Considering Careers After College:

The Role Memorable Messages Play in Student's Decisions

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ABSTRACT

When contemplating major decisions, such as college and career, people typically rely on advice from other, significant individuals from their life. In the field of communication, memorable messages are "interpersonal messages...remembered for a long time" with "a profound influence on a person's life" (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981, p. 27). These messages are a primary way individuals learn about social norms, expectations, and relationships, particularly during emerging adulthood. More specifically, parents may play a significant role in the socialization of college and career expectations for their college-aged children. This project will expand the research on memorable messages by exploring students' recollections of parental communication about college and career decisions. Additionally, this study seeks evidence of traditional gender roles and ideology that may be perpetuated through the communication of career advice from parents to their students.

Keywords: college and career, memorable messages, parental advice, socialization

INTRODUCTION

Memorable messages are "verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives" (Knapp et al., 1981, p.27). These messages have been previously studied in organizational socialization (Stohl, 1986), in sexuality and dating (Heisler, 2014), and in diet and exercise (Ruth-McSwain & Ferrara, 2016). In families, previous memorable message research has shown that parental messages continue to socialize children, even years after they have left the home (Wang, 2014, p. 270). Specific to college-aged students, Knapp et al.'s (1981) foundational study on memorable messages concludes that "[o]ne's self-concept and ability to get along with others (the two most common topics of memorable messages) may be especially important during adolescence and early adulthood, so advice on such matters may be more salient at that time" (p. 35).

This project will expand the contemporary literature on memorable messages by examining participant responses that recall parental communication regarding employment and careers. Research from Scarduzio (2018) says that "it is important to consider how messages that individuals evoke surrounding work and careers shape their own motivation and beliefs about meaningful work… youth are socialized into work, occupations, and careers" (p. 432). Memorable messages may play a significant role in parental interactions as parents offer advice about future careers to their offspring. Previous research indicates that parents communicate expectations about their students' behavior while in college, including messages about "working (and playing) hard, the necessity of attending college, providing encouragement and support, and general advice based on parents' own experiences" (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2014, p. 44).

Thus, the current project seeks the content and influence of parental messages about students' career and employment.

In addition, scholarship indicates that parents are a primary source of information on gender socialization (Epstein & Ward, 2011). These gendered communications may extend into messages about future work also. Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris & Shepherd (2006) argues, "early work socialization with parents may teach children about the gendered nature of occupational roles" (p. 166) concluding "women received significantly different messages than men about choosing particular careers and exiting the paid labor force in relation to anticipated family obligations" (Medved et al., p. 161). Therefore, the current project also questions the existence of traditional gender ideologies in parental memorable messages about careers. Participants' views on the importance of these parental messages will offer insight on the potential influence of memorable messages on children's decisions about college and career. This study aims to increase the existing research on memorable messages by addressing communication from parents about college and careers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOCIALIZATION

Socialization plays a critical role for the way individuals learn to become members of society. "Socialization refers to the developmental processes through which individuals acquire the values, behaviors, and motivations necessary to become competent members of a culture" (Morawski, 2014). Although sociologists differ in their explanation of the socialization process, most would include a version of Arnett's (1995) outcomes: (1) impulse control and the development of conscious, (2) role preparation and performance, including occupation, gender, and institutional, and (3) the development of sources of meaning, what is important, values and

gives purpose (p. 618). The socialization process is neither quick nor finite; rather, it is a life-long on-going journey from childhood through adulthood. Individuals develop personality, attitudes toward others, and even gender identities, through observation and imitation. However, in childhood and adult life, only some of our copied behaviors are met with praise and approval from others. Mead (1934, p. 153) argued that we are particularly sensitive to the feedback from *significant* others, such as parents, in our lives. Thus, we strive to please these important individuals by performing (and repeating) the behaviors that win their approval. As a result, the rewarded behaviors become reinforced and shape the child's worldview. Thus, while socialization occurs through a variety of sources, such as media and peer groups, and various channels, parents are a primary factor in the socialization process for children (Wang & Benner, 2016), particularly as children reach ages of early adulthood (e.g., college).

