COLLEGE STUDENTS AND CAREER:
AN EXPLORATION OF VOCATIONAL ANTICIPATORY SOCIALIZATION

Teresa Elizabeth McAlpine

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Approved by:

Dennis K. Mumby

Patrick T. Akos

Carole Blair

Steven K. May

Lawrence B. Rosenfeld

ABSTRACT

TERESA MCALPINE: College Students and Career: An Exploration of Vocational
Anticipatory Socialization
(Under the direction of Dennis K. Mumby)

This project examines a group of college students' understandings of career as they prepare

to graduate. Based on a grounded theory analysis of 10 focus groups and 21 interviews, this

project explores the way 56 college seniors make sense of societal and familial career

discourses. The students articulate dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices.

These include that the student should have a plan that meets the following standards: requires

one's degree, ensures financial security, is prestigious, is career-focused, and is something at

which one can excel. I analyze students' responses to these dominant discourses. While

students accept the discourses by making discourse-aligned choices and judging those who

do not comply, their acceptance is not total. Students also resist the dominant discourses.

They do so by making alternative choices and calling upon resistance discourses. Students

also simultaneously accept and resist the dominant discourses. Based on these findings, I

argue that the dominant discourses experienced by the students operate as a form of control

privileging certain career choices, approaches to career, and career decision-making criteria

while marginalizing others. However, this control is not total. Instead, it exists in a

dialectical relationship with resistance.

For Brian

&

In memory of Colleen

At times as I worked on this project it was hard to remember that I was not just a person who was (supposed to be) working on a dissertation. My friends from "home" often served as much needed reminders of who I am beyond the academic world. And so I thank Jennifer Bartin, Dave and Maureen Ebenhoh, Heather Hackmann, Kiersten Swisher, Mary Thome, and Bridget Zimmermann for reminding me of me.

Often when I talked about this project to people I felt like I needed to say, "But my family isn't like that!" I am lucky to have a family that I believe truly just wants me to be happy. The love and support of my parents, Robert and Elizabeth McAlpine, and my brother and sister-in-law, Robert and Alyssa McAlpine, continues to sustain me. And then there are my fabulous nieces, Laura and Lillie, who help me enter a world where the present moment is the most important one.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, Brian Robin Macobin. Throughout this process he has ably walked the fine line of reminding me that this project both mattered and did not matter. He has read most every word of the dissertation, many of them several times. There are not words enough to thank him for his emotional and practical support during this process. Instead, I will just promise to do the same.

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CHAPTER ONE

VOCATIONAL ANTICIPATORY SOCIALIZATION: A NEGLECTED AREA OF
STUDY

In recent years there have been a number of calls to broaden the scope of

organizational communication scholarship beyond the communication practices that occur

within the walls of specific organizations. In one such call, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004)

advocate a view of organizational communication that includes investigation of "how a larger

society portrays and debates its institutions and the very notion of work" (p. 19). Scholarship

that falls within this expanded understanding of the field includes, for example, analyses of

discourses of mothering (Medved & Kirby, 2005), career models (Buzzanell, 2000;

Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991), management self-help materials (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney,

2005; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000) and the notion of the "the professional" (Cheney &

Ashcraft, 2007).

While some scholarship has investigated "notions of work," such research has

generally focused on discourses of work aimed at/experienced by people who have entered

the professional workforce. Yet, people are socialized about work and career long before

they enter the professional workforce. From an early age, people are socialized by numerous

messages about occupational prestige, appropriate career paths, what counts as "work," and

so forth. These messages include statements from family and friends, media images, and

educational and institutional practices. Such messages construct discursive formations that

create certain expectations and "truths" about work and career. These constructed truths privilege certain career choices and life priorities while marginalizing others.

The issue of career has long been salient for me. As a child I dreaded the "what are you going to be when you grow up?" question because I never had an answer. On Career Day at school, I pretended I wanted to be a nurse (like my mom) even though I faint at the sight of a needle. In high school, the issue of career choice became even more salient. With college looming, I felt like I needed to have a plan. With a lot of angst, but not much research, I decided to apply to schools as a business major. It was the practical choice and I come from a family that values practicality. Rationalizing that a double social sciences major was as good as a business major, I changed my major to communication and psychology. But, I still had little direction and much anxiety. I worried a great deal about what to do after college. It seemed like most people I knew had a plan, but not me. My advisor told me that if I did not go to grad school I would "be wasting my grades." My parents said graduate school did not make sense without a plan and that "real world" experience was important.

The details of my career history are not important to this study, but the stress I felt over career choices during college is part of the reason I chose to do this project. In my interactions with college students as an instructor, I have watched a number of them struggle with similar concerns. I have been particularly moved by the stories students have shared with me regarding struggles with their families over career choices. One student in particular stood out to me. An articulate, socially-engaged, passionate woman, Collette[1] was a student in three of my classes and later participated in this project. Over several semesters, Collette and I talked about her post-college plans. One day in the midst of a rambling conversation

about her indecision, Collette announced with certainty that she wanted to work with food and eventually become a chef. She went on to talk about her love of food and cooking. But then, she told me she did not think she would pursue that after graduation. Her parents wanted her to go to graduate school in speech pathology instead. A devoted daughter, Collette was unwilling (at the time) to disappoint or disobey her parents. While Collette's story was among the most vivid I heard from students, it was not isolated. Furthermore, as I began telling family and friends about the pilot study for this project, I heard many more stories. Everyone seemed to have been or know someone who had felt some amount of pressure regarding career decisions. Whether the push was to go to law school because that is what smart kids do or not to study art because it was too risky, the stories were numerous.

As a scholar interested in critical approaches, I began to think of these career issues in terms of power-laden social constructions. Many people, including Collette's parents, view working in a restaurant as a lower status occupation than being a speech pathologist. There is nothing inherently true or real about this judgment. Yet, it has material consequences for Collette and others facing similar career choices. In contemporary U.S. society, the average worker spends almost 2000 hours a year at work (Schor, 1993). For some people the choice of how to spend those hours is severely limited by circumstances, including economic constraints and a lack of educational opportunities. This project looks at the other end of the spectrum. I am interested in how career choices are also constrained for people who are widely viewed as having numerous opportunities. For example, Collette identifies her family as being very financially secure. Her parents have paid for her education. She has been academically successful at a respected university. Many would say she can choose to do

whatever she wants. However, she, like many others, faces familial and cultural expectations as to what she "should" or "shouldn't" do after graduation.

Collette and other college students have been socialized regarding appropriate career paths, acceptable occupational choices, and ways they should make career decisions. To understand better this process, in this project I analyze how 56 college seniors make sense of widely disseminated work and career discourses. I use a grounded theory analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify various career discourses that enable and constrain the choices the students consider possible. As discussed above, my initial interest in this topic was in understanding how career choices are constrained by societal and familial pressures. However, as the project developed, I sought to remain open to the various ways the participants interacted with work and career discourses. Therefore, I examine the ways the students accept, negotiate, and resist these discourses. My goal in studying student experiences of work/career discourses is to understand the ways the dominant discourses operate dialectically to simultaneously control students and foster their resistance.

In the sections that follow, I outline mainstream understandings of organizational socialization, provide an introduction to the literature on vocational anticipatory socialization, discuss a critical approach to vocational anticipatory socialization, and preview the structure of this dissertation.

Organizational Socialization

Most organizational communication research on socialization refers to a stages model, often the one presented by Jablin (1987). In this model people are socialized before they enter the workplace (anticipatory socialization), at the point of entry (organizational assimilation–encounter phase), and as their time in the organization progresses

(organizational assimilation – metamorphosis phase). Jablin also includes stages of

disengagement and exit in his model. Primarily, this model focuses on how people come to

know and adopt the norms and rules of the organization (socialization) and how the

newcomers shape the roles and organizations they enter (individualization).

Anticipatory Socialization

While Jablin's model of organizational socialization focuses on people entering and

adapting to workplaces, it does acknowledge that people are socialized about work before

they enter the workplace. Jablin (1987) terms this part of the socialization process

"anticipatory socialization." Van Maanen (1976) defines anticipatory socialization as:

> The degree to which an individual is prepared – prior to entry – to occupy
> organizational positions. As such, preparatory learning occurs via the person's
> family, peers, educational institutions and cultural influences (media etc.). The
> results of anticipatory socialization may range from the internalization of broad
> societal prescriptions (e.g., "a man must work") to specific behavioral guidelines
> associated with a chosen career (e.g., "doctors must not become personally involved
> with their patients"). (p. 81)

While Van Maanen's definition is focused on vocational anticipatory socialization, often

anticipatory socialization is divided into vocational anticipatory socialization and

organizational anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001). In this distinction, *vocational*

anticipatory socialization involves all socialization influences about work and organization

before the job search process starts. Once the job search begins, the model terms the

socializing practices *organizational* anticipatory socialization. In this project, I use the term

anticipatory socialization to refer only to *vocational* anticipatory socialization (hereafter

abbreviated VAS).

While much research has been done on organizational socialization, very little

attention has been paid by organizational communication scholars to the anticipatory

socialization stage (see Clair 1996; Gibson & Papa, 2000 for exceptions). Instead, most of

the research has focused on socialization processes after people enter work organizations

(Kramer & Noland, 1999), often completely ignoring the concept of anticipatory

socialization (e.g., Forward, 1999; Kramer & Noland, 1999; Van Maanen, 1975). Also, in

reviews of organizational socialization, the research discussed in the VAS section nearly

exclusively comes from outside the communication discipline (e.g., Jablin, 1987, 2001). By

focusing nearly exclusively on work socialization after people enter the workplace,

organizational communication scholarship is ignoring an important component in the work

socialization process. As Clair (1999) writes, "organizational communication socialization is

meant to be much broader than socializing or assimilating someone into an organization" (p.

376). Since socialization is "the manner in which an individual learns the behavior

appropriate to his position in a group" (Brim, 1966, p. 9), organizational socialization

research should include study of how people come to understand what behaviors and

attitudes about work and career are appropriate. As this understanding begins long before

people enter the paid workforce, increased study of vocational anticipatory socialization is

needed.

  Organizational communication has largely ignored the VAS process. However, other

fields have investigated ways young people are socialized regarding work and career. While

the disciplinary backgrounds of the research on this process vary, it all focuses on what

people learn about work and occupations before they enter the (full-time) workforce. As

Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann (1991) write,

> Work beliefs exist independent of current work experiences. Adolescents and young
> adults may hold beliefs about job-related exploitation and alienation, just as they may
> hold beliefs about the personal fulfillment one should derive from one's work, even
> though their employment experiences are limited. (p. 729)

There are many personal and social factors that may shape people's understandings of occupations and work. The five areas communication scholars cite as central to anticipatory socialization are: family, peers, school, part-time work, and the media (Jablin, 1987, 2001; Vangelista, 1988). In the following sections, I review key topics discussed in mainstream organizational communication VAS reviews of these areas.

Family

One of the key sources of anticipatory socialization about work and organizational life is the family. Much of the socializing effect of the family comes from parents (Barling et al., 1991; McCall & Lawler, 1976; Seligman, Weinstock, & Helflin, 1991; Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995), but siblings (Tucker, Barber, & Eccles, 1997) and the larger family unit (Pearson & Bieschke, 2001) also play a role. VAS research on ways children and young people are socialized through familial interactions focuses on three areas: a) the socializing role of children's household work (Bowes & Goodnow, 1996; Goodnow, 1988; Goodnow, Bowes, Warton, Dawes, & Taylor, 1991); b) the socialization of work-related values and attitudes through familial communication (Barling et al., 1991; McCall & Lawler, 1976; Pearson & Bieschke, 2001; Vincent, Peplau & Hill, 1998); and c) parental influence on young people's career-related expectations and aspirations (Seligman et al., 1991; Trice & Knapp, 1992; Trice et al., 1995).

Goodnow (1988) argues that children's participation in household tasks is an early vocational socialization process. Through their participation in chores, children learn familial norms about how housework is or is not valued. They also learn how tasks are sex-typed as "male" or "female" (Bowes & Goodnow, 1996). Furthermore, through household chores children learn communication patterns related to work. These patterns include how

and when to raise questions, how decisions are made, and when following orders is necessary (Bowes & Goodnow, 1996).

In addition to the socializing role of household chores, familial interaction also socializes children in terms of work-related attitudes. Some of the strongest evidence for the family's power as a socializing agent comes from research showing that children take on many of the same attitudes toward work as their parents (Barling et al., 1991; McCall & Lawler, 1976). These attitudes include a strong work ethic (Gibson & Papa, 2000), intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for work (McCall & Lawler, 1976), attitudes towards labor unions (Barling et al., 1991), and attitudes regarding women's fulltime employment (Pearson & Bieschke, 2001; Vincent et al., 1998).

A third line of VAS research regarding familial socialization examines young people's career expectations and aspirations. Some of this research includes the extent to which children aspire to the same fields as their parents. There is evidence of correspondence between children's occupational aspirations and choices and the occupations of their mothers (Trice & Knapp, 1992; Trice et al, 1995) and fathers (Schulenberg, Vondracek & Crouter, 1984). A more complex way that families socialize young people regarding career aspirations is through cultivating children's beliefs about their abilities. Frome and Eccles (1998) found that parents socialize their children in terms of ability expectations in math and English. The expectations parents have for their children outweigh grades in terms of how the children view their abilities.

In addition to cultivating students' aspirations, families communicate expectations regarding career choice. These messages may be internalized at fairly young ages. For example, Seligman et al. (1991) found that children as young as 10 felt pressure from their

parents to pursue high-status occupations. The effect of these socializing messages on children may depend on several factors related to family dynamics and race/ethnicity. The levels of connection and autonomy in families appear to play an important role in children's beliefs about career (Guay, Senecal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003; Kinnier, Brigman, & Noble, 1990). Children from families that are more closely connected are more likely to adopt the expectations set for them by their parents (Kinnier et al., 1990). There is also some evidence that race and ethnicity play a role in the importance of socialization by family members. Dillard and Campbell (1981) found that African American adolescents were more likely to follow parental expectations than Puerto Rican or Caucasian adolescents. Similarly, McWhirter, Hackett, and Bandalos (1998) found that family influence was more strongly connected to the career aspirations of Mexican-American girls than to the career aspirations of Caucasian girls.

Peers

While the family is typically the first socializing agent, as children grow, the peer group becomes increasingly more important (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Peer influence is especially strong because the peer group is both a reference group to which teens compare themselves and a setting in which adolescents can experiment with behaviors they are learning from other socializing agents (Peterson & Peters, 1983). In relation to vocational anticipatory socialization, "peers function as significant others who confirm or disconfirm the desirability of particular occupations" (Peterson & Peters, 1983, p. 81).

Although peer relationships are believed to be an important factor in the vocational anticipatory socialization process, little scholarship has been done connecting issues of career and work to the socializing effects of peers (Jablin, 2001; Vangelista, 1988). The VAS

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research that does focus on peers is centered on two key issues: a) work-related

communication patterns learned in peer groups, and b) peer influence on aspirations.

Jablin (2001) argues that young people's peer relationships are an important site of

learning about communicating in organizational contexts. Through these relationships young

people learn about problem solving, conflict resolution, and appropriate emotional

expression. Young people learn these communication behaviors in friendship groups and

activity-based groups such as sports teams or scouts. While these communication behaviors

are similar to those encountered in formal work organizations, little is known about how

these young adult experiences relate to future adult work interactions (Jablin, 2001).

Although not addressed in Jablin's (2001) review of peer-related VAS literature, a

second peer-related aspect of VAS is peer influence on career aspirations. Vangelista (1988)

reviews this literature, citing several studies supporting the influence of peers on career

aspirations. Davies and Kandel (1981) found that peer influence on adolescents' future plans

did exist. However, parents' aspirations for their children had a much stronger effect than

did peer influence. This supports Sebald's (1986) finding that adolescents were more likely

to go to their parents for career concerns than to their friends.

Education

Along with family (e.g., Barling et al., 1991) and peers (e.g., Davies & Kandel,

1981), educational institutions are sources of vocational anticipatory socialization (Jablin,

1985, 1987, 2001). Jablin (1985) writes that schools are especially important sites of

socialization because "(1) schools have the explicit mandate to socialize people, (2) schools

serve as transitional institutions, (3) the relationships of authority and control in school

systems replicate hierarchical structure in the workplace, and (4) schools are one of the first

formal organizations that children experience" (p. 617). In schools, from elementary (or even preschool) through college and graduate school, students are receiving messages about work and career (Snizek & Mayer, 1984).

Of the research done on anticipatory socialization in schools, little relates to the implicit messages the students receive about work and career. Instead it focuses on outcomes of direct teaching strategies (Vangelista, 1988). Of this research on outcomes, much has focused on the extent to which students receive and retain accurate information about occupations (Grotevant & Durrett, 1980; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991). These studies show that many of the messages students report holding are inaccurate. For example, half of high school seniors did not know the accurate amount of education required for their desired occupation (Grotevant & Durrett, 1980). Similarly, Nicholson and Arnold (1991) found that college students were not socialized about post-college work realistically.

This research on education provides some important findings related to the accuracy of socialized expectations (Grotevant & Durrett, 1980; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991). However, it does not interrogate the role of educational institutions in vocational socialization. Instead, it presumes that realistic VAS is an objective of educational institutions.

Part-time Employment

The fourth source of VAS identified by Jablin is part-time employment. Jablin's inclusion of part-time employment as *anticipatory* to full-time employment has been critiqued (Clair, 1996). While I am sympathetic to this critique, since part-time employment is included in the major reviews of the literature on the topic (Jablin 1987, 2001; Vangelista, 1988), I include it here.

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Although Jablin includes part-time work in his model of VAS, the socializing effects of adolescent employment have not been the focus of much research (Jablin, 2001). The research that does exist in this area focuses on the work-related skills young people do or do not learn through part-time work. Greenberger, Steinberg, and Ruggiero (1982) conclude that, typically, adolescent work does not provide useful skills and generally does not involve substantial learning or autonomy. However, Phillips and Sandstrom (1990) argue that such work does socialize young people into some of the communication practices typically used in work settings.

Media

The final source of VAS messages come from the media. Research in this area investigates representations of work and occupations in various mediated forms including movies (Hassard & Holiday, 1998), television (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 1997; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 1989), television news (Ryan & Sim, 1990), magazines (Pierce, 1993), soap operas (Katzman, 1972) and children's books (Ingersoll & Adams, 1992). It also examines the influence of these depictions on children and young adults (Pfau, Mullen, Deidrich, & Garrow, 1995; Potts & Martinez, 1994; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987).

In examining depictions of work, these studies seek to understand how different aspects of work (Hassard & Holiday, 1998) and types of professions (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 1997; Ryan & Sim, 1990; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 1989) are depicted. Within this literature, sex- and race-based stereotypes in depictions of occupations receive the most attention (e.g., Ingersoll & Adams, 1992; Pierce, 1993; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987).

In addition to examining how professions and work are represented in the media, VAS literature also investigates the influence of these representations on young people (Pfau

et al, 1995; Potts & Martinez, 1994; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987). Based on their study of

female adolescents and television viewing patterns, Wroblewski and Huston (1987) write,

"the results support the prediction that early adolescents glean a considerable amount of

occupational information from television" (p. 295). The occupational information the 9 to13-

year-olds gathered from television appeared to influence their career aspirations. The girls

who watched programs that depicted people in jobs that were considered gender

nontraditional were more likely to aspire to male-stereotyped occupations. Conversely, the

girls who watched programs that depicted people in gender traditional jobs were more likely

to aspire to female-stereotyped occupations (Wroblewski & Huston, 1987).

Research on sex stereotypes is not the only focus of media-related VAS literature.

For example, Potts and Martinez (1994) researched the effects of cartoon viewing on

children's attitudes to scientists. Previous research on depictions of scientists found that they

are depicted negatively, often as mentally unstable or evil, in children's programming.

Accordingly, Potts and Martinez hypothesized that children who watched more cartoons

would have more negative views of scientists than those who watched fewer cartoons. They

found support for this hypothesis. While this is a specific example of the media's role in

VAS, it illustrates the potential influence media have on how young people view occupations

and work.

