

How, then, does a strong parent-child relationship hurt college-going prospects? It makes a high-school senior substantially more likely to express a strong desire to live at home during college. And those seniors who said it was important to them to live at home after high school were more than 40 percent less likely to enroll in a four-year college than their peers were.

The study found that many other traits — including socioeconomic disadvantage, being foreign-born, or not having degree aspirations — increased the likelihood that a young person would not want to leave the nest right after high school. Above and beyond the effects of such factors, Hispanic students were more than twice as likely as white students to report that it was important for them to stay home, suggesting that culture also plays an important role.

But, after using regression analysis to separate out the other possible factors, the researchers found that the unwillingness to leave home that comes from having good relationships with the parents has a negative-enough influence on college-going to cancel out the positive influence derived from the higher academic performance associated with such family relations.

In a paper summarizing their findings and submitted to the *American Sociological Review*, Ms. Turley and Mr. Desmond say: "Through our research, a paradox has come to light: Strong family ties, considered vital to a child's success in school, can serve as an impediment to a child's educational attainment. Parents who strive to develop an encouraging and communicative relationship with their children might produce a high-school honors student but not a four-year college graduate." —*Peter Schmidt*

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