For example, family has been an important factor in the socialization of finances for emerging adults (Shim, Barber, Card, Xiao & Serido, 2009), even when parental messages are not explicitly shared or enforced. In a study that consisted of interviewing 20 different emerging adults, from the ages of 18-29 of varying socio-economic and educational backgrounds and varying life situations (Marchant & Harrison, 2019). Researchers found that participants "did describe observing family as financial role models, often picking up their anxieties about money rather than remembering positive experiences," even though finances was rarely discussed in participants' homes. Marchant & Harrison (2019) concluded that "family as trusted primary advisor continues well into adulthood, even where family financial capability may be low" (p. 99). In some instances, parental influence increased the likelihood of healthy behaviors and risk-avoidance, such as decreased likelihood of college binge-drinking (Wood, Read, Mitchell, R. & Brand, 2004), smoking (Mathur, Stigler, Erickson, Perry & Forster, 2004), and distracted driving

behaviors (e.g., texting while driving) (Bingham, Zakrajsek, Almani, Shope & Sayer, 2015).

Beyond specific behaviors, parents may transmit more general values, beliefs, or ideologies, such

as religious faith (Leonard, Cook, Boyatzis, Kimball & Flanagan, 2013) or political party

affiliation (Achen, 2002).

This parental socialization may also extend to career choices and professional decision-

making. In their longitudinal study of women's roles, Farré and Vella (2012) explored the impact

of a mother's attitudes about work on her children's choice of career(s). The authors found that a

mother's impact on her son's beliefs and behaviors ultimate carry weight for the woman he

marries; the authors summarize:

> Our results clearly suggest that attitudes towards gender roles are passed from generation
>
> to generation and that cultural transmission has implications for the labour market
>
> behaviour of younger generations. ... This result reflects the fact that a woman's attitudes
>
> affect her labour supply indirectly through other lifetime choices such as education and
>
> fertility. In contrast, the effect of a husband's attitudes on his fertility or educational
>
> choices is much smaller. This evidence indicates that men's inherited [maternal] attitudes
>
> have an economically and statistically significant effect on the choice of women they
>
> marry (p. 234).

Even when adjusting for the variables characterizing the child's household during his/her youth

(such as birth order, income, race, religious affiliation), parents' influence on a child's future

career choices remains significant. Research from Scarduzio (2018) says that "it is important to

consider how messages that individuals evoke surrounding work and careers shape their own

motivation and beliefs about meaningful work… youth are socialized into work, occupations,

and careers" (p. 432). Verbal messages are a key tool in the process of socialization, making

communication studies a significant source of information for this study.

SOCIALIZATION AND COMMUNICATION

This intersection of relationship and instruction served as the basis for examining the

communicative elements within the socialization process. Individuals' need for connection with

others often manifests in communication. In fact, the success of this connection may be

determined by the quality and quantity of the communication. Further, communication itself

requires social interaction. As children mature, parents "teach" children cultural and familial

norms and rules, sometimes through direct, verbal instructions (e.g., "We don't use words like

that in our family"), and other times through more indirect, nonverbal role-modeling (e.g.,

parental occupations or education) (Thomas & Blakemore, 2012, p. 407; Witt, 2013, n. pag.).

"To fully capture the communicative re-production (and possibly transformation) of social

knowledge, detailed attention needs to be paid to the critical messages and interactions shaping

how we make sense out of our social worlds over the course of a lifetime" (Medved et al., 2006,

p. 163).

One way parents might instruct their children is through the use of "memorable

messages" (Knapp et al., 1981, p. 25). Memorable messages are those communicative phrases an

individual remembers for an extended period of time. According to Knapp et al., memorable

messages are relatively short communication units that are remembered and perceived (by the

individual) to be influential in his/her life. These "if-then" conditional statements, originally

examined in organizational contexts, reflected guidelines or prescriptions for behavior that

demanded action from listeners. Despite the limited verbal history of these messages, Knapp et

al. argued that the content of the messages "transcended any one specific context" (1981, p. 32)

to influence a receiver's general life actions. Further, the messages were most often communicated from older, more experienced individuals to new, lower status employees. Throughout memorable message literature, little attention has been paid to the exact content of messages, and this study will focus on the content of messages.