A Critical Approach to VAS

The VAS literature reviewed above primarily takes a functionalist perspective. It

examines the sources and messages that socialize young people about occupations and work-

related communication. Some VAS literature examines issues of power through an analysis

of sex and race stereotypes related to occupation (e.g., Ingersoll & Adams, 1992; Pierce,

1993; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987). However, in general, VAS literature refrains from an analysis of social control.

Adopting a critical approach expands the scope of VAS research to include an interrogation of power and resistance in career socialization; as such, a critical approach to VAS examines the contemporary meanings of career. What counts as a "successful," "real," or "normal" career is a power-laden social construction. These notions of work privilege certain ways of being in the world while marginalizing others. A critical organizational communication perspective examines how these ideas are legitimated, transformed, and contested. One example of this type of research is Clair's (1996) study of college students' experiences with the colloquialism "a real job." Using a critical-interpretive approach, Clair analyzed college students' essays about hearing or saying the phrase "a real job." Through her analysis, Clair examines the ways this colloquialism reflects and perpetuates capitalist notions of "real" work. Furthermore, she argues that this colloquialism and the attendant capitalist notions of work marginalize career options such as blue collar and non-profit work while privileging white collar, for-profit career options. In doing so, she highlights the power-laden socializing aspect of the colloquialism "a real job."

A critical approach to VAS also examines how young people's career socialization involves complex forms of control and resistance. One example of such an approach is Willis' (1977) analysis of a group of teenage working class males in England. While not framed as either study of VAS or an organizational communication project, Willis' work highlights potential focal points for critical VAS scholarship. Through an ethnographic investigation, he documents how the peer group functions to define what counts as appropriate masculine attitudes toward education and work. Specifically, he addresses the

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lads' understandings of themselves as resistant to dominant notions of appropriate, middle-class behavior and belief in education as a means to career success. Willis discusses how the lads' resistance to the dominant educational ideology results in their insertion in the same occupational and class situations as their fathers. While his analysis can be criticized as emphasizing only the reproduction of power, it highlights the rich potential in examining the ways control and resistance circulate through young people's career decision-making experiences.

In this project, I combine aspects of Clair and Willis' studies discussed above. This project seeks to examine both college students' discursive constructions of work and career, and the ways power and resistance circulate through those students' decision-making experiences. The college seniors in this project have all been socialized about appropriate post-college choices. While what counts as appropriate may differ based on the student's personal characteristics, his or her family background, or any number of other circumstances, the students share an understanding that certain choices are appropriate while others are not. This is evidence of vocational anticipatory socialization. The students have not yet entered the professional workplace, but they have been interpellated by dominant career discourses.

Dissertation Structure

This project analyzes how students are socialized about career and the ways they respond to that socialization. The structure of this analysis is summarized below:

In order to examine the socialization process experienced by the participants, it is first necessary to understand prevalent career discourses. Therefore, in chapter 2, I review the literature on traditional, mainstream contemporary, and alternative career discourses. I also address the literature on career discourses directed at young people before they enter the

professional workplace. Throughout this review, I examine the ways these various

discourses enable and constrain career and lifestyle choices. Additionally, I discuss research

on the career-related attitudes of today's teenagers and college students. Finally, I propose

the research questions that guide this project.

After reviewing the relevant literature in chapter 2, in chapter 3 I discuss this

project's theoretical grounding. Specifically, I address the relationships among discourse,

power, identity, and agency that I am adopting. I also address the normative grounding for

this project.

Having discussed the relevant literature and my theoretical perspective, chapter 4

addresses the methods I used. First, I outline the critical qualitative orientation I adopt. Then

I address my rationale for using interviews and focus groups. Finally, I discuss the research

context, participants, and the data collection and analysis processes.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the key themes identified in the data analysis. In chapter 5, I

discuss the dominant discourses of post-college choice experienced by the college students.

These include an expectation to have a career. Furthermore, the students perceive the

expectation that their plans should meet certain standards. Common standards include that

the plan should: require their degree, provide financial security, be prestigious, be

advancement-oriented, and allow them to excel. In chapter 6, I discuss student responses to

these dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choice. I explore the ways students

accept the mainstream expectations through making aligned choices and judging others. I

then discuss students' resistance through discourses of differing priorities, individuality, and

confidence. Finally, I examine how students simultaneously accept and resist the dominant

discourses.

Chapter 7 connects chapters 5 and 6 in a discussion of the dialectics of control and resistance exhibited in the students' interactions with career-related discourses. I explore how the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices operate as a form of control that limits occupational choices, privileges certain approaches to career, and promotes corporate decision-making values. Throughout this analysis, I address the ways in which the same discourses that control students also enable resistance. Additionally, I highlight ways that student resistance perpetuates dominant understandings.

In chapter 8, I address the implications of my findings for the field of organizational communication. I also discuss several ways that these findings could be useful for career counselors, academic advisors, faculty members, parents, and others who interact with college students during their career decision-making process. Finally, I address limitations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the study of students' lived experience of career discourses within the broader context of research on the professions and careers. By the time young people are college seniors they have encountered various career-related discourses. While some of these discourses may be restricted to their families or a particular set of circumstances, research on career formations identifies pervasive career discourses. In this chapter, I synthesize research on the career discourses most relevant to college students. Such research does not always frame career concepts and formations as discourses. However, I am using the term "discourse" to highlight the constructed nature of career paths and expectations. Specifically, I discuss the relevant research on traditional, mainstream and alternative discourses of professional careers. I also address the literature on career discourses directed at young people before they enter the professional workplace. Throughout my discussion of contemporary career discourses, I emphasize the possible ways these discourses enable and constrain various career and lifestyle choices. I also address what is known about the career-related attitudes of today's teenagers and college students. Finally, I propose the research questions that guide this project.

Professional Career Discourses

Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) define career as "the unfolding sequence of a person's work experience over times" (p. 8). Although this definition is fairly broad, cultural constructions of appropriate careers are narrower. Societal, organizational, and familial

discourses of an appropriate career construct and maintain particular ways in which this unfolding is expected to occur. In this section, I discuss traditional and newer mainstream discourses of professional careers. I also address some alternative discourses of career. For each discourse, I consider what career and lifestyle options are enabled and constrained by that understanding of an appropriate career path.

<div align="center">*Mainstream Professional Career Discourses*</div>

Organizational communication scholarship, particularly critical, feminist, and postmodernist approaches, has identified and critiqued dominant discourses of professional careers (Buzzanell, 2000; Grey, 1994; Lair et al., 2005). This analysis has included an examination of how the dominant professional career discourse has changed from an "old" social contract to a "new" social contract (Buzzanell, 2000). In this section, I explain the traditional and new discourses of professional careers. I also highlight the ways each discourse privileges and marginalizes certain options.

Career According to the Old Social Contract

The "old" or "traditional" social contract of a professional career was based on the employee's loyalty to an organization. The underlying assumption was that "employees exchanged loyalty for job security" (Sullivan, 1999, p. 458). Also termed the "organizational" career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), the old social contract presumed a long-standing and mutually committed connection between the organization and the professional. Within this discourse, the appropriate career path involved long-term, advancement-oriented employment within one or a very few organizations over the course of an individual's career. While not all career experiences matched this model, it was a dominant model of professional careers until recent decades (Sullivan, 1999).

The discourse of the traditional or organizational career enabled a particular set of relations between the organization and its employees. Professional workers had the freedom to trust that their jobs were relatively stable. Additionally, the discourse of the traditional career clearly demarcated how a successful professional would advance in the organization. Within this discourse, the appropriate professional career was one with a linear trajectory in which a person quickly advanced upward, typically within one organization. As Evetts (1992) writes, "The normal career is apparently one involving continuous service and steady, regular promotions to the highest position an individual is capable of achieving" (p. 7). This explicitly defined structure enabled professionals to understand where they stood in the organization and what they needed to do in order to advance.

By enabling stability and clear advancement structures, the traditional career discourse was also constraining. Since linear advancement within one or a few organizations was the standard, deviations from this were stigmatized (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). People were expected to move "up" and to do so quickly. To not move up was to "stagnate" or be "plateaued" (Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991). Within the traditional career discourse, there was not a language with which to position a slower career trajectory or a non-promotion-focused one as "normal" or "successful." Instead, to choose not to pursue an advancement-focused career path was termed "unsuccessful" or "opting out." Similarly, career choices that reduce the chance of promotion were seen as less successful. Therefore, taking "time off" work to pursue other interests or choosing not to focus on career for a period of time made one "unsuccessful." In this way, the traditional career discourse tended to privilege paid work over family responsibilities (Bailyn, 1993).

Career According to the New Social Contract

As workplace structures have changed and globalization and technology have increased, notions of career have also changed (Sullivan, 1999). The current dominant understanding of career is termed "the new social contract" (Buzzanell, 2000). In this newer discourse, career is understood as "a series of work contracts over the course of a lifetime" (Buzzanell, 2000, p. 210). With this less organization-centered notion of career, conceptualizations of advancement also change. In the new career, instead of the goal being advancement within an organization, now the goal is "employability security." This is the self-assurance that one possesses the requisite skills, education, and competencies to secure employment when a current "contract" ends. Within this discourse, employees are conceptualized as "free agents" who make their own decisions about employment and direct their own careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The extent to which this discourse is reflective of material workplace conditions has been challenged. However, the discourse itself is widespread within U.S. management and popular literature (Jacoby, 1999). Within these writings, two separate but related conceptualizations of the new career are discussed: boundaryless careers and protean careers. In this section, I explain each conceptualization separately. Then I identify the underlying relationship between them. Finally, I analyze potential ramifications of the new discourse of professional careers.

Within the mainstream new career discourse, the boundaryless career is one of the popular conceptualizations of an appropriate career. Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) definition of the term "boundaryless career" was broad. They defined a boundaryless career to include a variety of forms of independence from traditional career arrangements. These forms included "when a person rejects existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons"

and when a career actor "draws validation – and marketability – from outside the present employer" (p. 6).

Despite this originally broad definition of a boundaryless career, the term is now commonly used in a much narrower sense. A boundaryless career is most frequently understood as a career that is not tied to one organization (Sullivan, 2000). Instead, workers with boundaryless careers move between jobs at different organizations. To pursue such a career successfully, workers must continually accumulate transferable knowledge (Baker & Aldrich, 1996). They must also identify strongly enough with their careers to prioritize career advancement and success over location or stability (Baker & Aldrich, 1996).

The second popular conceptualization of career within the new discourse is that of the protean career. Like the boundaryless career, the protean career emphasizes independence from the organization. However, the concept of the protean career is less focused on external choices such as moving between organizations. Instead, the protean career concept is more focused on the subjective experience of the individual. The protean career is a "career driven by the person, not the organization, based upon individually defined goals, encompassing the whole life space, as well as being driven by psychological success rather than objective success such as pay, rank or power" (Briscoe & Hall, 2006a, p. 7). Hall (2002) discusses the protean career as an orientation or mindset people have towards their career. A person may have more or less of a protean career orientation. Briscoe and Hall (2006a) write, "the protean career orientation does not imply particular behavior, such as job mobility, but rather it is a mindset about the career – more specifically an attitude toward the career that reflects freedom, self-direction and making choices based on one's personal values" (p. 7).

The boundaryless and protean careers concepts have now become status quo (Briscoe & Hall, 2006b, p. 1). While distinctions can be made between these two career notions, central to both is the role of individual. In the new discourse of career, the professional worker is positioned as controlling his or her own destiny. The contract is no longer with the organization, it is "with the self and one's work" (Hall & Moss, 1998, p. 25). In this section, I address the ways this understanding of career enables and constrains career and lifestyle options.

Enabling autonomy. The new career discourse positions the worker as a free agent in control of his or her career path. Some scholars argue that this benefits workers by increasing their autonomy (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002). For example, Hall (2002) argues that workers are now freer to make lateral moves, switch jobs and change occupations. Such changes are destigmatized. Cohen and Mallon's (1999) study of "portfolio" or freelance workers provides evidence of this. They found that the portfolio workers drew on "emerging career discourse to legitimate their decision" (p. 344) to leave organizational jobs in favor of self-employment.

The new career discourse also allows for more autonomy because within the discourse of the protean career, "the goal is psychological success" (Hall, 2002, p. 24). Hall claims that external measures of success such as wealth and advancement are therefore no longer the only standards. This shift in definitions of success allows people more freedom to make choices that privilege family and personal priorities over work ones (Hall, 2002).

Constraining autonomy. While proponents of the new career discourses argue for their emancipatory powers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002), others critique them as restrictive (Du Gay, 1996; Grey, 1994). Critics argue that the new career discourses

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constrain workers by promoting two ideas about work: (a) workers are responsible for the success or failure of their careers (Buzzanell, 2000); and (b) career is intimately connected to one's sense of self (Du Gay, 1996). In this section, I explain these two ideas and discuss their ramifications.

The new career discourse positions workers as free agents in control of their careers. While this freedom is seen by some as an advantage to workers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002), others see it as a potential detriment (Buzzanell, 2000; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Since workers are constructed as having a near total responsibility for their own careers, if a person does not have career success, it is construed as the individual's fault (Buzzanell, 2000). Pringle and Mallon (2003) argue that the new career discourses have allowed organizations to transfer instability to the worker. Instead of the organization bearing the majority of the culpability for laying people off, the worker is responsible for ensuring that he or she is easily marketable to another organization. This understanding of career defers responsibility from institutional structures, government policies, and economic forces. Instead, the individual is conceptualized as an agentic self in control and completely responsible.

Lair et al. (2005) argue that some popular management writings promote this sense of personal responsibility through a discourse of personal branding. Here, "the concepts of product development and promotion are used to market persons" (p. 309). In self-help books that promote personal branding, employees are encouraged to learn ways they can continually develop and promote themselves as a unique "brand." In positioning people as unique brands, this discourse reinforces the idea that people must maintain their own marketability.

In addition to promoting the idea that individuals are responsible for their careers (Buzzanell, 2000; Pringle & Mallon, 2003), the new career discourse also connects one's sense of self to career performance. No longer does career success "just" determine social prestige and financial reward, now it is even more closely connected to self-worth. As Du Gay (1996) writes, the new career discourse promotes the idea that "becoming a better worker is the same thing as becoming a better self" (p. 137). This connection of identity to career has been critiqued as a form of the discourse of self-entrepreneurialism. Within this discourse, the self is a "project" that must always be worked on and continually improved (Rose, 1999). It is not enough to maintain the status quo; one should always be doing more, learning new things, and keeping up a competitive edge.

The sense of responsibility people are expected to take for their own careers and the close connection between work and self-worth promote specific ways people are expected to relate to their work and to the rest of their lives. In this section I address two ways workers' relationships to their work and lives are affected by the new career discourse: (a) the reduction of time and energy that can be devoted to non-work activities, and (b) the colonization of non-work arenas by work.

The new career discourse positions work as central to one's self-worth and the individual as responsible for career success. This combination leads to an increased pressure to focus on one's workplace performance. Such pressure restricts the amount of time an individual has free for non-work related activities. Baker and Aldrich (1996) write that, "the increased time burden represents a further encroachment of work into formerly personal time" (p. 142). They go on to explain that the new career models privilege "people whose sense of identity is not involved in a variety of other time-consuming activities, such as

parenting, hobbies or community work" because "these people will be better able to give

undiluted priority to their work lives" (p. 146). People who are unable or unwilling to place

such a high priority on work are marginalized within the new career discourse.

Baker and Aldrich's (1996) acknowledgment of the ways the new career discourse

promotes longer work hours is supported by Perlow's (1998) ethnographic study of a high-

tech organization. Perlow found that commitment was defined by organizational members at

all levels to mean time on-site and the sacrifice of personal life for work. Perlow argues that

workers who do not accept this notion of commitment and do not work long hours or

sacrifice their evenings, weekends, and scheduled vacations are not rated as highly as

workers who do. They are also less likely to be promoted, receive raises, or be given

bonuses. She argues that the value placed on hours spent on-site and personal sacrifice is not

empirically linked to productivity outcomes, but instead to an understanding of commitment

apart from outcomes. Within this discourse, the successful worker is one who demonstrates

commitment by privileging time at work over other aspects of life. To do otherwise is to

jeopardize one's chances at promotion and positive reviews. In a social climate where

performing well at work is tied to self-worth (Du Gay, 1996), these workers must continue to

sacrifice time at home in favor of time at work in order to maintain a positive sense of self.

The sacrifice of family and leisure time is promoted in the personal branding

literature discussed above. Lair et al. cite the following excerpt as an example of the

discourse of personal branding that privileges work over non-work:

> If Brand You is about your signature WOW Projects . . . and it is . . . then you must
> somehow (consult the Time Management gurus) weed out the 96(*!*) percent of
> distractions . . . and Work-the-Hell-Out-of-Your-Signature-WOW project (come
> Bloody Hell *and* Bloody High Water). We all know folks who are going to . . . start a
> business . . . write a book . . . learn to skydive . . . build a house . . . as soon as they
> "find the time." *BULLSHIT!* When you CARE you MAKE the time . . . and if that

means saying "NO!" to your friends, your spouse, your kids (hey, I never said there would be no sacrifices), well, there it is!

(When I'm at work on a book – i.e., now – I am unspeakably rude to friends, family, colleagues. Sometimes correspondence goes unanswered for a . . . year. And far too many Little League games have been missed. And Mom has gone far too long without a phone call. Etc. Fact is: I don't know how else to do it?! And there may well be no other way?). (Peters, 1999, p. 72, cited in Lair et al., 2005, p. 327)

To the extent that the discourse of personal branding is taken up, this quotation illustrates the ways it constrains placing an emphasis on relationships or non-work-related fulfillment.

In addition to pressure to spend a lot of time at/on work, the new career discourse also promotes the colonization of non-work aspects of one's life. Grey (1994) argues that the construction of "career" as an entrepreneurial project of the self promotes a change in the way all aspects of life are viewed. He claims that within the new understandings of career, "it becomes necessary to sublimate one's whole life to the development of career" (p. 487). Proponents of the new career discourse stress the importance of workers "cultivating networks," taking "responsibility for their own career futures" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 11), accumulating knowledge, and increasing their identification with career (Baker & Aldridge, 1996). To succeed in these tasks, many aspects of life become colonized by work. Grey writes that, "friends become transformed into 'contacts,' and social activity becomes 'networking'" (p. 487). Examples from his ethnographic study of accountants include college students deciding on extra-curricular activities based on how they will look on their resume, employees who see all acquaintances as potential clients, and spouses who evaluate their partners in terms of their effects on career. Grey writes that within this environment succeeding requires that "every facet of the employee's life be orchestrated through the single principle of career development and success" (p. 488). In this way, the new career

discourse serves as a source of corporate colonization in that it promotes "corporate encroachment into nonwork life" (Deetz, 1992, p. 17).

Alternative Career Discourses

While the discourses of the old and new social contracts may be prevalent career discourses, they are not the only ways people understand their careers or position their choices. Empirical studies of the ways people frame their career choices find several alternative discourses being employed (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Smith, Arendt, Lahman, Settle, & Duff, 2006). These alternative discourses include: work as instrumental, career as improvisational, and work as service. In this section, I explain these alternative discourses and highlight the career and lifestyle choices these discourses enable and constrain.

Work as Instrumental

Both the traditional and the new career discourses define life success in terms of career achievement. However, there is evidence of people privileging other facets of their lives in their personal definitions of success. For these people, paid work provides necessary income while people focus on other activities in their lives. People may identify more closely with these other activities and consider them more important than career. Other activities may include family (Bailey, 2000; Perlow, 1998), the arts (Henson, 1996), travel, or volunteer/civic work (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999).

The alternative discourse of work as instrumental enables individuals to privilege non-work aspects of their lives. In calling on this discourse, workers position work as subordinate to other arenas of life including family, community, and hobbies. This promotes

workers spending more time away from work. It also resists the colonization of non-work aspects of life by work.

While this alternative discourse addresses some of the constraints of the mainstream career discourses, it is important to note what it constrains. In viewing work solely as instrumental, this discourse retains the dichotomy of work and home. In doing so, Fletcher and Bailyn (1996) argue that both organizations and individuals miss out on the ways that work and personal life can inform each other in fulfilling and productive ways. Additionally, in current U.S. society making career choices aligned with this alternative discourse will typically constrain a worker's ability to advance. It also may result in a worker receiving poor work reviews (Perlow, 1998).

Career as Improvisation

Another alternative career discourse involves understanding career as a set of improvised choices made without an orientation towards a specific goal. This differs from the discourse of work as instrumental in that there is little emphasis on work as providing the financial means for something else in particular. Instead, career is viewed as a somewhat haphazard set of circumstances affected greatly by chance, interests and opportunities. In their study of 75 New Zealanders from a range of occupations, Arthur et al. (1999) found that many of the participants had no planned career trajectory. The participants only made sense of their career decisions retrospectively. Most of the voluntary job changes noted by participants did not involve career advancement. Instead, participants discussed the seemingly random choices they made and the influence of timing and luck on how their careers (defined broadly to include family and civic life) had played out. In emphasizing chance and flexibility, participants did not, generally, privilege career advancement or

monetary success over their personal lives. Instead, they talked about doing what seemed

best in any given moment in time. In this way, Arthur et al. provide empirical evidence of

individuals' career sense-making practices being less calculated and less goal-oriented than

either the new or old career discourses would promote.

The discourse of career as improvisation enables a different relationship between the

individual and his or her career than is promoted by mainstream career discourses. Instead of

a goal-oriented focus, this discourse privileges making decisions based on priorities and

opportunities in the present with little regard for the future. It also positions luck and chance

as important factors in one's career. This enables a notion of one's career as something that

is not entirely within one's control. In doing this, the discourse of career as improvisation

provides an alternative to the focus on autonomy promoted by mainstream contemporary

discourses of career.

While the alternative discourse of career as improvisation may be called on by some

workers, U.S. society is not structured to support such individuals. This results in pragmatic

constraints for workers. In current U.S. society, making career choices that are aligned with

this discourse is likely to result in workers earning less income over a lifetime than they

would otherwise. It is also likely that switching jobs and occupations and spending time

outside of the paid workforce will result in low or non-existent retirement funds. Similarly,

such a career path is likely to involve many gaps in healthcare coverage.

Work as Service

Dominant discourses of career often define success in terms of advancement,

prestige, and wealth. However, some people willingly choose lower paying and less

prestigious occupations than they could otherwise obtain. In some cases, they make this

choice based on a belief that the job will allow them to serve others. Examples of this include education and human services occupations.

In explaining alternative career choices such as these, individuals often draw on a discourse of service to others. Specifically, Smith et al. (2006) found that non-profit arts managers used discourses of spirituality, service, and meaning in explaining their career choices. Similarly, Smulyan (2004) found that teachers used a discourse of teaching as a political and social justice-related act to justify their career decision. Studies of stay-at-home mothers (Kaufman & Quigley, 2000; Medved & Kirby, 2005) also identified the ways women position their choice as for the good of others such as their children, spouses, and communities.

The alternative discourse of work as service enables individuals to take low-paying jobs that align with their beliefs. In each of the above studies (Kaufman & Quigley, 2000; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Smith et al. 2006; Smulyan, 2004), people call upon the discourse of service to justify their low-paying or low-prestige job choices. In this way, the discourse of work as service broadens the range of acceptable occupational possibilities.

For some people, calling on the discourse of work as service allows them greater freedom in occupational choice. However, this discourse simultaneously serves to constrain certain career choices and increase anxiety. It does not allow for the idea that work can be just instrumental. Instead, this discourse positions work as a primary form of identity and fulfillment. It is the way a person serves the larger community. To the extent that someone accepts this discourse of work, he or she may feel guilty for having a job that is not seen as serving others.

Pre-Professional Career Discourses

Organizational communication scholars have, to some extent, identified and critiqued dominant and marginalized discourses related to professional career paths (Buzzanell, 2000; Buzzanell & Goldzwig, 1991; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Smith et al., 2006). However, they have paid less attention to the ways career discourses relate to pre-professional socialization. While the field's dominant model of organizational socialization includes a pre-work stage called vocational anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 1987, 2001), little research has been done in this area. Career discourses do not just affect the choices that are privileged and marginalized once a person is employed. Career discourses also affect the choices people make before entering the workplace, including educational decisions and choices about what to do after finishing school. In this section, I discuss career discourses related to occupational choices and decision-making processes and potential effects of these discourses.

Dominant Discourses of Appropriate Occupations

Dominant professional career discourses privilege certain approaches to work and particular definitions of success. Similarly, dominant pre-professional career discourses privilege certain occupational choices. Through looking at the occupational aspirations children report, it is possible to see some ways people are socialized regarding acceptable occupations. Evidence of children's aspirations coming into alignment with dominant ideas of appropriate occupational choice can be seen early in life. In their elementary school years, children learn to discriminate between "real" and "fantasy" jobs (Helwig, 1998). During this process their aspirations become more "realistic." In other words, as children age they are less likely to report occupations that few people hold, such as professional athlete or inventor. Instead, they are more likely to aspire to managerial and technical occupations. As

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the children grow older, their choices become more aligned with what their parents and the larger society view as possible, appropriate, and valuable (Auger, Blackhurst, & Wall, 2005; Helwig, 1998).

To describe more fully the process by which young people narrow their aspirations, Gottfredson (1981) proposed a model of career choice based on the concept of circumscription. She theorized that as children age the occupational choices they see as possible become circumscribed by notions of sex, social standing, and intelligence. This process leaves the person with a "zone of acceptable alternatives" (p. 548). She writes, "this social space reflects the sort of person he or she would like to be or is willing to be in the eyes of family, peers, and wider society" (p. 548). Based on Gottfredson's model, for a career to be an acceptable choice for a young person it must be aligned with his or her sex, social standing, and intelligence. Acknowledging that Gottfredson's model has been empirically supported and challenged (Hannah & Kahn, 1989; Leung & Harmon, 1990; Sellers, Satcher, & Comas, 1999), I am not uncritically accepting this model; instead, I am using it to engage research on how young people are socialized to understand the choices they "should" make about their futures. Also, it is relevant to note that a number of factors such as the quality of educational opportunities a student has and his or her geographic location all affect the choices students are able to make. These might also be considered circumscribing factors. However, for the purpose of this project, I am interested in the ways societal discourses of acceptable occupations circumscribe occupational choices.

Gottfredson identifies sex as the first circumscribing factor. She claims that from a very young age children limit what they see as possible for themselves based on their sex and their notions of sex-appropriate occupations. As occupational norms change, the discourse of

sex-appropriate occupations may be less pervasive for women than for men (Leung &

Harmon, 1990). Even with this shift, there is still evidence to support the notion that

occupational choice is circumscribed by sex for both males and females. Such

circumscription is found at a young age. Auger et al. (2005) found that 69% of first-graders'

occupational aspirations were traditionally sex-typed. Sellers et al. (1999) found that third

and fourth graders across socioeconomic statuses were significantly more likely to aspire to a

sex-traditional occupation than a sex-non-traditional occupation. Similarly, Poole and

Cooney (1985) found sex differences in the occupations boys and girls perceived as possible.

Although the sex differences were moderated by social class, the girls perceived more

technical-service, clerical-service, and skilled occupations as appropriate for themselves.

The boys saw themselves more often in both less skilled and highly skilled or professional

occupations. There also is evidence that discourses of sex-appropriate occupations affect

occupation-related choices later in life. Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005) found that high

levels of compensation were more important for men in making a college major change than

they were for women.

The second way young people's occupational choices are circumscribed is through

their awareness of what occupations they should rule out based on prestige. A person's

social standing and socioeconomic status determine what is excluded. People are expected to

pursue occupations that will maintain or exceed their family's social standing and

socioeconomic status (Gottfredson, 1981). Hannah and Kahn's (1989) study supports

Gottfredson's model in that the high school students surveyed selected occupations with

prestige levels comparable to the SES of their families. This fits Gottfredson's theory that

people eliminate career options that are either above or below the prestige level typically associated with their SES.

There is evidence that an understanding of which occupations are prestige-appropriate starts at a young age. Trice et al. (1995) found that fourth graders eliminated possible career options based on their corresponding social status. In other words, the students had come to know which jobs were more appropriate than others.

Further evidence of this discourse of occupational prestige is seen in the aspirations parents have for their children. Downing and D'Andrea (1994) identified the extent to which parents are biased toward certain decisions for their children. They found that U.S. and British parents, in contrast to Swiss parents, had specific educational and career biases for their own children: they were strongly biased towards their children attending college and pursuing careers that required a college degree. Of the U.S. parents surveyed, nearly 63% would discourage their child if she or he "had decided on a career in a working class activity," and an additional 11.5% would go as far as to oppose the choice. Only 18.6% would leave the choice to the child. This bias towards professional occupations and away from working class activities corresponds broadly with large-scale measures of occupational prestige (Treiman, 1977; Nakao & Treas, 1994). This parental bias may be felt by children from an early age. Seligman et al. (1991) found that 10-year-olds felt pressure from their parents to pursue high-status occupations.

Gottfredson's (1981) model argues that after students narrow their "zone of acceptable alternatives" based on what occupations are sex-appropriate and of the "correct" prestige level, they then consider their own intelligence. The discourses connecting intelligence to appropriate career choice are interesting in that what is widely considered a

"gift" that opens up opportunities can become a source of constraint. Being able to perform well academically is often framed as "opening doors" for young people; however, there is evidence to show that as some doors open, others shut. For a student who is considered able to pursue higher-status occupational choices, other choices are not as acceptable. This is because of a discourse that says that if people have the qualifications to pursue a high-status occupation, they should do so.

Smulyan's (2004) longitudinal interview study of women who chose to be teachers vividly illustrates this form of constraint. Smulyan discusses the reactions her participants received to their decision to be teachers. In choosing to become teachers, many of the women violated the expectations their parents had for their futures. As students, and then graduates, of a small selective liberal arts college, many of their parents expected the women to do "more" with their education than become teachers. The women articulated expectations they felt regarding "what a 'smart girl' should do" (p. 524), including occupations in medicine and law.

This same idea of academic ability determining what one should do is echoed in Wear's (2000) study of female American Asian/Pacific Islander medical students. She found that the students' academic abilities became evidence parents used for encouraging the women to be doctors. As one of the women discussed, her family "assumed" she would go into medicine because she received good grades and did not ask if she wanted to be a doctor, but, rather, "what kind of doctor she was going to be" (p. 160). While Wear connects these parental expectations to larger Asian/Pacific Islander cultural norms, these types of expectations also are articulated by the women in Smulyan's (2004) study of non-minority women. Further, in Hemsley-Brown and Foskett's (1999) study of young people in England,

students' attitudes about nursing as a career were influenced by parental expectations that they should "use" their qualifications (results of a national exam). Therefore, students were expected to pursue goals that required the qualifications they earned and discouraged from any options that did not require their qualifications. A similar response was found among Australian high school students (Rossiter & Yam, 1998), who said that if they had scored well enough on their qualifications to pursue a higher-status occupation, their parents wanted them to do so. Together, these studies (Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 1999; Rossiter & Yam, 1998; Smulyan, 2004; Wear, 2000) describe the presence of a discourse connecting possibility with expectation: if a person *can* pursue a higher status occupation, he or she is expected to do so.

Gottfredson's (1981) model of circumscription based on sex, occupational prestige, and intelligence involves several of the dominant discourses that constrain occupational choice. However, these are not the only constraining discourses. An additional discourse is that one should also only consider occupations that are viewed as "real" occupations. In one of the few empirical organizational communication studies on discourses involved in career choice, Clair (1996) explores college students' understandings of and experiences with the concept of "a real job." Their narratives revealed that for most students, a "real" job is one that involves salaried pay, utilization of education, a typical workweek, potential for advancement, and occurs within a profit-based organization. Jobs that do not fit these standards are less "real" and less appropriate for the students to pursue. Examples students gave in the study of options they did not feel they could pursue or would be chastised for pursuing included non-profit work, landscaping, the Peace Corps, and childcare.

Effects of Dominant Discourses of Appropriate Occupations

Pre-professional career discourses privilege certain occupational choices. For college graduates, the discourses of acceptable occupations tend to privilege stable, high-paying, and prestigious occupations. In many ways, these discourses serve the graduates well in terms of their financial futures and their cultural capital. To the extent that students make discourse-aligned choices, they are likely to pursue prestigious and financially stable occupations.

Although discourses of appropriate occupation may serve college graduates in many ways, the discourses simultaneously constrain the students. Just as one set of occupational choices is privileged, another is marginalized. The dominant discourses about acceptable occupational choice restrict what careers are viewed as appropriate. Marshall (1989) states that, "theoretically a range of career possibilities are being recognized, but many are depicted as 'failure'" (p. 285). Discourses of what counts as acceptable work may limit the choices individuals consider as acceptable or available to them. Career possibilities that are labeled as "failures" (Marshall, 1989) will be less likely to be chosen. This is seen when students reject non-profit or blue/pink collar work in favor of corporate jobs (Clair, 1996). It is also seen when young people choose occupations based predominantly on parental expectations (Wear, 2000), or are discouraged from occupations the family finds undesirable (Smulyan, 2004).

While some students may limit their choices based on dominant discourses of appropriate work, others make alternative choices. However, these choices are likely to be stigmatized. Therefore, people who make (or desire to make) less acceptable job choices may experience high levels of stress or anxiety. Clair (1996) argues that "the depression induced by holding a marginalized job or wanting to hold a marginalized job can be nearly

overwhelming" (p. 264). The stress caused by choosing an alternative job is seen in the identity-work used defend non-traditional job choices (Mulcahy, 1995; Smulyan, 2004; Thompson, 1991). In defending marginalized occupational choices, one of the resources on which people rely is a sense of connection with others in their occupation (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Pre-professionals who are making alternative career choices are less likely to have this sense of connection, thereby making the choice even more difficult than it would be otherwise.

Findings show that this narrowing of choices is not an isolated process affecting a few young people. In Wear's (2000) study of the career-related experiences and thoughts of Asian/Pacific Islander female medical school students, only 4 of the 20 students interviewed said their career was their own choice. Of the remaining 16, 3 said their parents made the choice for them. The other 13 reported that "their parents exerted various degrees of encouragement and pressure" (p. 159). The careers that the women were encouraged to pursue tended to be in medicine or science. Careers in the arts were discouraged. Many of the women said that their parents were the strongest influence in their choice and, in some cases, the women never considered any other options. Although Wear's study was specific to Asian-Pacific Islander women, the idea of parental influence on occupational choice is not limited to this population. Tang (2002) studied college students' career decision-making processes, specifically the students' reported influence by their families. When asked, "have your parents forced you to follow their choice of careers?," 10.5% of the Caucasian-American students (from a Midwestern university in the U.S.), 42% of the Asian-American students (from the same university), and 47.4% of the Chinese students (from a university in China) said yes.

Dominant Discourses of Appropriate Career Decision-Making Processes

Not only are there more and less acceptable careers to choose, there are also normalized understandings of *how* a person should make initial career choices. In many ways, the discourses of how one should decide on an initial job mirror the discourses of the old social career contract. Both include an assumption of linearity and a concern with time.

Within the assumption of linearity is the idea that the career choice a young person makes is of critical importance because it represents the starting point of a career trajectory. As Arthur et al. (1999) write,

> Occupational choice represents a popular model for understanding careers. As children we are not asked, "Who are you going to work for when you leave school?" or "What do you hope to learn after you leave school?" but "What are you going to be (or do) when you leave school?" Often, the unspoken assumption appears to be "for the rest of your life." . . . Terms such as "vocational choice," and "vocational counseling," focused on young people as they make early career decisions, imply once-and-for-all investment in a single occupation. (p. 91)

In addition to implying that the career choice a young person makes is permanent, there is also an expectation that the choice should be made by an appropriate time. To many, to be a college senior and not have a career plan is viewed as a problem. This view is articulated by Jurgens (2000) when she writes, "For over 70 years, indecision in educationally and vocationally undecided-undeclared college students has been a concern of college faculty, counselors, academic advisors, administrators, and researchers" (p. 327). While some vocational psychologists have argued that college students' indecision should be viewed more positively as "open-mindedness" (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), other researchers aim to understand career indecision in order to reduce it (e.g. Guay et al., 2003, Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006).

Not only should the decision to choose a career be made at the "appropriate" time so that a person is not "undecided" past the "appropriate age," but the decision should be made rationally. Evetts (1992) argues that this emphasis on a rational choice is reified in career counseling literature. While some career scholars (Mitchell et al., 1999) have advocated an increased acknowledgment of the role of unplanned events and luck, these less rational aspects of career decision processes often are not addressed.

It is not just the unplanned that is left out of discourses of appropriate or normal career decision-making processes, but also the emotion involved. As Young, Paseluikho, and Valach (1997) write about career decision making, "the place of emotion in these processes has also been devalued" (p. 36). One of the key themes I identified in my pilot study was the extent to which college students were expected by others to make career decisions rationally (McAlpine, 2005). Examples of this emphasis on rationality include a father who created a career decision matrix (based on pay, prestige, and time required for completion) for his sophomore daughter, the career counselor who told a student which major she should pursue based on the number of related courses she had taken, and the family and friends who could not understand a woman's decision to turn down a well-paying job she did not think she would enjoy. In each of these cases, emotion was not considered an "appropriate" decision-making criterion. Instead, a rational process based on efficiency, pay, and social standing was emphasized by family, counselors and friends.

Effects of Dominant Discourses of Appropriate Career Decision-Making Processes

The dominant career decision-making discourse encourages college students to make career-related choices early in their educational process. This can result in students carefully researching colleges, majors, and possible careers. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) claim

that this leads to aligned career choices in which students' occupational goals match their educational plans. Such students are well-prepared for their future goals. The emphasis on rational career decision making also promotes students' focus on the practicality of their choices. They are encouraged to understand the financial and logistical implications of various career options. Having a realistic image of the amount of education a position requires and its earning potential promotes informed decision making. Together, these behaviors help students make informed decisions in a timeframe that fits current educational and organizational structures.

The career decision-making discourses of linearity and rationality enable useful information-seeking behaviors. However, they also can promote anxiety and negate the value of emotions and intuition in the decision-making process. Just as students may face an emotional toll in having to defend alternative career choices, they also may have to defend the criteria they use to make their decisions. To the extent that efficient and rational decision making is privileged as the appropriate career decision-making process, students who choose to use other processes may be stigmatized. In these situations, emotion may not be honored as a valid way of knowing. Instead, some students may be told that their choices should be made based on logical factors, such as pay, how much longer they would have to stay in school, and job market forces. Factors such as passion, interests and intuition may be devalued. Students also may face a valorization of efficiency and a pressure to make choices according to a timeline set up by others. For the students, not to be on that timeline might be seen as "wasting" time or being "behind."

College Students' Career-Related Attitudes

While it is useful to consider professional and pre-professional career discourses, it is also important to understand how certain groups of individuals may interact with those discourses. This project is focused on understanding how a group of college seniors make sense of such discourses. Therefore, it is relevant to examine this population's attitudes and beliefs related to their future career paths and occupations. In this section, I discuss the career-related expectations today's high school and college students have for themselves. I also address what is known about their parents' expectations for them.

The students who participated in this study were traditional-aged college students set to graduate in 2006. This means that they were born between 1981 and 1985. Twenge (2006) writes that "those born after 1980 do not yet have a coherent generational identity or name" (p. 6). Among other monikers, people born during this time period have been labeled Generation Y, Generation Me (Twenge, 2006) and The Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Just as the labels given to this group vary, so do some the attributes ascribed to them. For example, Twenge argues that this group of young people cares little about social norms or what others think of them. Conversely, Howe and Strauss conclude that people in this age group are more conventional than previous generations and overarchingly support a system of social rules.

Despite some differences in the conclusions scholars have reached about young people in this age range, there are a number of consistencies. Those that are most relevant to this project involve the high expectations students and parents have for the young people's futures.