In families, parents fulfill the role of experienced mentor for their children offering communicative socialization through memorable messages. According to the work of Dorrance Hall, Ruth-McSwain & Ferrara (2016) work on women ages 20–57 about memorable messages received from parents about diet and exercise throughout adolescence, "memorable messages from parents influence the values, perspectives, and behaviors of their children for a lifetime… and families are a rich source of memorable messages" (p. 247). Families provide an ample supply of memorable messages due to the communication that is involved in parenting. Research has examined the existence of parental memorable messages regarding dating and sexuality (Heisler, 2014; Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018) and in diet and exercise (Dorrance Hall et al., 2016). In their article exploring weight gain during early college, Thompson and Zaitchik (2012) found college students were able to recall memorable messages from parents about body image and reported heightened sensitivity, and pressure, from these communications. Authors concluded, "parents are an important source of approval and criticism for students (p. 54)" and "parents' messages are particularly salient and influential" for their children (p. 50).

Parental memorable messages might be especially influential during the period of emerging adulthood-- like college. Specific to college-aged students, Knapp et al.'s (1981) foundational study on memorable messages concludes that "[o]ne's self-concept and ability to get along with others (the two most common topics of memorable messages) may be especially important during adolescence and early adulthood, so advice on such matters may be more

salient at that time" (p. 35). College, as the metaphoric gateway to adulthood, provides ample

opportunities to explore and question one's values and priorities. One's future career and

employment is often at the forefront of students' thinking as they seek to negotiate values,

interests, talents, and often financial concerns. Wang (2014) writes that "Through supportive and

socializing messages, parents can embed college advice within a personal and collective dream

of higher education," (p. 270) and parental advice embedded by parents may be part of students'

thinking. Medved et al. (2006) concludes that "[c]ommunicated by family, friends, coworkers, or

through the media, messages… contribute to meaning construction about work and family in

contemporary society," (p.162) and these factors also contribute to meaning construction for

careers as well.

While the nature of certain messages shared in interactions between parents and

adolescents about work and family arrangements, parents are an important role in providing key

information (Medved et al., 2006, p. 162) and this study will focus on specific messages from

parents as they relate to college and career. The following research questions guide this inquiry:

RQ1: What, if any, memorable messages do college students recall from parents

about careers?

RQ2: Do students identify these messages as influential in their choices and

decisions about possible careers after college?

In addition, scholarship indicates that parents are a primary source of information on

gender socialization (Epstein & Ward, 2011). These gendered communications may extend into

messages about future work also. Medved et al. (2006) argues, "early work socialization with

parents may teach children about the gendered nature of occupational roles" (p. 166) concluding

"women received significantly different messages than men about choosing particular careers and exiting the paid labor force in relation to anticipated family obligations" (p. 161). Therefore, the current project also questions the existence of traditional gender ideologies in parental memorable messages about careers.

RQ3: Do gender differences and traditional gender ideologies present in the content of the parental memorable messages about careers to their children?

Throughout memorable message literature, little attention has been paid to the exact content of messages, and this study will focus on the content of messages.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Subjects consisted of 40 participants (18 male and 22 female) students who were at least 18 years of age and currently attend either a two-year or four-year college or university. The majority of participants were sophomores at (36.6%; N= 15), followed by juniors (31.7%; N = 12). Seniors accounted for 26.8% (N= 11) of respondents while first-year students were a minority (4.9%; N = 2). Participants ranged in age from 19-33 years and represented predominantly Caucasian (85.4%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (7.3%), other (4.9%), and Hispanic, Latino/a (2.4%) ethnicities. Most participants were members of two-parent households (90.2%; N = 37) while single mother households accounted for 7.3% (N = 3). The remaining 2.4% of participants defined their family situation as "divorced." Twenty-two percent (N = 9) of participants were first-generation college students suggesting 78% of participants lived in families with higher education experience.

When asked to identify the individual who filled the role of "mother," most participants referred to their biological mother (97.6%; N = 39); one participant identified "sister" (2.4%).

Over half of the participants' mothers had an education level of a bachelor's degree or higher:

Bachelor's degree (36.6%; N = 15); Master's degree (12.2%; N = 5); Doctorate or professional

degree (7.3%; N = 3).

When asked to identify the individual who filled the role of "father," most participants

referred to their biological father (97.6%; N = 39) while2.4% referred to "adoptive father" (N =

1). Over half of the participants' fathers also had an education level of a bachelor's degree or

higher: Bachelor's degree (34.1%; N = 14); Master's degree (17.1%; N = 7); Doctorate or

professional degree (7.3%; N = 3).