Educational Expectations

Much of the research on current youth attitudes toward career is based on comparisons of this generation and past generations (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Twenge, 2006). In doing so, researchers have found that the current group of teenagers has higher educational expectations than those found in past generations. Schneider and Stevenson found that 90% of 1990s high school seniors expect to attend college compared to 55% in the 1950s. The higher educational expectations extend to graduate degrees. In 2003, 75% of the first year college students surveyed reported that they wanted to earn an advanced degree (Twenge, 2006). Interestingly, the emphasis on advanced degrees is not wholly connected to professional expectations that require such degrees. Instead, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) found that half of the students surveyed in the 1990s expected to obtain a higher degree than is needed for the occupation they are seeking. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) speculate that this is because young adults view "a college degree similarly to the way adolescents in the 1950s viewed a high school diploma – the necessary ticket for an entry-level job" (p. 43). Since a college degree is the new minimum, advanced degrees "are thought to separate winners from losers in the job market" (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999, p. 52). Schneider and Stevenson (1999) conclude that "teenagers accept the volatility of the labor market and believe that the way to create a personal safety net is to obtain additional information" (p. 11). This results in students believing that they need to earn advanced degrees to stay competitive in many professional fields, even those that do not require advanced education.

Professional and Financial Expectations

In addition to high educational expectations, contemporary young people also have high professional expectations for themselves. The students in this study are part of an age

cohort that is more likely to expect to work in professional jobs than previous cohorts (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Twenge, 2006). Seventy percent of high school students surveyed in the 1990s expected to work in professional jobs. This is compared with 42% who had this expectation in the 1950s (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) and 1960s (Twenge, 2006). Today's young adults also expect to obtain financial success. Howe and Strauss (2000) found that more than 80% of teens believe they will obtain higher levels of financial success than their parents. This is especially interesting considering that the students surveyed were from a school district where the median income is almost twice the national average.

<div align="center">Desire to "Have it all"</div>

Research on teenagers who were born in the 1980s indicates they have a desire to "have it all." They want to be financially successful, have strong family lives, serve others, and feel fulfilled (Twenge, 2006). Nearly three-fourths of first year college students surveyed in 2004 said it is "important to be well-off financially" (Twenge, 2006, p. 99). However, financial success is not the only high priority for these students. In 2003, 75% of first year college students indicated that raising a family was an important life goal. This is compared to 59% in 1977 (Twenge, 2006). Students also desire to maintain a close connection with their families of origin. Howe and Strauss (2000) found that more contemporary teenagers want to have a good lifelong relationship with their parents than did those in recent decades. As Howe and Strauss (2000) write,

> The teen view of success has become better-rounded and less exclusively focused toward one life goal. Over the last decade, "marriage/family" and "career success" have each declined in importance as "the one thing" in life. What's now more important is the concept of "balance" – especially, balance between family and work. (p. 179)

The students' desire for balance is not just between work and home. The students also want to lead lives that include service to others. Volunteering hours (Twenge, 2006) and beliefs in the importance of "making a contribution to society" (Howe & Strauss, 2000) are increased in comparison to recent decades.

In addition to wanting career success, a strong family life and the opportunity to serve society, Twenge (2006) argues that this generation expects to feel happy and fulfilled throughout the process. She claims that this group of young people assumes that work should have meaning. Once they enter the professional workforce, the young adults expect to hold jobs that provide them with a sense of fulfillment and happiness.

Parental Expectations

This group of young people's high educational (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Twenge, 2006) and professional (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) expectations are shared by their parents. Schneider and Stevenson (1999) report that the educational expectations parents hold for their children increased significantly between the 1980s and the 1990s. Now more parents are expecting their children to attend graduate school regardless of the students' occupational goals. Howe and Strauss (2000) claim that it is not just parental expectations regarding education that have changed, but the intensity with which many of these children have been parented. Howe and Strauss argue that this group of young people has been "regarded as special since birth and have been more obsessed-over at every age than Xers" (p. 13). They contend that this level of parental intensity creates pressure and stress for many young people. The pressure includes pressure to get high grades and get into prestigious colleges (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Howe and Strauss write that these young people are "pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective

opportunities adults are offering them, Millennials feel a 'trophy kid' pressure to excel" (p. 44). This pressure may be exacerbated by the close relationships many from this generation have with their parents. Howe and Strauss' (2000) survey of teenagers found that over 90% say they "trust" and "feel close to" their parents" (p. 8).

Connecting Students' Attitudes to Discourses of Career

In many ways, the career-related attitudes of young American adults mesh well with contemporary discourses of work and occupation. The emphasis the students place on professional careers aligns with mainstream discourses of appropriate occupational choices. Also, the students' desire to earn degrees beyond what is necessary for a desired occupation can be seen as a response to the discourse of the new social contract. The students have internalized the idea that they need to always be marketable. Having an advanced degree is one way to enhance one's marketability.

While the emphasis on professional occupations and higher education meshes well with mainstream discourses of career and occupation, other career-related beliefs are less clearly aligned with dominant discourses. Specifically, how the students' desires for balanced lives that prioritize work, family, and civic life relate to societal discourses of career and occupation is unclear. The generational comparison data provides a compelling argument that the high expectations are a change from previous generations, not simply a case of youthful idealism (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Twenge, 2006). The students' priority on "having it all" could be interpreted as resistance to the new career discourse that privileges work at the expense of personal lives. The students could be adopting alternative discourses of career that emphasize balance. This would support Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005) claim that contemporary youth are more likely than those in past generations to adopt

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alternative understandings of the relationship of work to the rest of one's life. Additionally, the students' priority of balanced lives could be seen as an extension of the original definitions of the boundaryless and protean careers. In those definitions (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002), the new career formations allowed people the freedom to prioritize their own values over traditional standards of advancement and success. In this way, the students may be adopting and transforming mainstream discourses of career.

A more critical interpretation of the students' desire to have it all relates to the discourse of the entrepreneurial self. The students' expectation that they will be able to balance a financially lucrative and personally fulfilling career with a strong marriage and family life and service to the community may be linked to broader notions of self. The students may be adopting the discourse of the entrepreneurial self. Within this discourse, they may feel responsible for working to continually perfect themselves and their lives. It may be that they have adopted the notion that they must have stellar careers *and* must also excel in all other aspects of their lives. To fail in any area could be seen as failing in the "project of the self" (Grey, 1994).

An additional interpretation of the students' expectations of themselves relates to their parents. It is possible that the students expect educational, professional, familial, and civic success of themselves because that is what they know is expected of them by others. In this way, the students may be affected by discourses of loyalty, family and obligation.

In order to investigate such connections between career discourses and college students, further research on college students' interactions with career discourses is needed. This project is one such endeavor. Below I discuss the research questions guiding this project.

Research Questions

In this chapter, I outlined traditional, contemporary, and alternative career discourses. Additionally, I discussed common pre-professional discourses related to occupational choice and career decision making. Together these discourses privilege certain career choices and approaches to career while marginalizing others. What is unclear from the literature is how college students make sense of these (or other) career discourses. To investigate such issues, this analysis includes an examination of the dominant career discourses the students experience. Specifically, the first research question guiding this project is:

What do college students facing graduation experience as the dominant discourses

surrounding career and occupation?

Through addressing this question, the analysis identifies the privileged discourses students experience regarding appropriate post-college choices.

After discussing the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choice experienced by students, I address the students' responses to those discourses. Ezzy (1997) writes, "cultural discourses about careers and work are variously accepted, resisted and transformed in people's day to day lives" (p. 430). To gain insight into these processes, I examine the following research question:

How do college students facing graduation respond to the dominant discourses

surrounding career and occupation?

Together, an examination of these two research questions will provide an understanding of not only the career discourses students experience but also the complex ways they respond to such discourses.

In this examination of college students and career discourses, I employ particular understandings of discourse and its relationship with power and identity. In the next chapter I address these issues. I also explain the grounding for critique I am using in this project.

1. All participants were given the given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. These pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript except when students chose duplicate pseudonyms. In those cases, I used an alternate fictional name.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCOURSE, POWER, AND IDENTITY

In investigating how a group of college seniors experience and respond to discourses

of career, this project relies on a particular understanding of the relationships among

discourse, power, identity, resistance, and agency. In this chapter, I address how I am

conceptualizing discourse and its relationship with power and identity. In this discussion, I

highlight an understanding of resistance and agency as inherent in discursive forms of power.

Finally, I address the normative grounding for this project.

Discourse

The term "discourse" has a variety of meanings. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) and

Alvesson and Karreman (2000), for example, distinguish between *Discourse* and *discourse*.

In this distinction they acknowledge that some scholars conceive of discourse on a micro-

level involving "the study of talk and text in social practice" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p.

7). Other scholars take a more macro approach and view Discourses as "general and

enduring systems of thought" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7). These two

conceptualizations of discourse are intertwined. As Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) write, "at a

macro level, discourse refers to the scripts themselves; at a micro level, it is the infinite

process of negotiating them, often adhering to but occasionally improvising and rewriting

them" (p. 12). This project examines the interrelations of these two levels of discourse. I

analyze students' reported perceptions of career expectations in order to examine cultural

meanings associated with work and career. My analysis is rooted in the notion that practices of everyday life perpetuate, negotiate, and sometimes resist broader societal understandings.

Discourse and Materiality

Whether considering discourse at the level of everyday interaction or enduring systems of thought, discourse is intimately connected to materiality. Discourses do not just operate at a linguistic or conceptual level. Instead, "discourse and communication can literally create lasting institutional and economic arrangements" (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004, p. xxvii). For example, dominant discourses of appropriate career create and then are perpetuated by institutional practices. Such practices include organizational promotion structures and university policies on choosing one's major. Conversely, institutional arrangements also reinforce career discourses. For example, one of college students' common understandings of a real job is that it is a full-time position with benefits (Clair, 1996). This discourse can be read as reinforced by many current corporate health insurance policies that do not provide insurance for part-time work. This material practice perpetuates the discourse of part-time work as less "real" than full-time work.

The dialectical relationship between discourse and materiality highlights the importance of considering discourses as contingent and contextual. Discourses arise within and perpetuate broader economic, political, and social circumstances. In the literature review, I discussed the discourse of the entrepreneurial self as being the notion of the individual as a perpetual project. Du Gay (1996) argues that the understanding of self as entrepreneurial is part of a broader discourse of enterprise. In explaining the discourse of enterprise, Du Gay highlights the interrelationship of discourse and materiality. Specifically, he asserts that the discourse of enterprise in the United Kingdom arose within a particular

political and economic setting. Du Gay argues that the discourse of enterprise arose in relation to the Conservative Thatcher government which positioned an "enterprise culture" as necessary for "the economic and moral regeneration of Britain" (p. 56). Du Gay further connects the discourse of enterprise to the global, free-market economy. In other words, the discourse of enterprise is both rooted in and constitutive of economic and political conditions.

While Du Gay's (1996) scholarship on career-related discourses highlights the relationship between discourse and materiality, other research does not. For example, Newton (1998) critiques Grey's (1994) analysis of accountants for not addressing this relationship. Newton argues that Grey ignores the material realities of employment in favor of viewing orientations to career as arising out of one's sense of self as an entrepreneurial project. Newton writes:

> It seems strange that Grey hardly appears to consider the more usual interpretation that careers are significant, at least in part, because of their relation to material rewards and the economic "glory to come." Once again, the significance of the "material" interests associated with "careers" can be seen to be related to certain medium-term, socially constructed stabilities, such as those reflected in the relatively better mobility and "opportunities" of professional and managerial groups within capitalist societies. (p. 424)

As Newton argues, understandings of career do not exist outside of material conditions and interests. This project recognizes the role material conditions play in students' approaches to career. The students' career choices are intertwined with material conditions. For example, the job market in a student's field relates to some of the career discourses with which the student interacts. If a student's field of interest is in demand, the student might encounter a discourse of career scarcity which says that he or she should jump at the chance because the job market might not hold. Simultaneously, the student might encounter a career discourse

that says that because his or her field is in demand the student has more freedom to make an alternative choice because he or she can always get a job in the original field. The material conditions most often discussed by students were those surrounding college loans, bills, and health insurance. Students discussed how college loan repayment schedules, bills that must be paid, or an absence of health insurance limit the possibility of making certain career choices such as traveling after college, taking several part-time jobs, or taking a lower paying position. In other words, the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices do not take place in a vacuum. Instead, the dominant discourses that privilege having a plan that provides financial security are interrelated with current fiscal realities facing many college students.

Discourse and Power

In conceiving of discourse as "general and enduring systems of thought," discourse is viewed as a primary mechanism through which power operates. Articulated by Foucault (1995/1975, 1990/1976, 1980), this conception of power departs from a traditional, sovereign understanding of power (Clegg, 1989). Traditional examinations of power conceptualize power as based on positions of authority. In such cases, power is often viewed as a top-down process through which people control those beneath them. For example, governments, supervisors, and parents exert control over citizens, workers, and children. In this understanding, power is a commodity that is held by some people and exerted over others. Conversely, a discourse-centered understanding of power holds that power is dispersed. From this perspective, power is not something that certain people possess. Instead, power circulates within all social interactions. Foucault (1990/1976) writes that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p.

93). Adopting a Foucauldian perspective on power draws attention to how everyday practices are part of circuits of power. For example, students' career choices are not only controlled by overt forms of power such as someone telling the students to pursue a certain option. Instead, their career choices are also controlled through the construction of a discursive field that privileges certain choices and marginalizes others. Within that discursive field are media images, jokes, resume templates, everyday conversations, and so forth. Understanding power as ubiquitous and dispersed aids in an analysis of these varied sources of control.

Just as a Foucauldian understanding of power challenges the traditional understanding of power as located only in authority figures, it also challenges the idea of power as only repressive and preventative. Instead, a discourse-based understanding of power understands power to be enabling and productive. Put simply, power produces. In the following sections, I explain how discursive power produces knowledge and identities. Then I address disciplinary forms of power.

The Production of Knowledge

As Foucault writes, "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (1995/1975, p. 194). It is through this idea of power as productive that Foucault conceptualizes the mutually constitutive relation of power and knowledge. From this perspective, power creates systems of truth or knowledge. Correspondingly, ideas of truth rely on and perpetuate forms of power. Therefore, what counts as true and natural are formations created within relations of power. These formations are often accepted as natural and inevitable in daily interactions, yet they are actually constructions.

This relationship between knowledge and power is evident in scholarship that identifies the constructed nature of truths about work and career. For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault (1988/1965) traces how unemployment became linked to immorality in 17th century Europe. Work was seen as having an ethical and moral benefit to people. This "knowledge" that work is moral and unemployment immoral was constructed within relations of power. It then operated as a form of power promoting the confinement of the unemployed. In a contemporary example of career power-knowledge relations, Clair (1996) highlights how understandings of "a real job" are rooted in capitalistic ideologies of valuable labor. She argues that what counts as real work is communicatively constituted within capitalistic relations of power that privilege for-profit organizations and wealth. These "truths" about real work serve as a form of control that privilege certain work choices while marginalizing others.

Understanding career "truths" as products of power relations draws attention to the constructedness of understandings of career. In this project, I identify some of the "games of truth" surrounding career choices. While people often act as though these contemporary understandings of career are inevitable and ahistorical, examples from history argue the opposite. For example, Jacques (1996) and Caplow (1954) argue that contemporary western society's practice of categorizing individuals by occupation is a historical construction. They claim that a person's occupation has not always been such a key factor in people's social identities. Instead, Jacques claims that before the industrial revolution in America, people were participants in a society where "the world of wage work was only one relatively peripheral role of membership in a community" (p. 82). As industrialization increased, aspects of people's lives became more fractured. Splits between production and

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consumption, work and home, business and community, and church and state became prominent. Within this social system, employment became the primary source of status as face-to-face relationships became less common. Jacques writes, "no longer is one primarily known by one's community identity" (p. 123). Instead, occupational identity has become a key factor in defining and categorizing others.

Not only has the meaning of occupational roles changed throughout history, but so have the meanings associated with particular occupations. For example, in illustrating that occupational meanings change over time, Ciulla (2000) discusses how artists and sculptors were viewed in Ancient Greece. In that historical and social context, sculpting was considered manual labor whereas painting was considered a liberal art. Based on this distinction, the painter was of high social status. Conversely, the sculptor was not given as much prestige. In a more recent case study, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) trace the cultural meanings associated with pilots. They illustrate how the current identity of pilots as masculine, rational professionals was the product of a careful construction of discourses that served the interests of airlines and their need to demonstrate the commercial viability of flying as a safe activity to members of the public. In this context, the "truth" of pilot identities was constructed at the intersection of particular economic, political, and discursive processes. These examples illustrate the social construction of occupational meanings. In a particular context, meanings about career often are treated as truths. However, they are historically and socially contingent constructions. The contingency of social truths about career is central to the critical impetus of this project. It is because understandings of career are not set that change is possible.

The Production of Identities

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses produce identities by framing what identities or subject positions are possible/preferred in a given context. As Taylor (2005) writes, identity "is the effect of discourses that construct and enforce preferred narratives for understanding the self, other and world" (p. 117). The discursive construction of identity occurs within relations of power. As Tracy and Trethewey (2005) write, "discourses of power articulate an idealized subject position and, in organizational contexts, that position reflects the interests of the organization more than the interests of the individual" (p. 176).

Organization studies scholars have highlighted several preferred identities constructed by privileged discourses. For example, Tracy and Trethewey (2005) discuss how discourses of managerialism and entrepreneurialism "hail a preferred organizational/cultural subject" (p. 176). Similarly, Du Gay (1996) discusses how managerial discourses of excellence "make up" employees in certain ways. He writes,

> The identity of the "worker" has been differentially constituted in the changing practices of governing economic life. "Workers" and "managers" have been "made up" in different ways – discursively re-imagined and reconceptualized – at different times through their positioning in a variety of discourses of work reform. (p. 55)

Willmott (1994) argues that people's investment in particular discursively produced identities is due to a sense of insecurity. He argues that the conditions/discourses of modern life construct individuals as sovereign agents who are responsible for their own lives. Willmott states that this sense of responsibility coupled with conditions of modernity causes people to feel perpetually insecure. In discussing the conditions of modernity that give rise to insecurity, Collinson (2003) emphasizes changes in how identities are secured. He argues that in feudalistic societies often identities were ascribed at birth. Such identities were more stable than in today's society. Collinson writes that "selves are now achieved through

practice" (p. 530). He argues that this leads to perpetual insecurity because the practices through which people achieve identities are "conditional and have to be earned and achieved" (p. 531) repeatedly throughout a person's life. However, the perpetual insecurity does not keep people from investing in identities. Rather, people do invest themselves in categories or identities in order to reduce their insecurity. Once invested in an identity, individuals engage in the self-discipline necessary to adequately embody that identity.

Disciplinary Power

To the extent that people invest themselves in discursively constructed identities, they are likely to discipline themselves accordingly. Disciplinary power occurs when people "bring themselves under control" (Barker & Cheney, 1994, p. 27). In this form of power, it is the individuals themselves who are exerting control over their own actions. As Weedon (1987) writes, "most discourses work on the basis of consent by offering 'obvious' or 'natural' ways of being" (p. 100).

While disciplinary power is self-induced, it relies on the construction of norms and the presence of judgment (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998). Through this process an individual's actions are situated within and compared to those of a larger group. Within this comparison process, judgments are imposed. If one's actions compare unfavorably to the norm, corrections are necessary or the person is devalued. This is a process of judgment where "the judges of normality are present everywhere" (Foucault, 1995/1975, p. 304). As a result of the ever present judgment of normality, people exert control over their own behaviors. They discipline themselves according to the standards set through the normalizing process.

In her study of professional women, Trethewey (1999) examines how women discipline themselves and each other according to discourses of appropriate behavior. Trethewey identifies a set of standards the women feel are expected of them. She then explains how these bodily standards prompt the women's self-disciplining. The women monitor such things as their weight, body language, and expressions of emotions. Often when these attributes or behaviors do not match the dominant discourses for what a professional woman does, the women adapt their behaviors.