PROCEDURE AND ANALYSIS

IRB approval was secured before proceeding with participant recruitment and data

collection. Ideal participants were identified as students of at least 18 years of age and currently

enrolled in either a 2-year or 4-year university. Participants were limited to enrolled students as

future career decisions are particularly salient during this stage of life. These participants were

recruited through a snowball sampling method utilizing GroupMe, a free messaging app.

Potential participants received a text message containing the survey link. Upon accessing the

questionnaire, interested individuals were required to confirm their understanding of

participation requirements and provide consent before proceeding to the remaining survey items.

Questionnaires consisted of several general demographic questions: race, age, gender

identification, and questions about college status: 2-year or 4-year college or university, first-

generation student, and class standing. Participants were also asked to describe the household in

which they grew up (e.g., two-parent, single-parent, mother/father, etc.). Participants were then

asked questions about their parental figures (e.g., "who fills the role of mother in your life: birth

mother, adoptive mother, grandmother, sister, etc.; who fills the role of father: birth father,

adoptive father, grandfather, brother, etc.)" as well as parental education level. A modified

version of Stohl's (1986) memorable message interview script was used as a guide for open-

ended questions about recalled parental messages; participants received a general description of a

"memorable message" and were then prompted to think about the messages they received [from

mothers/fathers separately] about choices about future career and employment. Follow up

questions encouraged participants to explain how (if) these parental messages impacted decision-

making: "How has (if at all) this message influenced your own thinking and choices about your

future career and employment?"

CODING

Because of the exploratory nature of the current study and the open-ended design of the

utilized questionnaire, it was necessary to develop a coding scheme originating from obtained

participant responses. Using all the questionnaires as representative responses, categories were

inductively developed emerging from participants' words and grounded in the data (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). These categories were then used as a coding scheme by two trained coders for the

analyses of all open-ended responses. Inter-coder agreement reached 100% for the "messages

about careers from mothers/fathers" and the "influence of messages" items. All coding disputes

were resolved through discussion resulting in universal agreement across all categories.

For all the open-ended items, the unit of measurement for each participant response was

identified at the level of "themes." Thus, a single participant-recalled message could contain

several categorizable units of analysis. For example, one participant shared a message from their

mother like this: "Very few, mainly do what makes you happy and don't worry too much about

money. Has encouraged all of my interests." In this example, two units of analysis were present

in the single recalled message: (1) THEME #1: qualities of a successful/good career with

subcategory #1: Pursue passion/interest/happy – self-fulfillment, and (2) THEME #3: parental support/no pressure to choose a particular path. Therefore, this message's two thoughts were treated as distinct units of analysis and thus categorized separately.

RESULTS

The current study asked participants to recall the parental messages about careers and future employment they had received and to recount the influence of these messages. Forty completed surveys yielded 49 maternal messages and 44 paternal messages about careers. Additionally, participants provided 39 reflections about maternal message influence and 38 reflections about paternal message influence. Some participants completed demographic questions but failed to provide parental messages, and some participants answered most questions but failed to answer them all, and there was no reason given for this absence. The content of these messages revealed several themes described in the following paragraphs.

RQ#1: RECOLLECTION OF MESSAGES FROM PARENTS ABOUT CAREERS

Several participants recalled messages from their parental figures about careers. Both paternal and maternal messages yielded four themes regarding the characteristics and pathways for future career success.

Defining a Successful Career. Theme one includes messages about parents defining a successful or adequate career (43.61%; N = 41). This theme includes ideas that are divided into three subcategories. Subcategory one includes messages about a career that creates self-fulfillment (26.6%; n = 25). "Self-fulfillment" incorporates the pursuit of passion, interests, and happiness. For example, ***"Do what you're passionate about, even if it's unconventional."*** Subcategory two includes messages about a career that provides financial security (13.82%; n = 13). "Financial security" includes independence, provision, and the ability to do desired things in

life. For example, ***"Get a job you love that will support the lifestyle you want."*** Additionally,

subcategory three includes advice that a college major does not always align with future career

plans (3.19%; n = 3). For example, ***"You don't always end up working in the field that your***

college major is" and ***"Don't worry about what your bachelor's major is, focus on being***

adaptable to different situations." These messages were all specifically about college majors

and degrees.

    Pathways to Success. Theme two includes advice about how to be successful or establish

a successful career (47.87%; N = 45). Parental advice included suggestions on how participants

could plan for (and act upon) their pursuits of future employment. Three subcategories emerged

from parental messages about career planning. Subcategory one includes advice about the

priority of events for achieving a successful career, like the order and hierarchy of pursuing

passions or emphasis on obtaining a job first before other goals (like marriage or graduate

school) (20%; n = 9). For example, ***"Find a job and make sure you love it before going on to***

more school." This message emphasizes the importance of obtaining a job (or career) that aligns

with the individual's interests before beginning graduate school as an additional educational

experience. Subcategory two includes advice about the steps to be successful in future careers

(68.89%; n = 31). Examples of subcategory two include messages regarding hard work, doing

"your best," resume preparation, and taking advantage of opportunities. For example, ***"She tells***

me to network and make sure my resume is up to date. Also, she has told me to follow up with

any and all opportunities that come my way." Subcategory three includes messages that frame

attitude and life outlook (11.11%; n = 5). For example, ***"A message my father has preached to***

me is that I should "always show enthusiasm and be proactive in the workplace." Participants'

recalled messages about attitudes included perspective and worldviews, a way to frame one's

personal approach to employment in a way that would increase the likelihood of workplace

success.

Parental Encouragement/Support. Theme three includes parental support messages

which emphasized the unconditional nature of parent-child relationships (7.46%; N = 7). This

theme is divided into two subcategories. Subcategory one includes messages which articulate

expressions of unconditional backing (71.43%; n = 5). Participants recalled messages that

contain the belief that parents will provide support no matter their college and career choices: ***"I***

will support you no matter what!" Subcategory two describes advice rather than pressure;

messages in this subcategory emphasize parental guidance, but not mandated or enforced paths,

about future career or college choices (28.57%; n = 2). These messages are characterized by

advice that the participants described as optional or suggestions (in contrast to expectations or

rules). Sample messages include: ***"She recommended I go to college. But never pushed it"*** and

"My mom has never pressured me to choose a specific career but has been supportive and

encouraging through my choices." These messages were all about encouragement and support.

No messages. Theme four includes the accounts of participants who claimed they did not

receive any messages from their parents (1.06%; N = 1). Participant stated that **"They haven't**

really said anything." This was the only time a message was not given to participant.

RQ#2: GENDER DIFFERENCES

Previous literature indicates significant differences in the assignments of work and free

time for male and female children at home (Raskind, Patil, & Tandon, 2020). The current study

reveals support for some differences in parental messages for male and female children about

career and work after childhood. Mothers and fathers appeared to agree on the qualifications and

characteristics of successful future careers for children. There were almost equal messages

categorized as theme one (parents defining a successful or adequate career) with 22 recorded

from mothers and 19 from fathers. Messages related to theme two were almost equal as well

(advice about how to be successful or establish a successful career) accounted for 21 messages

from mothers and 24 messages from fathers. The one area of difference among recalled parental

messages occurred in the assessments of theme three (parental support). Participants were

noticeably more likely to recall messages of encouragement and support from mothers (N = 6)

than fathers (N = 1). Unfortunately, insufficient sample size prevented data analysis on the

effects of parental sex (mothers vs fathers) by participant sex (daughter vs son).

RQ#3: INFLUENCE OF MESSAGES

Most participants stated that recalled messages influenced them in some type of way.

Participants provided 39 comments about the influence of maternal messages and 38 comments

about the influence of paternal messages. Themes of influence ranked evenly between father and

mother messages. Influence of messages were grouped into six categories.

Impacted Major/Job Choice. Category one was the most common theme for the influence

of messages, and it was also the most diverse (37.7%; N = 29). Category one includes six

subcategories. The first subcategory includes how messages helped define a 'good' job (17.24%;

n = 5). Subcategory two includes positive comments about how parental messages encouraged

freedom to make decisions, like ***"I think it's allowed me to explore many different passions for***

potential careers" (31.03%; n = 9). Subcategory three includes comments about how individuals

rejected the advice given to them (6.9%; n = 2). For example, ***"Not really at all since I knew I***

didn't want to do a trade" was given in response to a parental message about obtaining a trades

certificate. Subcategory four includes comments about how parental messages encouraged

individuals to follow their passions over money and followed financial stability (24.14%; n = 7).