In Trethewey's (1999) study, the women discipline themselves according to dominant discourses. The organization does not create a policy stating that female workers must be physically fit. Instead, women monitor each other and themselves according to a constructed norm of how professional women should act/be/look. It is the covert nature of disciplinary power that makes it particularly powerful. As Barker and Cheney write, "discipline embodies a powerful force of unobtrusive, or non-overt, control in contemporary organizations' activity, meaning that the control no longer appears to come from 'outside' the employee's sphere of activity" (p. 27). Individuals' consent and participation in disciplinary control perpetuates the control. As Foucault argues, "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (1990/1976, p. 86).

In relation to discourses of career and occupation, the normalization and disciplining processes can be seen in some of the ways people describe their career choices. Some examples from my pilot study illustrate this process (McAlpine, 2005). The students I spoke with were fairly consistent in their understanding that it is "normal" to know what you are going to do after graduation and that certain choices are more acceptable than others. This is

evidence of the existence of socially constructed norms. Furthermore, some students whose post-college plans were uncertain or of low acceptability disciplined themselves in how they talked about those choices. For example, a student talked about the numerous lies she has told instead of "admitting" that she does not have a post-college plan. The normalization and disciplinary process can also be seen in the college major and summer job choices some students reported making throughout high school and college. They made choices that positioned them to get "appropriate" post college jobs because they knew that was what was expected of them. In these cases, the students controlled themselves in accordance with social norms.

<div align="center">Resistance and Agency</div>

As discussed above, people discipline themselves in accordance with dominant career discourses. However, there is not a totalizing relationship between dominant discourses and individual behavior. To address why dominant discourses do not determine behavior, in this section I address three attributes of the interrelations among discourse, power, identity, and agency: a) resistance exists in a dialectical relationship with control; b) there are multiple, shifting discourses creating multiple identities; and c) the multiplicity of discourses creates individuals' ability to agentially interact with discourses.

<div align="center">*Dialectics of Resistance and Control*</div>

Above I discussed how discourses control through the construction of bodies of knowledge and identities. However, such control is not total. Instead, as Foucault writes, "there are no relations of power without resistances" (1980, p. 142). Since resistance is present in all relations of power, no discourse can unilaterally control behavior.

The inevitability of resistance is key to why discourses are not totalizing forms of control. However, to view control and resistance as separate entities is to create a false dichotomy. There are not acts of resistance and acts of power. As Gordon writes in his commentary on Foucault, "the binary division between resistance and non-resistance is an unreal one" (Foucault, 1980, p. 257). While Foucault theorizes power and resistance as part of the same circuits of power, organization studies scholarship at times treats them as separate processes. Mumby (2005) argues that much of the scholarship that examines control and resistance privileges one over the other. In this privileging, resistance is often either seen as a set of work activities that reproduce control (e. g., Burawoy, 1979) or as "pristine" (Kondo, 1990, p. 224) behaviors done by free agents in a conscious challenge of authority. Whether control or resistance is privileged, the assumption of separate processes leaves little room for analyzing how particular acts might be implicated in processes of resistance and control. In the following section, I address some scholarship that avoids this dualistic understanding of control and resistance.

Instead of viewing control and resistance as separate processes, a dialectical perspective examines control and resistance as mutually constitutive. Within the dialectical perspective, the assumption is that behaviors and discourses can be both resistant and controlling simultaneously. As Collinson (1994) writes,

> Resistance and consent are rarely polarized extremes on a continuum of possible worker discursive practices. Rather, they are usually inextricably and simultaneously linked, often in contradictory ways within particular organizational cultures, discourses and practices. Resistance frequently contains elements of consent and consent often incorporates aspects of resistance. (p. 29)

Sotirin and Gottfried's (1999) analysis of secretarial bitching highlights the dialectical relationship of control and resistance. Instead of viewing bitching as either a form of

resistance or control, Sotirin and Gottfried analyze its ambivalent nature. For example, through bitching, the secretaries reaffirm the ideal secretarial identity of feminine gentility. However, in bitching the secretaries also articulate alternate secretarial identities including the secretary as knowledge worker. In this way, the bitching reinforces dominant secretarial identities while simultaneously challenging them.

In career-related studies, two projects that examine the dialectic of control and resistance are Willis' (1977) examination of British teenage working class "lads" and Fournier's (1998) analysis of a group of young professionals. As I discussed in chapter 1, Willis' ethnographic project analyzes the way the young lads' resistance to dominant ideologies of education results in their eventual control. By resisting dominant educational standards, the lads reinsert themselves into working class, manual labor, low-autonomy jobs similar to those of their fathers. Therefore, the lads' resistance is also a form of control. Fournier's (1998) analysis of recent college graduates identifies a similar inter-relationship of control and resistance. In an organization where the discourse of enterprise is dominant, she identifies ways some new graduates resist. They do so by articulating resistant discourses that position enterprise as corrupt and their actions as full of integrity. Fournier labels these alternatives as discourses of "militancy" (p. 56). While the workers resist through these alternative discourses, Fournier argues that their resistance reproduces the dominant discourse of enterprise. The dominant discourse positions the resistant graduates as choosing to "fail" (p. 72). Their "failure" helps to reinforce the discourse of enterprise by showing the penalties for not adopting this dominant discourse. These penalties include less advancement, a marginalized role in the company, and a less prestigious office location. Therefore, "stories of resistance are an essential component of the operation of enterprise for

they show the sanctions attached to refusing to join in, to constitute oneself in an appropriate way" (Fournier, 1998, p. 72). While Fournier identifies the ways resistance perpetuates dominant discourses, she also argues that the resistance can promote change. She claims that the alternative discourses of militancy subvert the enterprise discourse by making "available different vocabularies of motives" (p. 77). In both Willis (1977) and Fournier (1998) resistance and control are examined as complex processes that cannot be isolated from one another.

In this project, I also attempt to avoid a binary distinction between control and resistance. For the sake of clarity, in my analysis chapters I discuss students' acceptance and resistance of the dominant career discourses separately. However, I also address ways students simultaneously accept and resist dominant discourses. Furthermore, in the discussion chapter, I explore some ways dominant career discourses enable alternative ones and ways alternative career discourses rely on and perpetuate dominant discourses. In doing so I highlight how "resistance frequently contains elements of consent and consent often incorporates aspects of resistance" (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994, p. 29). For example, in this project a student might talk about joining the Peace Corps as a resistant act. She might be resisting social standards related to income and advancement. However, her action represents forms of control as well. Joining the Peace Corps might be the "acceptable" way to take "time off" after graduation. Also, in joining the Peace Corps she becomes part of another set of power relations. In the Peace Corps context, leaving to work for a for-profit organization may be seen as resistant. In other words, no act is purely an effect of control or an example of resistance. Control and resistance exist in a dialectical relationship. This precludes any one discourse from operating solely as a form of control.

Multiple Discourses Construct Multiple Identities

Just as the dialectical nature of control and resistance prevents the totalizing control

of dominant discourses, so does the nature of identity. The discursive construction of

identity does not mean that a set of discourses constructs one identity that a person then takes

up. Instead, numerous discourses construct multiple identities for any one individual. As

Collinson (2003) writes,

> Rarely, if ever, do we experience a singular or unitary sense of self. There also
> appears to be an almost unlimited number of possible sources of identity. Human
> beings seem able to construct coexisting identities from many different aspects of our
> lives (e.g. one's body, ethnicity, religion, possessions, family status, gender, age,
> class, occupation, nationality, sexuality, language, political beliefs, clothing etc.).
> While some of these coexisting identities are mutually reinforcing, others may be in
> tension, mutually contradictory and even incompatible. (p. 534)

Viewing identity as constructed by multiple, at times contradictory and incompatible

discourses means that identity is not fixed. Instead it is a continual site of struggle.

Kondo (1990) examines this understanding of identity as discursively constructed,

multiple, and shifting. In her ethnography of Japanese factory workers/family members,

Kondo analyzes the ways people "craft" selves at the nexus of discourses of gender, class,

age, ethnicity, and other social categories. The selves people create are not static. Instead,

Kondo argues that people can be understood as "multiple selves, whose lives are shot

through with contradictions and creative tensions" (p. 224). For example, Kondo analyzes

how women working in a factory simultaneously occupy the identities of maternal women

who should be respected and part-time workers who command little respect. It is not as

though the women are either respected maternal figures *or* disrespected part-time workers.

They are both. Kondo discusses how these contradictory, multiple identities play out in ways

that highlight the dialectical nature of control and resistance discussed above.

The current project can be seen as an investigation into how the identity of a "good college graduate" is constructed by and for a group of college seniors. In this process, the multiple and contradictory nature of identity plays out on two levels. The first is the level of career discourses. As I discussed in chapter 2, there are multiple discourses of career. Some of these discourses are more prevalent than others. As Weedon (1987) writes,

> Not all discourses will carry equal weight or power. Some will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo. Others will give rise to challenge to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of current organization and the selective interests which it represents. (p. 35)

In other words, regardless of the fact that some understandings of career are more firmly instantiated into contemporary society, there are alternative discourses of career. For example, the dominant discourse may construct pay as central to work success. However, simultaneously there are discourses that construct service to others as the defining element of success. This multiplicity of career discourses means that there is not one clear "good college graduate" identity.

In addition to the multiple career discourses at play, other discourses interact in the construction of students' identities. The ways the "good college graduate" identity is constructed for any one student depend on how that student is situated within other discourses central to modern U.S. society, including class, gender, age, and race/ethnicity. For example, in the pilot study for this project (McAlpine, 2005), Erica discussed how the "good college graduate" identity her family expects her to adopt is constructed in large part by discourses of class and education. Erica is a first generation college student from a family that has always struggled financially. For her, the privileged identity of a good college graduate is constructed as someone who immediately gets a well-paying job after graduation. The type of job is not nearly as important as the financial security it brings. In contrast,

Amanda is a distinctly middle to upper middle class student, and the privileged identity for her emphasizes prestige over immediate income. In highlighting the ways Erica's and Amanda's identities are constructed differently, I do not want to imply that discourses of class are the only salient discourses. Discourses connecting class to occupation are only a few among a multiplicity of discourses that construct a variety of "good college graduate" identities. It is also important to note that Erica and Amanda do not just perform the "good college graduate" identity. Instead, their personal identities are constructed by identities of woman, daughter, American, friend, and so forth. These identities may be complementary or contradictory. For example, a graduating student's identity as a son or daughter might lead the student to feel compelled to move close to home. This could easily be in conflict with that same student's identity as a young professional.

Understanding identity as constructed by multiple, potentially conflicting discourses leads to an understanding of why discourses do not determine identities or people's actions. Instead, people have the potential to act agentially in their interactions with discourses. In the following section, I address the understanding of agency I am using in this project.

Agency

Agency can be conceptualized as the ability of a social actor to "act otherwise" (Giddens, 1979). Newton (1998) argues that Foucauldian organization studies scholarship has not productively analyzed how individuals "made sense of themselves and the social in an agential sense" (p. 426). Instead, he argues that "the predominant focus of their argument still lies with the programmatic prescriptions of different discursive fields rather than with the manoeuvring of agents in relation to discursive practices" (p. 429). He claims that in much of this scholarship "the subject is 'done to': she does not appear to do much doing" (p.

428). While this project relies on Foucauldian understandings of discourse, power, and

identity, I conceptualize the participants as active agents who take up, resist, and

accommodate career discourses.

Conceiving of participants as agential beings is not antithetical to understanding

identity as discursively constructed. The discursive construction of identity does not

preclude the possibility of agency. As Tracy and Trethewey (2005) write, "although

individuals cannot freely choose the discourses that constitute them . . . a space for agency

lies in the ability to traverse, intersect and hold in tension competing discourses and attendant

ways of being" (p. 188).

This "space of action" (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996) is a product of the multiplicity of

discourses discussed above. Since there are multiple discourses of an appropriate post-

college choice that circulate, students are able to make choices that diverge from the

privileged ones. This means that while the dominant discourse operates as a form of control,

that control is not total. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) write,

> The circulation of a plurality of discourses and practices through which identities are
> formed makes it more likely that identities are only partly or temporarily regulated by
> management-driven or other group-controlled processes of regulation. . . . The
> struggle to forge and sustain a sense of self-identity is shaped by multiple images and
> ideals of ways of being. (p. 637)

Jorgenson's (2002) analysis of female engineers addresses how people agentially

position themselves in relation to multiple identity-constructing discourses. Specifically,

Jorgenson identifies ways the participants position their identities in relation to being women,

mothers, and engineers. The women adopt, transform, and resist prevalent discourses about

what it means to be women/mothers/engineers. Jorgenson writes, "It is important to

understand how, in certain situated encounters, participants choose to take up some positions

over others, for example, that of qualified engineer over professional woman or working mother" (p. 359).

Another study that examines how people agentially position themselves in relation to dominant discourses is Trethewey's (2001) analysis of professional white middle-aged women's experiences of aging. Trethewey argues that "Women do not evidence either domination by age ideology or resistance to age ideology; rather, they engage in hegemonic struggles, out of which a (contested) identity emerges. . . . Identities emerge in the contested spaces between domination and resistance" (pp. 187-8). She discusses how "participants articulate the ways in which they are able to craft new identities as they work in and through midlife" (p. 209). She concludes that many of the women simultaneously reproduce "the master narrative of decline" while also drawing on other discourses to create new identities.

The ability of individuals to agentially interact with discourses has been examined in various contexts including clients in human services organizations (Trethewey, 1997), working class males in Britain (McDowell, 2003), Japanese factory workers (Kondo, 1990), employees in surveillance-based organizations (Collinson, 2003) and medical doctors (Cohen & Musson, 2000). In their own way each of these studies highlights Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) argument that individuals "are not passive receptacles or carriers of discourses but, instead, more or less actively and critically interpret and enact them" (p. 628). However, it is important to note that retaining a strong conception of agency does not preclude an awareness of power relations. While identities are not fixed, their fluidity is constrained by relations of power. Some discursive constructions carry more currency than others, are more deeply ingrained in institutional practices, and are supported by people in authority. Additionally, people with less social capital may resist privileged identities in

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ways that simultaneously perpetuate the dominant understandings. Holmer-Nadesan (1996)

identified this process in her analysis of dormitory housekeepers. She found that the

managerially defined housekeeper identity is that of "peon" or "manual" laborer. Some of

the women resist this identity by adopting a caregiver or maternal identity. In doing this the

women are resisting the managerially constructed identity. However, since the maternal

identity is associated with self-sacrifice, adopting this identity does not foster collective

resistance. The women are unlikely to join together to demand higher wages or better

working conditions. Therefore, Holmer-Nadesan argues that the women are simultaneously

resisting and perpetuating the managerial identity of powerlessness by adopting the maternal

identity.

Grounds for Critique

The perspective I have laid out in this chapter draws heavily on Foucauldian

conceptions of discourse, power, and identity. Conceptualizing discourse, power, and

identity in these ways allows for a nuanced examination of the ways cultural and familial

discourses of career privilege certain choices and identities while marginalizing others.

However, a Foucauldian perspective has been criticized for its lack of a normative foundation

for critique. Within much Foucauldian scholarship there is "a refusal to clarify the normative

criteria for distinguishing more or less acceptable forms of power" (Willmott, 1994, p. 115).

In this project, I retain critical theory's emphasis on emancipation. As a critical scholar, I am

committed to decreasing oppression and increasing individual freedom. I am not seeking a

space of pure freedom outside of relations of power. Instead, I view critical research as

seeking to bring to light the alternative possibilities that are marginalized by dominant

discourses so that people can realize their own interests and create more democratic social

structures. Part of this process is to make visible the constructedness of current ways of being. In making the taken-for-granted visible, critical theory "aims at displaying implicit values with the hope of recovering value conflicts, making them discussable and enabling people to choose more clearly in their own interests" (Deetz, 2005, p. 95).

My goal as a scholar is not to eliminate the career discourses I chronicle as currently dominant. Instead, the goal is to understand how such discourses operate and with what material consequences. I adopt the ethical grounding articulated by Ashcraft and Mumby (2004) in their feminist communicological approach: "the goal of a feminist communicological ethic, then, is to draw attention to how particular communication practices privilege some interests and forms of difference over others, and to examine the consequences of such processes of privilege" (p. 129). Fundamentally, this perspective views "discursive closure" (Deetz, 1992) as unethical. One way discursive closure occurs is when certain discourses are privileged and others marginalized, such that the dominant discourses narrowly frame what counts as "truth." For this project, this means that I view the privileging of certain career discourses as problematic. To the extent that students are expected to adopt a particular narrow understanding of appropriate career choices with limited opportunities to explore alternatives discourses, I find the current situation unethical. Phrased differently, the goal of the project is not to eliminate the dominant career discourse, "but to disrupt its hierarchical superiority" (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004, p. 434).

Conclusion

In studying college seniors' experiences of career discourses, I am adopting a particular understanding of discourse. Based largely on Foucauldian analytics, I view discourses as power-laden producers of truths and identities. Yet, because there are always

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multiple discourses, the truths and identities that exist are not limited to those produced by any one discourse. This means that while people are controlled by dominant discourses of career, they can also resist those discourses. However, the presence of resistance and human agency does not mean that dominant discourses should not be critiqued. In this project, I retain a normative grounding for such critique. Based on this grounding, I view discursive closure as unethical and seek to disrupt the dominance of controlling career discourses.

This chapter explained the theoretical lens I am using in this project. The next chapter lays out the methodological portion of the project. In chapter 4, I address the epistemological orientation, methodological rationale, research context, data collection, and data analysis procedures for this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODS

In the previous chapters, I explained the rationale for a critical study of college students' understandings of and responses to career discourses. In this chapter I explain how I developed and conducted this project. Specifically, I present the underlying epistemological orientation, the methodological rationale, the research context, and the data collection and analysis processes.

Epistemological Orientation

In investigating college students' experiences with career discourses, I chose to use a critical qualitative approach (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). In this section, I first present background on a general qualitative research epistemology. I then explain the critical qualitative approach.

Qualitative Research

A wide variety of methods and theoretical perspectives have been taken up under the broad umbrella of qualitative research. What connects these varied methods and perspectives is an emphasis on investigating the ways in which realities are socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative research does not seek to understand or codify an objective reality; instead, it focuses on the ways "particular realities are socially produced and maintained through ordinary talk, stories, rites, rituals, and other daily activities" (Deetz, 2001, p. 23). This perspective on research leads to a meaning-centered focus and an emphasis on the value-laden nature of inquiry.

In examining everyday behaviors, qualitative research is less concerned with what happens in an objective sense than with the meanings people assign to what happens. Qualitative research aims to interpret "phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 5). For this project, I am interested in the meanings people construct about work and career. When I quote stories my participants shared about their career choice experiences, I am not asserting that the events recounted actually occurred in the manner told. What "actually" occurred is not the focus of my project. Instead, I am interested in examining the sense-making processes in which the student engages as he or she recounts an experience related to career expectations.

As I examine participants' construction of meanings related to work and career, a qualitative research perspective requires me also to examine my own views. Within qualitative research, inquiry is seen as a value-laden endeavor (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As a qualitative researcher, I do not assert that my interpretation is the only possible interpretation. In creating an interpretation, I acknowledge that my experiences and theoretical positions sensitize me to particular issues in the data. In collecting the data, analyzing it, and writing about my findings, I have worked to be self-reflexive about the ways my own career attitudes and experiences affect my choices and insights. Throughout the process, I have made journal entries about and discussed with others the ways my biases towards non-profit and education sectors shape my reactions towards some participants. Similarly, I have worked to be conscious of the bias I have against privileging work and career over family and personal life. In remaining aware of these biases, I force myself to question their constructedness. They are beliefs that have shaped my own choices, but they are not universal truths and I must be careful to not treat them as such. Throughout the

research process, I have also given much thought to the ways my middle-class background has provided me with a range of choices that are not materially possible for many people. I have worked to raise my own awareness of the material limits people face and how those limits intersect with notions of possible career and lifestyle choices.

In addition to needing to be aware of the ways my personal beliefs and experiences shape my interpretations, I also must be conscious of the ways my theoretical approaches shape my research process. I chose to approach this project as a critical qualitative researcher. In the following section, I explain the goals of a critical qualitative approach and why I have selected it.

Critical Qualitative Research

Within organizational communication research, two paradigms that commonly employ qualitative inquiry are the interpretive approach and the critical approach. An interpretive qualitative approach seeks to understand and describe the social world. While a critical qualitative approach also seeks to understand the complexities of human experience, it does so in order to offer critique and promote change. A critical qualitative approach seeks to "name the world as part of a larger effort to evaluate it and make it better" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 450). Such evaluation is antithetical to the interpretative qualitative approach.

A critical approach seeks to make the world better by drawing attention to the ways taken-for-granted norms are actually power-laden social constructions. To do this, critical scholars examine how power and discourse operate to privilege dominant constructions to the extent that the dominant constructions seem inevitable (Mumby, 1988). In doing so, the critical approach does not promote a specific emancipatory agenda. Instead, it aims to open

up possibilities for alternative meanings and sense-making practices thereby "enabling people to choose more clearly in their own interests" (Deetz, 2005, p. 95).

The emphasis of the critical qualitative approach on examining power-laden dominant constructions in order to open up alternatives makes it well-suited to this project. The goal of this project is to understand how college students make sense of discourses of appropriate post-college choices. Through such an analysis, I can highlight the ways these discourses enable and constrain students. Interrogating the ramifications of dominant discourses is important because these discourses are not natural or permanent. Instead, current connections between career choices and appropriateness, prestige, and value are social constructions. The meanings associated with work and career could be different than they are.

<center>Methodological Rationale</center>

In taking a critical qualitative approach, numerous methods could be used to investigate college students' understandings of career discourses. I chose to use focus groups and interviews. In this section, I describe my rationale for using these two data collection methods.

I selected focus groups as a primary data collection method because this study focuses on cultural understandings of appropriate behavior. As Morgan (1988) writes, "focus groups are invaluable for examining how knowledge, ideas, story-telling, self-presentation and linguistic exchanges operate within a given cultural context" (p. 5). While one-on-one interviews may also provide such information, the focus group dynamic can promote a more spontaneous sharing of ideas. Morgan writes, "When all goes well, focusing the group discussion on a single topic brings forth material that would not come out in either the

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participants' own casual conversations or in response to the researcher's preconceived questions" (p. 21). An additional benefit of the focus group method is that it emphasizes participants' knowledge and understandings over the researcher's (Morgan, 1988).

While focus groups provide the above described advantages, they are also limited. In a focus group, the interviewer may have few opportunities to ask follow-up questions that probe specific issues. The group dynamic may also limit the extent to which participants feel comfortable disclosing emotional content. For example, Michell's (1999) research found that while focus groups provided "a rich and productive way of gaining access to well rehearsed 'public knowledge,'" (p. 36) information regarding emotions was less likely to be shared in the group environment. This may be a result of the difficulties in ensuring confidentiality in a focus group. Participants may be reluctant to discuss certain topics or feelings within a group of peers. For these reasons, I decided to incorporate one-on-one interviews into my research design. In interviews Michell observed a shift from "'telling it how it is,' toward talking about 'how it feels'" (pp. 40-41). Since part of what I wanted to understand were the ways college students felt in response to dominant cultural discourses about career, it was important that I talked with people individually in order to increase the opportunities for personal disclosures about these issues. Together the focus groups and interviews allowed me to gain insight into both the cultural understandings of career and the emotional experiences related to those cultural understandings.

<center>Research Context</center>

This research project involved college seniors at Southeastern University (SEU) in the spring of 2006. To contextualize the project, I describe the school's reputation, the

student population, and other relevant attributes. I also discuss the job market college seniors faced in 2006.

Southeastern University

Southeastern University is a large public university in the southeastern portion of the United States. Current enrollment is over 16,000 undergraduate students and 10,000 graduate and professional students. SEU is considered among the "most competitive" colleges and universities (*Barron's Profiles of American Colleges,* 2007). The vast majority of the students I spoke with enrolled in 2002. Their admissions class included 17,000 applicants. Of these, just over 6000 were admitted and 3,460 enrolled. The acceptance rates vary greatly between in-state and out-of-state students. Competition for out-of-state admission is much more competitive. This is in part due to a state mandate that 82% of the student population be in-state residents. In the 2002 admissions process, 56.6% of in-state applicants were accepted compared to 17.7% of out-of-state applicants (Southeastern University website).

SEU students are typically high academic performers in high school. In the incoming class of 2002, 71% were in the top 10% of their high school class. An additional 20% of the new SEU students were in the second 10%. In 2007, 85.4% of incoming students had a high school GPA of 4.0 or more on a 4.0 scale. The average GPA was 4.37 (Southeastern University website). Typically, such high GPA's are achieved through earning A's in advanced courses. Such A's count for 5 points even on the 4 point scale.

Once students are enrolled at SEU, they automatically enter the school of Arts and Sciences. They remain there until they either select an Arts and Sciences' major or apply to one of SEU's professional schools. This is expected to occur during a student's sophomore

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year. In 2007, the most frequently chosen majors at SEU were: Journalism and Mass

Communication, Biology, and Business Administration (Southeastern University website).

SEU's student make-up is approximately 60% female and 40% male. The

racial/ethnic make-up of the student population is approximately 76% European American,

12% African American/Black, 8% Asian American/Asian, 5% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 1%

Native American/Alaskan Native, 0.2% Pacific Islander; 2% other, and 2% unreported

(Southeastern University website).

Southeastern University was named one of the nation's best values for public

undergraduate education by *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine (Lankford, Steeley, &

Varner, 2006). For an in-state student, the 2007 total estimated cost (including tuition, room,

board and living expenses) was approximately $15,000 per year. For an out-of-state student,

the cost was approximately $30,000 (Southeastern University website). The Project on

Student Debt reports that in 2005, 34% of SEU students graduated with debt. The average

debt of a 2005 SEU graduate was $13,801.

Job Market

I began recruiting students to participate in this project in January 2006. The

students were all scheduled to graduate in May, August, or December of 2006. The job

market they were entering was considered to be the best in four years (Gonzalez, 2006).

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' survey, companies

planned to hire 14% percent more new graduates in 2006 than they did in 2005 (Gonzalez,

2006). The highest growth occupations in 2006 included jobs in the bioscience, technology,

and healthcare fields. Jobs in those areas were predicted to increase by 30% in the coming

decade (Schworm, 2006). Liberal arts students faced a somewhat more difficult entry into

the workplace. Even with a strong job market, Schworm (2006) reports that liberal arts students typically need an internship, and often multiple ones, to be competitive for many positions.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

A total of 56 Southeastern University college seniors participated in this project. All 56 students participated in the focus groups. Twenty-one of those 56 participated in follow-up interviews. All participants were scheduled to graduate in May, August, or December of 2006. This population was chosen because seniors are faced with imminent decisions about what to do after graduation. The immediacy of these decisions means that seniors may be more conscious of and able to express the various messages they receive about career choices than would non-seniors. Only graduating seniors under the age of 25 were recruited and participated. While the intention of the research was to study the attitudes and experiences of U.S. college students, three foreign exchange students participated.

Of the 56 focus group participants, 42 were female; 14 male. Of these participants, I interviewed 15 females and 6 males. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 detail the self-reported race/ethnicity, grade point average, familial socioeconomic status, and academic major of the focus group and interview participants.

Table One

Self-reported Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Focus Group Participants	Interview Participants
African American/African	13*	5
Asian American/Asian	6*	4*
European American/ European	30*	10
Hispanic/Latino/a	4	1
Pacific Islander	1	0
Other/Unreported	2	1

Note. An * indicates 1 foreign exchange student

Table Two

Self-reported Undergraduate Grade Point Averages

GPA	Focus Group Participants	Interview Participants
4-3.8	4	4
3.79-3.5	11	6
3.49-3.0	29	6
2.99-2.5	8	4
2.49-2.0	2	0
Under 2.0	0	0
Unreported	2	1

Table Three

Self-reported Familial Socioeconomic Status

SES	Focus Group Participants	Interview Participants
1 – Very Wealthy	2	1
2	4	3
3	16	8
4 – Middle Class	23	8
5	10	1
6	0	0
7 – Very Poor	0	0
Unreported	1	0

Table Four

Academic Majors

Academic Major	Focus Group Participants	Interview Participants
Humanities/Social sciences	45	14
Communication Studies	9	4
Journalism & Mass Comm.	7	1
Political Science	6	3
International Studies	4	2
History	4	2
English	3	2
Sociology	2	0
Spanish	3	0
Music	1	0
Psychology	2	0
Education	1	0
Classics	1	1
Linguistics	1	1
Anthropology	1	0
African Studies	1	0
Peace, War & Defense	1	0
Science & Math	17	4
Biology	8	2
Environmental Science	2	0
Biochemistry	1	0
Nutrition	1	1
Exercise & Sports Science	1	0
Biomedical Engineering	2	0
Computer Science	1	1
Biostatistics	1	0
Business	4	4

Note. Due to double majors, the totals exceed the number of participants.

Procedures

Focus Groups

I conducted 10 focus groups with 4-8 people in each group. This total includes one

pilot focus group. Focus groups lasted from 48 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes (not including

an icebreaker activity and paperwork). In this section, I discuss how I recruited focus group participants, what the focus group process entailed, and support for the authenticity of the focus group data.

Focus Group Recruitment

After obtaining human subjects research approval through SEU's Institutional Review Board, I recruited participants through personal contacts, mass e-mails, and campus fliers (Appendix A). I used personal contacts to recruit participants for the pilot focus group. To do this I sent an e-mail to my former students inviting them to participate. Three of my former students and one other SEU student comprised the pilot focus group. Participants for the non-pilot focus groups were recruited through a mass e-mail and campus fliers. The vast majority of the participants responded to the mass e-mail which was sent to all SEU seniors. Only a few participants were recruited through the campus fliers. All recruitment materials offered students $10 for their participation in a focus group discussing "Life after College." The recruitment materials solicited both participants who had a post-college plan and those who did not. My initial recruitment measures resulted in enough participants for seven focus groups. However, the participants did not include many math and science majors. I then sent a second recruitment mass e-mail directed at math and science majors. Based on the second recruitment e-mail (Appendix A), I held two focus groups with math and science majors.

During the follow-up interviews, I asked participants why they had decided to participate in the focus groups. The most common response was the $10 incentive. Other responses included that the topic interested them, that they knew me and wanted to help, and that they had been involved in research and knew it can be hard to get participants. Of the 56

participants, I knew nine previously. Eight of them were former students of mine. Three of these participated together with one new participant in the pilot focus group. The other six participated in regular focus groups. All of the participants were college seniors and so the chance that I would have them as a student after the project ended was very slim.

Focus Group Process

All the focus groups took place in conference rooms on SEU's campus. The focus groups were held in the afternoons and evenings. All but one focus group was held on a weekday. I provided brownies, grapes, and soda for each focus group. In addition to the participants and myself, each focus group was attended by a research assistant, Christine. A college senior herself, Christine assisted with my data collection process as part of an independent study. During each focus group, I moderated the discussion and she took notes on a laptop computer. These notes were used to supplement the digital voice recordings. In her notes, Christine attempted to record the speaker of each statement. This allowed for more accurate attribution of comments to participants during the transcription process. Christine also noted some of the participants' nonverbal behaviors.

Each focus group began with the participants completing a consent form (Appendix B) and demographic questionnaire. On the consent form, I asked participants to indicate a preferred pseudonym. I have tried to honor these pseudonyms. In a few cases there were duplicates and I have created alternative pseudonyms for these participants. After completing the paperwork, students were asked to write whatever name they wanted to go by during the focus group on a tabletop name card. These cards faced the group so that everyone could refer to each other by name during the discussion.

For the pilot focus group and the first two groups thereafter, I did not have students introduce themselves to each other or engage in any icebreaking activity. Instead, I welcomed participants, explained the process, and asked them to participate in a focusing activity (described below). After the third focus group (including the pilot group), I decided that more of an icebreaker and introduction might be useful. While the pilot group and the first focus group went well and conversation seemed to flow easily, the second non-pilot group was not as interactive or talkative. So, I decided to start the focus groups with an icebreaker called Zobmondo®. In this activity, participants (and usually Christine and I) formed two concentric circles. Each participant was given a Zobmondo® card listing humorous "Would you rather . . ." questions. An example question is, "Would you rather always speak in rhyme - OR - never hear every third word spoken to you?" During the activity, we each introduced ourselves to the person across from us and asked and answered a question from the cards. Then I would ask the outer circle to rotate one person and we would start over. This activity allowed each participant to interact one-on-one with half of the group. It usually involved much laughter and conversation. After the Zobmondo® exercise ended, we all sat at the conference table, finished any of the paperwork, and passed around snacks. Then I asked the participants to briefly introduce themselves to the group using either their pseudonym or their first name, whichever they preferred. Beginning the focus groups this way seemed to work well so I continued doing it. For the remainder of the focus groups, I included introductions and typically also included the Zobmondo® exercise. However, I shortened the Zobmondo® exercise for three focus groups to accommodate time or space constraints.

Following the consent process, any opening activities, and a welcome and thanks from me, the focus group moved on to a focusing exercise (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). For this exercise, I asked participants to write down five things they could do after college that they thought would be considered appropriate for them. After a few moments, I asked the students to also write down five things they could do after college that they thought would be considered inappropriate for them. Then, I asked students to jot down the sources from which they got the idea that a certain choice was appropriate or inappropriate. I asked them to do this for at least a few of the choices on their lists. After students were done with this, I told them that I wanted us to have a free-form discussion about the types of choices that they feel would be considered appropriate or inappropriate for them. I asked them to share some of what they had written as a way to get that conversation started.

Building from the focusing exercise, I moderated the focus group discussion using a set of questions (Appendix C) as a guide. I did not use a high level of moderation (Morgan, 1988). Instead, I encouraged the participants to engage in a discussion with each other in which I periodically inserted a new question or topic.

The questions that I used as the guide for the focus groups were developed through three processes. I conducted a pilot study (McAlpine, 2005) which informed the questions. I also surveyed a group of twenty undergraduate students as to what questions they believed would best address my central issues. This process highlighted the need to ask about issues of obligation and money. Finally, I conducted a pilot focus group for this project. The pilot group participants suggested that I change the way I worded the focusing exercise to make it clearer. I implemented their suggestions in the rest of the focus groups.

While I used the pilot study, undergraduate survey, and pilot focus group to develop my focus group guide, I also continued to adapt it throughout the data collection process. In particular, I adapted my follow-up questions throughout the focus group process in response to previous groups' comments. Often in groups I would ask questions that checked something recent participants had said. For example, early focus groups frequently mentioned that making a non-traditional choice was acceptable *if* it was for a limited amount of time. In later groups, if no one mentioned this, I asked something like "Does it matter how long you do the alternative thing for or not?" In asking such questions, I used the focus groups as evolving checks against emerging trends in my initial analysis.

Focus Group Data Authenticity

In considering the authenticity of the data collected during a focus group, two issues were most important. One concern is that participants would be reluctant to disagree with one another (Fontana & Frey, 2003). A second concern was that participants would try to express the views they feel are desired by the researcher (Carey, 1994). In this section, I explain why I do not think either of these concerns were overwhelmingly present in the current study.

One concern in conducting focus groups is that group members will report agreement with each other even if they hold divergent views (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 73). While I cannot know the extent to which participants may have done this, there is evidence that students felt comfortable expressing disagreement. At several points in the focus groups, a participant stated that he or she did not agree with a statement another student had made. Examples of this included disagreements about life priorities and about the stigma of moving

home after graduation. In our interview, Patrick commented on the freedom he felt to express disagreement during the focus group, saying,

> I thought, felt comfortable enough to like, you, you have definitely the threat of, like, falling into groupthink (um hmm) in, in which one person's like, "I'm really anxious about it" and then everybody else feels (right) like they have to be anxious about it regardless of if they actually are or not. I felt like people were pretty comfortable about, like, (um hmm) just saying the truth and, like, I felt comfortable saying that I wasn't really all that anxious about it.

Further evidence that students felt willing to express alternative opinions also comes from the follow-up interviews. During the interviews, several participants mentioned that one of the things they liked about the focus group was the chance to hear from students who had different perspectives. As Jamie said about the focus group, "I thought it was really interesting. I really enjoyed listening, um, because that's, they had a lot of opinions that I don't normally come into contact with. Most of my friends are kind of like me."

Another potential issue with focus group data is that participants may feel pressured to state opinions that they feel are desired by the researcher (Carey, 1994). In this project, the students' apparent sincere engagement in the focus groups argues for the authenticity of their responses. During most all of the focus groups, students demonstrated their involvement by asking questions of each other. In one focus group, the involvement went past engagement in the present conversation. Several students in that group exchanged e-mails and offers of assistance in finding post-graduation living arrangements. Students also showed their sincere engagement in the topic and group through the comments they made about the focus group process. At the end of several groups, students commented on how much they had enjoyed it. For example, the following conversation took place at the end of the first focus group:

Jane: That was really fast actually.

Dirk: This was great.

Collette: Yeah, this was fun.

Dirk: It was. Yo. So can I put on, like, a mustache and a wig and come back?

Other students went beyond calling the focus group fun and framed the experience as helpful. The following interchange came from the eighth focus group.

Teresa: Other last, other last thoughts that come to you as we've talked?

Shlea: Can we do this again!? [group laughter]

Joan: Group therapy sessions.

During the follow-up interviews, students reiterated the idea that the focus group experience had been therapeutic. Specifically students said they appreciated the chance to air their feelings and to feel a sense of camaraderie with others who are in similar situations. To the extent that students experienced the focus groups as therapeutic or at least enjoyable, it is likely that they were engaging in the interaction in a way that mitigated demand characteristics.

Interviews

After all the focus groups were completed, I conducted 21 interviews. Interviews ranged in duration from 49 minutes to 1 hour 48 minutes. In this section, I discuss how I selected and recruited interviews participants, what the interview process entailed, and support for the authenticity of the interview data.

Interviewee Selection and Recruitment

Focus group participants were asked to indicate on their consent forms whether they would be open to participating in a follow-up interview or not. All but 3 of the 56 focus group participants indicated that they would be willing to be contacted for an interview. To

decide who to ask for an interview, I did a preliminary analysis of the focus group data. In this analysis, I identified students who appeared to be exemplars of particular responses to career discourses. Specifically, I identified students who expressed acceptance of mainstream career discourses, students who expressed alternative career discourses, and those who did both. I also considered the level of pressure the students expressed related to career choice. I wanted to interview students who had experienced a range of levels of pressure related to career choice. A final concern in selecting interviewees was that I wanted the interview population to at least maintain, if not exceed, the sex and racial/ethnic diversity of the focus group population. Based on these considerations, I e-mailed potential interviewees asking them if they would be willing to be interviewed. The only material incentive for follow-up interviewees was food and beverage during their interview. In all, I e-mailed 34 focus group participants and conducted 21 interviews. Of the 13 people who I asked to interview, but did not, the reasons varied. One scheduled an interview but did not show up. We later tried to reschedule, but it did not work out logistically. The 12 other students did not respond to my e-mail or responded that they were too busy or could not participate. When a student did not respond or responded negatively, I contacted another student who had discussed similar career-related experiences during the focus group. This process allowed me to interview students with a range of experiences and attitudes.

Interview Process

I conducted each interview one-on-one. I met students in coffee shops, restaurants, campus gathering areas, and in one case, in my office. In all but the situation discussed above, the students showed up when they said they would and we did the interview without any problems.

Each interview began with me thanking the person for his or her help. I then asked the participant to read and complete the consent form (Appendix B). I reminded them that I was tape-recording the interview. From there, I used a semi-structured interview approach (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Similar to the focus groups, I used an interview guide (Appendix D) but did not restrict topics to that set of questions. In addition to traditional interview style questions, I also asked the interviewee to engage in a critical incident visualization based on the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954).