For example, ***"Definitely has helped me to pursue something I love, not just what will pay the***

bills." Subcategory five includes comments about how parental messages about how parental

messages indirectly influenced individuals' perceptions of what makes a career acceptable

(6.9%; n = 2). For example, ***"It's made me less likely to explore more risky career paths such as***

in the arts," assuming that a career in the arts would be less acceptable. Subcategory six includes

comments about how parental messages influenced individuals' perceptions of what makes a job

valuable or 'good' (13.79%; n = 4) like ***"This has made me slightly less open to jobs with lower***

salaries." Like theme one in the recalled messages categories, these messages reflect the

influence of parents shaping participants' self-definition of a good career or employment.

Impacted Interactions with Others. Category two includes comments about how parental

messages impact their thoughts towards others and interactions with others (7.8%; N = 6). For

example, ***"I'm much more focused on physically spending time with my family and not just***

making money."

Impacted Order of Events or Decision Making. Category three includes comments from

individuals about how parental messages impacted the order of events or decision making

throughout their college process (5.2%; N = 4). For example, ***"This is why I didn't date until my***

last two years of college. I am married now, but I'm in my last semester." These messages

suggest participants altered the timing, pathway, or order of events in their progress toward

graduation and employment based on parental advice. Further, the messages imply that a correct

or preferred timing exists for successful careers (e.g., school first, then marriage).

Impacted Self-Assessment. This category identifies messages that assess participants'

personal talents (36.4%; N = 28). These comments place a great emphasis on the personal "I".

This category is divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory includes comments from

individuals about how parental messages impacted their self-discovery, like ***"I felt more at ease picking a major and knowing I can be successful in the future no matter what I choose"*** (35.7%; n = 10). The second subcategory includes comments from individuals about how attitudes about hard work and ethics motivated them (35.7%; n = 10). For example, ***"This has taught me to always work hard no matter what I am doing."*** The third subcategory includes comments from individuals about their personal values and beliefs, like ***"It makes me hopeful to find a job because I know I will try my hardest"*** (28.6%; n = 8). This category accounted for comments on the individual's examination of themself.

It (the message) Just Did. This category (6.5%; N = 5) about influence from parental messages includes messages that were simply and literally, ***"yes"*** (80%; n = 4) and one response that stated something slightly more detailed in the following: ***"I always go to my dad for advice, so it has influenced me a lot"*** (20%; n = 1). Unfortunately, some participants did not provide a detailed account of how parental messages influenced them.

Non-influential Messages. This category is about those participants who recalled that messages from parental figures did not influence their decision-making process about college and career (6.5%; N = 5). One individual stated about his father that **"He hasn't influenced me because he doesn't really have a job, but it has led me to know that I will have a career and employment in the future."** Almost all participants were influenced by the messages they received from the parents, with a few exceptions.

DISCUSSION

This paper provides a small insight into how parental communication might influence future decision making for college students regarding career and employment. It appears that most participants did recall messages from their parental figures about college and career,

particularly regarding the characteristics of successful careers and how to achieve them. Further, individuals identified the recalled parental messages as important. Participants shared examples of altered decision-making about college major or employment. A noticeable number of individuals (N=16) consented to begin the online survey but did not answer any of the questions, and one individual partially completed the online survey providing demographic information and family status but failed to provide parental messages. Without further information it is impossible to determine if the incomplete surveys indicated the absence of parental messages, technology issues, or disinterest. Thus, the current study offers preliminary support for existing memorable message research and potential applications to university advising and career planning.

MEMORABLE MESSAGE SUPPORT

Memorable messages are messages that [and] "Unlike many proverbs, then, memorable messages are 'internalized' and 'taken to heart'" (Knapp et al., 1981, p. 39). Memorable messages generally come from those who are older and of a higher status than the recipient (Knapp et al., 1981, p. 33) and they are used to "attempt to integrate certain parts of a life script comprised of a set of guiding injunctions (p. 38). The current study confirms and expands this existing research by connecting the organizational focus of memorable messages with the socializing influence of parental communication.