The interview guide was developed out of the pilot interviews I did in 2005 (McAlpine, 2005) and my initial analysis of the focus groups. For example, it was clear from my initial analysis of the focus group data that race and ethnicity played a role in what some students felt was expected of them. Based on this, I asked interviewees more probing questions related to the ways family, ethnic, and racial background affected what they felt was expected of them. In this way, the interviews served as a check against my focus group analysis. Additionally, before each interview, I reviewed the transcript from that interviewee's focus group. In doing so, I noted issues I wanted to follow-up on and questions I wanted to ask the interviewee. Further, as the interviews progressed, the interview guide evolved slightly as I became aware of certain issues. For example, several of my early interviewees mentioned the role of faith and spirituality in their career choice process. Therefore, I began to ask other interviewees if their religious or spiritual views did or did not play a role in their career choice process. Once again, by continuing to be attuned to the interviewees' responses, I was able to use the interviews as checks against emerging trends in the data.

Interview Data Authenticity

In considering the authenticity of the data collected during interviews, a key issue is that of demand characteristics (Denzin, 1989). Participants may feel pressured to share stories or opinions that they feel are those the researcher is seeking. In the interviews for this project, I believe this happened at times. Some students seemed to remain very aware of the research setting throughout the interview, and appeared to censor their actions and statements. This process is seen in several student comments. For example, Amaya made two comments about how she felt like she was not staying on topic. Charlie apologized for an answer saying, "sorry, it wasn't a good story." Similarly, Emran commented about how he felt awkward eating during an interview.

Although students' self-conscious comments about the interview process do suggest limits for the authenticity of their disclosures, there were other interview qualities that argue for the believability of the data. One such quality is that interviewees expressed disagreement with ideas and trends I raised. For example, I told students that some participants said spirituality played a role in their decision-making process. I then asked interviewees if it played a role for them. Students answered both affirmatively and negatively. Similarly, some students responded negatively to questions about pressure from parents and faculty while others responded positively. The range of student responses and their willingness to say no to such questions suggests that they felt comfortable sharing opinions and did not feel an obligation to support a claim just because I made it.

Another argument for the authenticity of this data is the level of self-disclosure and detail participants provided. While not all participants shared involved or highly personal stories, some did. Examples of this include one woman discussing the eating disorder that

resulted in her hospitalization, a man who talked about his family's profound financial difficulties, and a woman who disclosed some of the struggles she has faced revealing her sexual identity to her family.

A final argument for the believability of the interview data is that the students expressed an interest in the topic and the project. Many of the interviewees said they originally came to the focus group for the money, but then were interested by the topic and so came back for the interview. As Amaya said,

> I liked it. That's another reason why I replied. I just liked the topic. I didn't know, I, I mean, I don't know specifically what the topic is, but that you were asking those types of questions because once you brought it up I thought, "oh my gosh, this really does have an impact on my life" you know like what other, like I guess, what other people think and how they view my role, so, I don't know. I think I was more noticeable of it afterwards or took more notice of it (yeah).

Other ways students expressed interest in the topic included asking me questions about what I had found so far and telling me about how they had talked to friends and family about the project. The students' interest in the issues discussed in the interviews adds to my belief that they shared authentic opinions rather than saying what they thought I might want to hear.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all the focus groups and relevant portions of the interviews. For this transcription process, I used the guidelines set forth by Bloor et al. (2001) to create "readable prose" (p. 61) that identifies speakers; notes overlaps, tone, and significant pauses; and incorporates nonverbal responses from fieldnotes. In this manuscript, I indicate overlaps in speakers by putting the interrupting speaker's comments in parentheses. I note vocal emphasis and pauses through the use of italics and bracketed comments. In total, there were 742 single-spaced pages of transcript.

I analyzed the transcripts using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, I did a line-by-line coding of the transcripts. The first stage in this process was an open coding in which I systematically specified the concepts as they occurred in the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and classified them according to "common characteristics or related meanings" (p. 103). Where possible, I used a speaker's own words as the name of the code. Throughout the open coding process, I created memos regarding my initial interpretations, connections, and questions. To facilitate the open coding process, I used Atlas.ti 5.0, a computer software program designed to assist qualitative researchers.

After these initial coding processes were complete, I used axial coding to "link categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). An additional level of coding, selective coding, was used to integrate and refine the ideas. During this final coding process, I asked a peer to look at the codes with me. Together we talked about the codes and the participant statements they represented. He played the role of devil's advocate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by questioning my categorizations. This discussion resulted in a clarification of my final categories.

The peer discussion process described above was not a formal reliability measure. Such processes are not aligned with the critical qualitative approach I took in this project. Instead, a naturalistic approach to inquiry is judged on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that in the end, this determination is made by the consumer of a text. However, researchers can take steps to argue for the trustworthiness and authenticity of their data and conclusions. Some of the steps I took in aims of increasing trustworthiness and authenticity were discussed above. These include: collecting more than one type of data, keeping a reflexive journal, presenting

emergent findings to participants for their comment, and involving a peer in the coding process. Additional steps recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that I took to enhance the trustworthiness of my analysis include: foregrounding participant voices in the writing of my analysis chapters and presenting my findings to peers and college students at several points throughout the process.

Based on this analysis process, I identified the students' understandings of dominant discourses of career. These are discussed in chapter 5. I also examined the ways the students respond to those discourses. I discuss these responses in chapter 6. In chapter 7, I connect the students' understandings and responses with broader societal discourses.

CHAPTER FIVE

DOMINANT DISCOURSES OF APPROPRIATE POST-COLLEGE CHOICES

Throughout the focus groups and follow-up interviews, students discuss the expectations they feel regarding post-college choices. With emotions ranging from anxiety to anger to contentment, students talk about what they are "supposed" to do after graduation. While the specific expectations each student articulates vary, there are commonalities across the group. They discuss standards that they believe college graduates are typically expected to meet. These expectations reflect dominant discourses of occupational choices and career paths. Such discourses position certain post-college choices as appropriate and others as inappropriate.

The first standard a student has to meet to be seen as appropriate is that he or she needs to have a plan in place. Beyond that, the dominant discourses construct standards of appropriate choices. For some students, specific occupations are (or are not) appropriate. Beyond an expectation to pursue or avoid particular choices, students articulate a set of standards that they perceive as criteria for appropriate choices. The common standards are that appropriate post-college choices: a) require a degree; b) ensure financial security; c) are prestigious; d) lead to advancement; and e) allow the student to excel. In this chapter, I discuss students' perceptions of these expectations. In doing so, I highlight some of the ways family background plays a part in what is expected of students. This includes socioeconomic status, ethnicity and race, and parents' education and immigrant status. Finally, I address

how a discourse of waste and use provides the underlying logic behind many of the expectations students experience.

The Necessity of Having a Plan

As students approach graduation, they face a number of expectations regarding what they are going to do next. Before I discuss the specifics of these expectations, it is relevant to discuss the broader expectation that they have a plan. Nearly every participant acknowledges that by the time students become seniors, they are expected to know what they are doing after college.

Students perceive this expectation through the numerous questions they are asked about their plans. Students report getting asked, "What are you doing after graduation?" frequently by nearly everyone in their lives: parents, relatives, teachers, friends, and acquaintances. As Collette says, "I think I've been asked *every day* for at (Jane: yeah) least the last year, every day (Jim: Yep) I'm pretty sure of it." Students interpret the frequent asking of this question as an expectation that they should have an answer. They should know what they are going to do after graduation. As Jim says, "You're supposed to have an answer when you graduate, right? A lot of people think you should. You went to college."

The expectation to have a post-college plan is not new for the students. The students have been aware of this expectation for many years. For example, when I ask Tim to share "a specific incident when you were very aware of someone expecting you to do something career or education-wise. Or expecting you not to do something?" he responds,

> Yeah, um, uh, I remember in preschool a time when they just asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and everyone, I don't know why I remember that, but I remember, just everybody going around the room saying, "Doctor, policeman, fireman." Um, I mean, I guess they didn't really-it wasn't a lot of pressure, but it was like, "oh, well one day we will grow up and we will have jobs. Cool." Um, and then, in 8th grade, they had a career program . . . So during that period, my parents were

even more asking about it, "So what do you want to do? What do you want to do? You're doing this career thing at school."

Tim goes on to say that as a child he did not know what he wanted to do as a career and that his parents encouraged him to figure out a plan. He explains they wanted him to find

> some sort of plan, yeah, some sort of plan, some sort of path. Just something to do. I mean, it wasn't, it was always very, I mean, it wasn't ever very specific . . . It was always literally just that, just like, "Find what you want to do. Find what you want to do." (um hmm) Really nothing (sure) ever beyond that.

Tim and other students, including Jane and Amber, recall being asked about future plans since they were in preschool. For other participants, high school was when the expectation became clear. For Rose, the expectation was expressed through high school career fairs and discussions about building a resume. These events "put a little pressure on me because I, I didn't know what I was gonna do. And I didn't even know what I was interested in." Similarly Miles says, "I think there's *a lot* of pressure on, on high schoolers these days and, like, when you enter your first year of college to decide what you want to do and if you don't know what you want to do, people look down on that."

Students attribute some of the pressure to have a plan to the ways high school curricula, college application processes, and degree programs are structured. For example, Miles says that "for our high school like, uh, it wasn't like it when I was there but, they do it now so that they've implemented programs where like, you have career pathways [Tinkerbelle, Anna, and Jessica nod] and they try to get you to choose when you're, like, a sophomore in high school." Some college degree programs are also structured so that students must know very early in their college career what they want to study. Anna discusses this saying,

> I know at State, like most of the programs, you start right in your discipline. So, I would start freshman year taking courses in architecture, rather than here, where I

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have, you know, two years to take courses that basically can be used in any major. So, but, I definitely felt that pressure to-I mean, especially senior year [of high school] when you're filling out all those applications that are like, "tell me, you know, why you want to do this." . . . So, it starts early.

Although Anna claims that Southeastern University's structure allows for more freedom, Miles notes that at SEU "the teaching fellows program . . . starts your freshman year, like, and I didn't decide I wanted to do it until my sophomore year and so I was, like, I couldn't join it."

Although the expectation to have a plan may start as early as pre-school and be reinforced by institutional structures in high school and college, the impending completion of college makes the issue more pressing for students. Students who do not know what they are going to do next say that they are facing an impending deadline or that they have already failed to meet such a deadline. Jessica articulates the latter saying, "I feel like I should know by now, [laughs slightly and talks firmly] it should be already scripted out and planned." Although Jessica feels as though she has already missed the deadline for deciding, other students say that the deadline has not yet passed but is quickly approaching. For many, that deadline is either graduation or later in the summer. As Amber says, "I'll be pretty sad if I don't at least have some interview opportunities by, I mean, before final exams." The idea that one needs to have a plan by a certain date is strong enough for some students that if it is not actualized they will reconsider their desires. This makes a short timeline for things to work out. As Kelly says,

> I think if I didn't have any prospects by the time graduation came, I would be nervous because then I'd have to, you know, reevaluate, you know, exactly what - maybe this isn't what I should be doing kind of thing at that point.

Whether a student is expected to have a plan by senior year, by graduation, or by the end of the summer after graduation, the expectation is that he or she should know. To not know

what one is doing next reflects poorly on the individual. It means, as Miles says, "you are

drifting."

Appropriate Post-college Choices

Teresa: What are some of the right answers when people ask you what you're doing? What would be judged favorably?

Reysanne: If you already have a job lined up or a school lined up.

Teresa: So knowing, whatever it is, knowing?

Reysanne: But, the, it has to be like a good thing, it can't be, like, it can't be "I'm going to go backpacking through Europe." It has to be, like, either you're getting, either you're going to school or you have a job.

Teresa: What kinds of jobs would be, any kind of job? What sorts of jobs?

Reysanne: Like any job that makes a lot of money, [pause] or is, or, like, just sounds professional [Seun smiles].

Patti: Or if it sounds related to what you studied.

As Reysanne affirms above, the dominant discourses of appropriate work say that as

graduation nears students need to have a plan for what they are going to do next. They

should "already have a job lined up or a school lined up." However, as Reysanne went on to

explain, it is not enough for students to have a plan. That plan must also fit within dominant

understandings of appropriate post-college choices. While there were some areas of student

disagreement, overall the participants articulate a fairly uniform understanding of which post-

college choices are or are not considered appropriate.

You Should Choose a Particular Field or Occupation

For some students, the expectation regarding appropriate occupational choice is very

clear. These students are expected to pursue and obtain jobs in either a particular field or a

specific occupation. The particular field or occupation may vary from student to student, but

what is the same is the expectation that the student needs to pursue *that* field. For example, growing up, Emran was expected by his father to go into engineering, Patrick's mother wanted him to be a doctor, and Anna's uncle encouraged her to be a pharmacist. As the students prepare to graduate, Mary Jane's grandparents want her to go to law school, Frankie's mother thinks she should study biomedical engineering, and Charlie's being told that she should pursue investment banking. In all of these cases, the expectations are not based on the students' desires. As Charlie says,

> I got like a finance/investment banking offer and I was like, "I do not want to do it." And my parents were pushing me to do that. I was like, "Nope, I'm not going to like it. I'm going to hate it." They're like, "it's just three years of your life."

While not everyone faces the direct pressure Charlie does, a number of students discuss being expected to pursue a particular occupation.

Students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds face expectations to pursue specific fields. However, several students discuss the critical role ethnicity has played in determining what occupations are considered appropriate for them. An example of this is Ella. Her parents expect her to go into a health-related field. Part of her parents' desire for Ella to pursue this career path is based on what counts as appropriate work in their Filipino community. Ella explains that within this community, "an appropriate job - it is really doctor, lawyer, or maybe accountant." Ella has decided to be a marine biologist. This choice is considered inappropriate by her parents and many other people within the Filipino community. Her parents have not accepted her decision. She says, "my parents keep on sending me things that are like, 'oh this is how much blah blah blah makes, and here's this like form for so and so internship here and' all health-related of course [laughs slightly and nervously]." Ella's situation demonstrates how what counts as appropriate occupational

choices is often family and context dependent. While her choice to be a marine biologist

might be lauded in many families, she says the following about her own:

> Well in my town, there's like a really big Filipino community. And, you know, like, they have parties every week and, you know, they keep talking about, you know, like, what their children are doing. Like, my brother is a doctor and my sister is a lawyer [laughs under her breath] so, my mother and father can say, "oh yeah, you know, she's a doc- er, he's a doctor, she's a lawyer" and they're like "oh, what your, um, what's your youngest one doing?" and they're like, "oh, well, you know . . . [said slowly, in a sing-songy manner] she's, she's uh, she's still thinking about it." [Ella laughs, the group smiles and laughs, and Kennedy nods] I'm just, I don't know, and then people ask me and I'm like, I'm going into marine biology [laughs] and they are like, "ooooh," [negatively] because like in the community that's not, like, considered appropriate.

Ella's decision to be a marine biologist is considered inappropriate because her family and

many in her community consider certain occupational choices to be the only appropriate

ones. This pattern is echoed by Reysanne, a Chinese-American student. She says,

> My parents have a very limited view on what is acceptable as, in terms of, like, occupation . . . my parents are really big into doctors. And they're really big into engineers [Salim nods] because they're both engineers so that's their thing. Um, they're very big into Ph.D.s. Um, and I guess they're, they're kind of into like business.

You Should NOT Choose Certain Options

Just as some students are expected to pursue a certain field or specific job, students

are also told that particular choices are inappropriate. Like the appropriate choices, what is

inappropriate varies by family and situation, although there are some consistencies. During

the focus groups, I asked students to list (first on paper and then in discussion) choices that

would be considered inappropriate for them. What follows is a resulting discussion:

> Amaya: Teach for America . . . my family would be like "No, that's absolutely not an option."
>
> Jane [nodding]: Yeah, or Peace Corps
>
> Teresa: Or Peace Corps also?

Jane: A chef.

Teresa: A chef?

Jacob: I put working in retail.

Teresa: Retail?

Several participants: Yeah.

Amaya: Getting married.

One female participant: Yeah.

Another female participant: Oh yeah, homemaker or having children [Elaine and Jane nod and say "yeah"].

Jacob: Living at home doing nothing.

Elaine: It's not the so much getting married and having children, it's just the being the homemaker (Jane: yeah) like you have to also have (Jacob: yeah) some separate career.

None of the students above are interested in pursuing any of the inappropriate options they discuss. However, others students are interested in options that are considered inappropriate. In some of these cases, the potential for disapproval prompts students to not actively consider those options. Shlea addresses this saying,

Whether the potential for disapproval prompts students to not actively consider those options. Shlea addresses this saying,

One of my inappropriate ones is to go be a roadie for my boyfriend and his dad [group laughter] . . . My boyfriend plays guitar, he's really talented and his dad is actually a local musician, he was really big in like the 70s and 80s and stuff. And I would actually love to do that, but my parents would die [group laughter]. Like, "What does your daughter do?" "Oh she hauls stereos and amplifiers for her boyfriend's band" You know [mild group laughter].

Although Shlea says she would "love to do that," she does not discuss it as a viable possibility. Instead she acknowledges that it would be considered inappropriate. The rest of the focus group's laughter supports this notion. They do not take her consideration of this possibility seriously.

Shlea is not seriously considering the choice of being a roadie. However, other students are actively pursuing options that are considered inappropriate by their family or social circle. These include Dirk, who is planning on trying to become a fulltime novelist (much to his mother and sister's dismay) and Collette, who is pursuing a career as a chef. Collette's parents are not supportive of her plan and do not take it seriously. Their disapproval is the source of much pain for Collette. As she explains,

> I just want their support and to accept what I want to do and he [her father] made it very clear that they're, they're not going to. So I think that was, it was hard to hear but I think sometimes you need a little bit of that harsh reality, um, to really, it makes you step up your game when you realize, okay it doesn't matter what I do because it's not gonna, uh, please them.

Collette says her parents do not articulate a particular career choice they want her to pursue instead of being a chef. Instead, they ignore her expressed goals and continue to ask her what she plans on doing as though she has not yet decided. For Collette and Dirk, it is not that they are expected to pursue any one option, but instead that the option they have chosen is considered inappropriate.

Whatever you Choose, it Needs to Meet Certain Standards

The dominant discourses about acceptable post-college choices position some specific occupations as acceptable or unacceptable. Although what the particular acceptable/unacceptable options are may vary by family or social circle, the overarching idea that some occupational choices are acceptable while others are not is a common pattern. In addition to discourses that privilege certain occupations above others, the students also articulate a number of broader career choice expectations. These expectations do not involve particular occupations or fields, but instead focus on attributes related to the choice. Broadly, the students say that for a choice to be considered appropriate it needs to meet several

criteria. Those criteria are: the choice should require a degree, it should earn a certain level of pay, it should carry with it a certain level of status or prestige, it should be career-focused, and the student should be able to excel at it.

Appropriate Choices Require Your Degree

Students repeatedly frame choices that do not require a college degree as inappropriate. As Kelly says when I ask what would be inappropriate, "Not, not something like what I could have had in high school or without going to college." If a position can be obtained without a college degree, it is widely considered to be an inappropriate choice for a college graduate.

While students connect this expectation to other issues such as pay, the expectation to get a degree-requiring position is not just about pay. The students are clear in the notion that, barring particular circumstances, getting a job that does not require your degree is unacceptable. This expectation holds even if the job pays as well, or better, than degree-requiring jobs. Cameron's current situation exemplifies this. As a college student she is working in management at Lucky Brand, a clothing store. She says that it would be considered inappropriate if she continued to work there after graduation. This is even though she does "make more than a lot of people that, a lot of my friends that I know have degrees." Her mom is clear in conveying to her that this job is "just a in-between job type thing." Cameron likes this job, but knows that it would not be considered appropriate for her to continue after graduation. She says, "I love working at Lucky Brand but [some group laughter] it's not considered a *job* to my parents." She continues on, explaining that for her parents,

> It's just seems like it would be a step back and it's not, it's not something that's said, you know, verbalized, but *it's there*. And you can tell by the way that, you know, it's

prefaced in conversations, that certain things are not even options. So that would be not an option for me, because I mean, I love my job but I can tell by just the way she [her mother] says, "You know, that's something you can do while you're in school," that it's not considered something that I would do after school.