As previously stated, parents are a primary factor in the process of socialization. "Young people learn norms, values, and beliefs associated with occupations and work through interactions with parents and other influential sources" (Scarduzio, 2018, p. 432). In the current study, it appears that most recalled messages did influence individuals, both in positive and negative ways. Participants shared how recalled messages molded their explorations:

> *"This has helped me discover what I want to go into and why."*
>
> *"I remembered that advice while choosing a college major and when thinking about*
>
> *the future career avenues I could pursue."*

According to Medved et al. (2006), both the direct and indirect messages provided by parental

figures and other influential figures are an early source of information about work attitudes and

occupational choices (p.165). While most recalled messages indicated the positive influence of

parental advice about careers, few participants' comments explicitly declared messages as non-

influential:

> *"Not really at all since I knew I didn't want to do a trade."*

Influence may not happen if the message does not align with the desires of the message receiver.

In this instance, the individual was not interested in pursuing an education that the parent was

referring to. When asked to recall the memorable message provided by the person who filled the

role of father, this same individual stated:

> *[Dad] wasn't sure why [I] would go to a four year since he has a trades degree. [He]*
>
> *does not value school the same amount because he needed only a bit of school but lots*
>
> *of experience.*

More examples of non-fluence include the following:

> *"Not yet."*
>
> *"Not very much; he left before we got to that stage of life."*

Influence might not happen depending on the relationship between parent and child. Some

individuals stated that messages were influential because of their close relationship to their

parental figure:

"Because I have a good relationship with my dad, I know he has told me these things

to show me that I'm capable of more than I realize sometimes, and it encourages me."

Perhaps an individual is less likely to be influenced by memorable messages if they do not have

a strong relationship with the message provider.

Additionally, the current study extends previous literature on memorable messages. Prior

scholarship on memorable messages has focused exclusively on verbal communication to the

exclusion of nonverbal messages. However, communication literature is clear: nonverbal content

plays a significant role in the assigning of meaning during communicative interactions (for

examples see Burgoon, Guerrero & Floyd, 2016 or Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2013). Previous

studies have explored parental socialization through nonverbal channels, particularly instructing

children in emotional expression (Halberstadt, 1986; Halberstadt, Fox & Aaron Jones 1993),

such as displays of anger and sadness (Cassano & Zeman, 2010). The current study also elicited

memories of parents' nonverbal actions as influential guidance:

"He's a very hard worker and has owned his own businesses for years. I like that."

"As a business owner, he always acts like providing for your family is the most

important thing."

 It appears that, like most communication interactions, nonverbal communication can be a salient

and important part of understanding.

Regarding RQ#2, there was little, but some, evidence of gendered differences in the

messages that fathers gave versus mothers. The messages recalled by the participants of this

study give insight into the ways present-day mothers and fathers think about gender roles in

relation to career and employment. Traditional ideologies were identified in both the recalled and

influence messages, most notably regarding relationships and independence. For example, one female participant recalled parental messages about marriage from both parents:

> ***"She told me to go to college and get a career, so you don't have to rely on a man or marriage to live."***

> **"He told me to be able to live independently before thinking about marriage."**

Relatedly, messages about independence were recalled as a characteristic of a successful career: **"She wants me to be independent and successful."** These independence and relationship messages were exclusively recalled by female participants. Male participants, however, recalled messages that tied career success to the provider role: ***"Work hard, find something that, preferably, you enjoy, but more importantly, can support a family."*** Thus, while limited in number, evidence for traditional gendered roles emerged in recalled parental messages.

In addition to the content of parental messages, the current study identified two areas of gendered differences in themes of recalled messages. First, mothers' messages were more often supportive. Mothers gave more messages about encouragement and support compared to fathers (mothers: $N = 6$; fathers: $N = 1$). This could be attributed to women's role as relationship supervisor - e.g., gendered expectations that women present as "nice," "kind," and "encouraging." Thus, it's not the messages per se, but the lack of these messages from fathers. In these participants' households, mothers were seen (through recalled messages) as the encourager, not fathers. Second, participants only recalled paternal messages regarding "*college major does not equal career*" (mothers: $N = 0$; fathers: $N = 3$). Similar to memorable message themes where only male participants recalled messages defining successful careers in light of the financial provider role (for their families), only paternal messages clarified differences between college major and future employment prospects. On the surface, these paternal messages appear to

emphasize the malleable nature of one's career trajectory; one's final employment does not necessarily coincide with one's area of study in college. The small sample size demands care when assigning meaning to these differences, however, like earlier recalled messages from fathers, it should be noted that only male participants recalled paternal messages regarding career changes and college major. These differences may reflect traditional gender ideologies present in the socialization process for careers supporting Medved et al.'s work. Early socialization from parents about work may teach children about gendered occupational roles and traditional stereotypes about different types of work (Medved et al., 2006, p. 166).

PRACTICAL CONNECTIONS

Beyond participants' abilities to recall messages, the current study explored participants' self-reported assessments of message influence. The influence expressed by participants, particularly given the emergent themes, may provide significant applications for college and university professionals, particularly college advisors who work with (or against) parental advice about career, college, and employment decisions.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 20 million students were enrolled in 2- or 4-year college prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; an average of 69% of available graduating High School seniors continue onto higher education classes (Digest of Education Statistics, 2019). While the U.S. Census (2018) reports that minority student enrollments continue to grow, white students remain the majority representation on campuses (52%). Furthermore, minority students are less likely to complete their degrees once they matriculate; "[a]t each type [private/public] of 4-year degree-granting institution, less than 50 percent of both Black students and American Indian/Alaska Native students graduated within 6 years" (Digest of Education Statistics, 2019). Minority students are also more likely to

be first-generation college students. While numerous college-sponsored resources are available

to students, research suggests that at risk students are the least likely to engage with these

support services (RTI international, 2019). Although numerous variables contribute to attrition

among first-generation and minority students, research suggests that frequent, in-person

connections with academic advisors can increase student self-efficacy and retention, particularly

among minority students (Museus, 2010). In their role as counselors to students, academic

advisors offer "a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of

student learning outcomes" designed for measurable student success (NACADA).

The current study's results may contribute to the success of these advising sessions. The

information in this study may be helpful to high school and college advisors who counsel

students on career advice. Given that parent messages are influential and advisor relationships

can help with graduation rates, the knowledge of parental communication might strengthen

advisors' influence. For example, if parents provide information that may be deemed wrong, this

gives advisors the chance to correct and guide students toward more effective pathways

regarding college exploration. Some students shared that the memorable messages received

influenced them in such a way that may reflect a dysfunctional belief: "**It's made me less likely**

to explore more risky career paths such as in the arts" and **"Yep this advice helped me**

make sure I didn't go into a dumb major." Parents might pass on career-related myths or

dysfunctional beliefs, and the knowledge of memorable messages can aid advisors with

disproving messages that contain such myths and beliefs.

LIMITATIONS

The goal of this study was to have a minimum of 50 survey respondents. However, only

40 of the 58 participants total participants completed the survey. For those students who did not

complete the survey, it is unknown as to the reason why they chose not to answer questions, perhaps the survey was too long, or they did not recall any messages. A larger sample size would allow for a wider range of results. Further, most current participants were Caucasian and lived in two-parent households. As research suggests two-parent households are a primary location for learning about the gendered division of labor with girls doing more household work than boys and observations of task-sharing by parents (Crouter, Head, Bumpus, & McHale, 2001; Gager, Cooney, & Call, 1999), an expansion of data collection including family type diversity would be a benefit to the study's conclusions. Similarly, demographic data does not provide adequate information regarding sexual orientation of participants' parents or family make-up. As the gendered division of labor is attributed to heterosexual (i.e., male parent and female parent) households, additional caution is warranted to avoid heteronormative biases in the generalizing of these results. Regarding gender literature, this sample size did not provide enough information for the splitting of messages for sons and daughters.

CONCLUSION

Future research would benefit from attracting a wider, more diverse sample, particularly exploring the potential differences in memorable messages from single-parent and dual-parent households, between participants of color and those who identify as Caucasian. It would also be interesting to give this study to only first-generation college students and find if the content of recalled messages were different compared to their counterparts.

The current study sought to uncover the connections between parental influence on careers through the recall of communicative interactions called memorable messages. As a college student, I am aware of the influential role my parents have played in my life thus far, both the single mother who raised me and the father who was only somewhat present throughout

my childhood. As a Communication student, I am aware of the power words can have in shaping

understanding and meaning. As memorable message literature increases, scholarship will

continue to show the power of words in other areas of life, beyond college and career.

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