Cameron is not alone. Other students, including Shlea and Patti, would like to continue working in their college jobs after graduation. However, they recognize that this choice would not be perceived as appropriate. In a telling story, Patti shares that she had considered continuing to work in a group home for people with disabilities. Patti is a scholarship winner and her scholarship puts out a booklet each year listing the future plans of its graduates. Patti says that if she had chosen to continuing working in the group home, she would "leave like 'in progress' there [laughs], rather than put that in [the scholarship book listing]." In other words, Patti would lie about her post-college job choice. Working at the group home is not an appropriate choice because it is something she could do (and has done) without a degree.

The expectation that an appropriate post-college job requires one's degree goes further. Not only does the choice need to require one's education, it needs to also *appear* as though it requires that education. Several students discuss the stigma attached to considering jobs that other people might not realize require a degree. For example, Isabella comments on the reactions a friend got for applying for management positions with retailers. Although these positions did require a degree, people responded negatively. Isabella says that "I just think there's that stigma [Samiyah and Kennedy nod] too that you see on TV like, 'Oh if you're working at Wal-Mart or Target, like, that must mean you're uneducated or something,' which is not true. So there's also that kind of consideration." Sasha continues after Isabella saying,

> I have one of those kind of negative images in my head, like, I know a lot of the career fairs that come around to SEU, a lot of the names listed on, like, this who's coming list or whatever will be like Target or something and right away, in my head

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I'm like, "Oh no, I can't be seen [some murmurs of laughter in the group] sending a resume to them or something" but I mean a lot of people really don't think about the other side of that whole business, there's a lot more than just working at a cash register or serving burgers.

In these comments, Sasha and Isabella highlight the need for people to recognize one's job as a degree-requiring job. As they discuss, this need makes applying for positions at retailers and other companies potentially inappropriate. Since a large number of the employees who work for such companies do not have a degree, if one works for them people may assume that the person is not a college graduate.

Students not only face an expectation that their choice be seen as requiring a college degree, but also that it require the sort of degree they have earned. Many students, particularly those who have studied a specialized field, are expected to pursue the field they have studied. To make a choice that would take them outside of that field is considered inappropriate. As Anna says when asked what is appropriate, "Getting a job like within your discipline." Similarly, Patti discusses the negative reactions she receives when she mentions possible choices that do not seem to correspond with what she has been studying. She says,

I feel like that ends the conversation. If somebody's like "Oh, what are you doing next year?" and you're like "something that's unrelated to what you are studying" that ends the conversation. Or, if it's your parents then they question you for, like, a long period of time, to figure out why you said that.

In a focus group of all math and science majors, students discuss the expectation to get a position requiring one's particular degree at some length. The students are all adamant that if a person has majored in a science, he or she is expected to pursue either graduate studies or a job in the sciences. As Mark says, "we've been at this school for four years, training to do one particular thing and if we don't do it that's quite inappropriate, and it's, like, a waste of our whole college experience." Teri agrees with Mark, saying,

I actually agree with that, because, like, and this, it's so stupid that we do this, but, like, if you go into science, like, you pretty much have to go to grad. school, med. school [Adi and Mark nod], or you go directly into a job working in like your general field . . . You have to go in a job using your science, not just, like, a taking, like, there's no year off to, like, figure out what you want to do, (Adi: yeah) like, you have to go right into it [Mark nods].

Appropriate Choices Pay

In addition to the expectation that students make post-college choices that require their degree, there is an expectation that the choices should provide financial security and even wealth. This expectation results in lower paying and less secure options being considered inappropriate. While some students interchange the concepts of financial security and high pay, I will address them separately. In this section, I first address the expectation that post-college choices provide financial security. I then discuss the expectation that post-college choices be high paying.

Appropriate choices provide financial security. In the data analysis process, I coded for the students' perceptions of other people's priorities about the students' post-college choices. Of the priorities students perceive from others regarding job choice, financial security is the most frequently mentioned. For most students, the acceptability of a post-college choice is contingent on it providing financial stability. One student who talks about this expectation is Frankie. Frankie's parents have encouraged her to study biomedical engineering. In Frankie's opinion they have pushed her in this direction because it will make her "hirable in the world." Frankie says, "The parents like pushed, push a lot. I mean, they, they might, like, kind of cover it a little, with like, 'Oh, we really do care about what you really want to do.' But they basically want, well, they want me to have like a secure job."

The expectation that post-college choices should provide financial security marginalizes less secure choices. Such options include artistic endeavors, service work,

traveling, and taking time after graduation to decide what one wants to do next. Of the participants, Dirk struggles the most with this expectation. He plans to pursue fiction writing full-time after graduation. This decision has been met with much condemnation. His mother has "already been concerned about it, like she's talkin' my ear off about it." She wants Dirk to choose an option that would provide him with the financial security writing lacks.

Appropriate choices pay well. Beyond the expectation to make choices that provide financial security, some students also face an expectation that they pursue options that will pay well. This expectation is communicated implicitly and explicitly. Some students report "just knowing" that as Meghan says, "you're supposed to get a great job and make a lot of money." For other students, such expectations are explicitly stated. For example, Kristen recalls her mother repeatedly telling her "don't be a teacher you're going to be poooooor." Kristen says that her mom was joking when she made these comments, but that there was also a note of truth under the humor.

The expectation that appropriate work should be well paying results in some students being discouraged from pursuing lower-paying fields. For example, Jessica describes her decision to pursue special education (by special education Jessica is referring to human services work with adults) in the following way:

> I ended up wanting to go into special education, which is what, like, I'm tracked on to do right now. But that's completely not taken well by my parents, and I feel, like, just the education, in general, people think that it's just looked down upon and "why would you want to do that?" A lot of times I get money, like, "it's not going to pay anything and why would you want to?!"

Although Jessica is still pursuing her interest in special education despite the negative responses she has received, other students acquiesce to the expectation to have a higher paying job. For example, Jane says,

> Oh geez, I thought for a while I wanted to be, like, a substitute teacher, just to sort of get a feel for things and my dad explained to me . . . he told me exactly how much pay I would probably get per year, and he's like, "no, you know, you didn't go to college to get a job like that." He's like, "I want you to shoot for better." So then you feel like you don't want to disappoint anybody [Amaya nods], so yeah, exactly. I was just thinking about it so, it's kind of difficult.

During the focus group, Jane says she is uncertain as to what she is going to pursue. However, it is clear that she is no longer considering substitute teaching. Since substitute teaching was going to be her way of exploring a possible career in education, this short-term decision may eliminate that longer term potentiality.

Neither Jessica's nor Jane's parents have specified exactly how much they should earn. Instead, both students have been told that they should earn "more" than their desired choice would pay. However, a few students' parents have conveyed specific salary amounts they expect their children to earn. One such student is Amaya. Her father is clear that he thinks she should earn at least $40,000 per year in her first post-college job. In commenting on this she says, "I was happy with $35 [thousand dollars] but he was like, 'no, you gotta get more' therefore, [I] chose a different job."

Pay expectations and family background. While financial security and "good" pay are expectations most students experience, these expectations vary for students with different socioeconomic backgrounds. For students from less affluent backgrounds, there seems to be a strong push to immediately procure a financially stable job. For students from wealthier backgrounds, the immediate income is less important than the long term earning potential.

One example of this finding is Patti. Her family wants her to maximize her immediate earnings, but does not expect extremely high future wages. As she discusses her family's views, Patti attributes their expectations to their class background. She says they are concerned with

how much money are you going to be able to make and support yourself . . . they like both have degrees sort of, but, like, they're not from, like, really nice colleges or anything and they worked really hard in their careers, so, like, I mean, like, if I were to be a doctor or, like, lawyer that would be, like, incredible to them, but I think they're more concerned with, like, a job and . . . I think their main priority is, like, what kind of financial decision is this.

While her family would approve of Patti basing her decisions on pay and financial security, she has decided to do Teach for America for the next two years. During this time she will receive a starting teacher's salary in an under-served school district. When I ask her how her family felt about this choice, she responds, "It's a waste of time, [laughs embarrassedly] I could make a lot more money in two years doing other things."

Patti identifies her class background as influencing what is expected of her. In her case, she is expected to start earning a secure income now. However, she does not feel pushed to ever earn an enormous amount. Alternatively, some students from wealthier families experience the expectation to earn at least as much as their parents. For example Kelly says that she thinks "it's part of our culture" that she does not "want to go backwards" from her family's high standard of living. Rose also experiences the expectation to at least maintain her family's economic status. For her, though, this expectation is problematic. Rose wants a career in museum studies, where salaries are typically lower than her parents' expectations. This has caused some tension in her family because "they want me to appreciate where I am now and try to stay there as opposed to going back down to $30,000 a year or something like that [Much of this is said in halting phrases. She looks down, half smiles, and pushes hair out of her face]."

Appropriate Choices are Prestigious

As discussed above, students face the expectation that their post-college choice should require their education. It is also expected to provide financial security and, in many

cases, high pay. Intertwined with these expectations are expectations about status and

prestige. Often the choices that are considered less appropriate for status reasons are also

those that do not pay as well or require a degree. Therefore, it could be argued that the

expectations related to status are really aspects of the expectations related to education and

pay. However, the students are clear in articulating that expectations related to prestige,

status, and social approval are connected to, but not subsumed by, these other expectations.

The importance of status can be heard in the language used by students to describe

certain choices. Examples include Brian, who says that his seeking "casual employment"

such as tending bar would be "completely absurd." Reese describes the Peace Corps as

"having a certain stigma." Further evidence that status-related expectations are separate from

financial security/pay expectations is seen in some of the low-paying but high-status

occupational choices noted by students. As Becca says,

> I think if people consider your profession honorable, like if you're a teacher, you
> don't get paid a lot but most people are like, "wow, that's really admirable that you do
> that" and so, they think higher of you or, like, if you're a pastor. You do something
> in those fields where you work with people, you try and make a difference in people's
> lives, then, then people respect it more. They might be like, "well I would never do
> that, because" but then they think that you have an ok thing as opposed to you being,
> like, a bus driver or doing, like, a service industry job [Shlea nods]. People, like, I
> don't feel like they respect it.

In Becca's statement and similar ones from other students, it is clear that status expectations

are separate from expectations related to pay.

In general the occupations that are considered of acceptable status level, such as those

mentioned by Becca, require a college degree. However, the students discuss status as

separate from educational attainment as well. There is extended conversation related to this

from one focus group. The discussion is about how people would respond if the students

chose to pursue a career as a landscaper. I ask them to assume that this job paid enough that

they would be comfortable and that they enjoyed it. Meghan responds that her "parents

would be absolutely devastated [eyes wide, shaking head no]." She continues saying,

> At the same time, I know my parents want me to be happy and like, the same with anyone, I mean, if landscaping is really what you're passionate about, and you really want to do it, it makes you happy, I mean, go ahead and do it, but I still think just society in general would just kind of look down upon that [Anna and Rose nod]. Maybe if you had your own business it could be a different story, but if you were just working, like as a landscaper, I don't know [voice fades off].

Charlie picks up this comment and echoes it saying,

> Going off of, um, what she was saying, I think that if you had started your own business and you're really good at it, you're one of those famous landscapers everyone wants, they would love that. But, if you're, you know, you know, you know, jumping on a truck every [Meghan laughs loudly and smiles; Jessica laughs and smiles] day and going to do a task, I don't think they would look at that as much.

According to this conversation, landscaping would be considered an inappropriate choice

unless somehow the landscaping position attained a level of status or prestige. This

conversation highlights the importance of status in considering the acceptability of a post-

college choice. While high-status jobs may often also be well-paid and require a degree,

status operates as a separate source of expectation.

While none of the students I spoke with want to be landscapers, a few are considering

options that are not as prestigious as what is expected of them. These include Jessica who

wants to work in special education, Amaya who wants to work for a small black-owned

business, and Reysanne who wants to go to law school at the University of California at

Berkeley instead of Harvard. In each of these cases, the students have received disapproval

from family members and others. This disapproval is based on the student desiring what is

considered to be a less prestigious option than they might have otherwise pursued.

Students often frame prestige-related comments in terms of their family members'

desire to "name drop." A number of students mention that they feel it is important to make

post-college choices that their parents and grandparents can share with pride at social gatherings. The students more often mention a concern with how a choice would reflect on their parents and grandparents than they do how it would reflect on themselves. In considering a non-traditional post-college choice, Amelia explains,

> I think it would only work for me if I could pass it off on something that sounds good (female: yeah). Yeah, they be straight with that, but, like, it would have to be brag . . . bragging rights. Like, it is all about that, like my grandparents need to have something to say because, because, "Lucy's granddaughter just graduated from Yale, summa cum laude, and now she's working in, you know, Great Britain and" But, it's like it has to be fantastic [Cameron nods] so if I'm supporting myself, that's great, that's kind of expected and then, but it has to sounds really, like, lucrative.

It is important to note in Amelia's statement that the important factor is not that the choice *be* really lucrative, but that it *sound* really lucrative. Similar to Amelia's need for her grandparents to have "bragging rights," Sophia feels a need to give her mother something to brag about. She talks about this saying,

> My mother definitely puts a lot of stock in being able to tell her friends, "well, you know, my older daughter is in medical school, and, you know, my younger daughter is [long pause] floundering for a way to change the world." I mean, but she says it so it sounds like I'm actually doing something [mild group laughter] so, uh, like, I mean, I need to actually do something so that she can continue bragging because she likes that a lot.

Similarly, Charlie says her parents want to be able "to gloat to their friends" about her prestigious job. In each of these cases, students articulate an expectation that their post-college choices need to reflect well on their family members.

In considering status-related expectations, it is relevant to acknowledge that what counts as prestige-appropriate choices varies across families and contexts. For some students, prestige is closely tied to money. For others, educational attainment equals prestige. For some, prestige is based on a comparison to parents. For these students there is

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the expectation that the students will do something that is at least as prestigious as their parents, if not more so. Seun articulates this saying,

> Yeah, also if I do anything else besides, like, going to graduate school, or medical school, or some, like, you know, just get a job right now might be disappointing my parents cuz I feel like, you know, my dad has a masters degree and I think my mom has a higher degree too, so I have to do just that or above that. They kind of expect that of me.

While Seun has to do as well as his parents, Charlie is expected to do better. She says,

> I think they'd be disappointed if I didn't strive for something higher than what they've already achieved. Like my dad did not achieve CEO . . . so just, he wants me, he-he even sent me a magazine with women entrepreneurs who are, like, women CEO's, top 25 or whatever (um hmm). And said, "we'll see you there in 15-10, 15 years." You know, you know, so obviously he's uh-pushing me, like, um . . . I think because he hasn't-didn't become one.

As is evident in these statements, the prestige-related expectations for Seun and Charlie involve meeting or exceeding their parents' achievements. To do less would be inappropriate.

In other families, appropriate prestige can be attained through competition. In these cases, a post-college choice is considered of reasonable status because it involves a stringent selection process. For example, Patti's decision to do Teach for America is more acceptable than other service-related choices because it involves a competitive selection process. She says,

> But, like, this [Teach for America] is something that they can accept because at least like I had to compete for it. Like, [Seun nods; Reysanne laughs] if I hadn't, like, had to compete for it, they wouldn't really feel as good about it. But because, like, I proved, like, *something,* then they see it like, at least, that, you know, I'm still, it's something that they can still . . . and, like, a girl down the street didn't get it, and so that made it, like, a lot better for me. [Reysanne and Seun laugh heartily] . . . I know it's really horrible, but this is just the way my parents feel.

Patti does not agree with her parents' views of appropriate post-college choices. However, she recognizes the role prestige plays in their opinion of what is appropriate for her.

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Appropriate Choices are Career-Focused

Students report that appropriate post-college choices are career-oriented and fit into an upward progression. Most of the choices that meet this standard would also meet the previous expectations of requiring one's degree, earning sufficient income, and being prestige-appropriate. However, the students articulate the career-oriented expectation as separate. For example, when I ask Jane about taking a job that she liked, would be good at, would feel fulfilled by, and which paid fine, she adds a caveat:

> I guess, yeah, if there's a chance for, like, the upward mobility, if that can get you somewhere or, like, yeah, the whole end goal thing. But, I mean to just do something just to something or even just because you enjoy it, I don't think that's, you know, a good enough reason for a lot of people [Elaine nods] or when they have to present the argument to other people.

As Jane expresses, there is an expectation that a student's next choice should lead them towards something. If a choice does not connect to future plans, it is considered inappropriate. Reese discusses this in the following conversation about why the Peace Corps would be considered inappropriate for her.

> Reese: It would be inappropriate because, it's, I don't know, it's, I don't see it as useful personally for my career plans. I mean while I'm in college it would make sense, it'd be fine, a summer doing this, that, or the other, but a year or two devoted to that, I don't think so.
>
> Teresa: Because it wouldn't lead towards the plan you have?
>
> Reese: Yes [very firmly].

Miles echoes this idea saying that appropriate choices would be "stuff that relates to your career path." For most students, the expectation that they should make post-college choices that advance their careers is not new. Some have felt this expectation for many years. They have been expected to select colleges, majors, and summer work based on career-related goals.

Although students may have encountered this expectation for years, for some it is particularly salient upon graduation. One reason for this is that several participants are in serious romantic relationships. They are deciding between moving to enhance their career opportunities and restricting themselves to a particular location that would be better for their partners. In each of these cases, when the student has chosen to prioritize the relationship over career advancement opportunities, that choice has been met with disapproval. For example Joan, a graphic design student, says,

> From their [her parents'] perspective, you know, me staying here when the design market, you know, isn't that great here, just because I prefer not to do a long distance relationship, you know, that's something that would not be ok with them.

Shlea, who has decided to stay in the local area for another year while her boyfriend finishes college, also feels as though she has failed to meet an expectation. She says, "they kind of look down on you, 'oh, you know, this is the kind of girl that's gonna make a decision because of a man' you know and stuff like that." For both Joan and Shlea, the expectation that they should prioritize their career over their relationship is clear.

An Appropriate Choice is One in which You Can Excel

The final standard for an appropriate choice is an expectation about excellence. Time and time again, students say that it does not matter so much what they do, they just need to do it well. Patrick voices this expectation saying,

> I think my parents don't really care necessarily what field I'm in as much as that I'm sort of, like, on track to being, like, possibly one of the preeminent people in that field, you know, like, they're not expecting me to be, like, the Stephen Hawking or whatever, but they're expecting me to, like, by the time I'm 60 or 70, [have] done the right things that get me to, like, a really high level.

Patrick says that it was this expectation to excel that prompted his parents to encourage him

to pursue a career in medicine versus his desired field of international diplomacy. In

explaining his parents' rationale, he says,

> More than anything they thought that in diplomacy or whatever it'd be a really tough
> going for me (sure). Which, which I mean, they're right in that sense. Um, and so
> they thought that if I were to be a *doctor* then I could, you know, go to med. school,
> and it-it's really easy to wrap your brain around that. I'd go to med school, have a
> really cushy doctor job (um hmm) make hundreds of thousands and, you know, end
> up in the, like, board of the American Medical Association (sure) or something like
> that and, like, whoop de do.

Patrick's parents' desire for him to be a doctor was mentioned in the earlier discussion of

expectations to pursue specific choices. Here Patrick explains his perception of the

underlying rationale for his parents' desire. While money is mentioned, he emphasizes his

parents' expectation for him to excel at whatever he would pursue. They pushed medicine

over diplomacy because they thought that in medicine the chances of achieving excellence

were greater. In Patrick's case this expectation was directly stated. Patrick explains,

> I think they're pretty, they're pretty, they're pretty direct about it (um hmm). I mean,
> they're pretty direct about "you can choose what you want to do, but we expect
> nothing less than the best out of you."

However, for other students the expectation of excellence has been conveyed implicitly. For

example, in talking about his father, Emran says, "And so I guess that was his philosophy. It

doesn't matter what I chose (um hmm), as long as I was, you know, as long as I excelled at

it." Similarly Reysanne says she feels that for her parents, "It's like whatever career I do,

they want me to *be the best* at it." Even though their parents may not directly state the

expectation, Emran and Reysanne understand that excellence is expected.

The expectation to excel in the future is not limited to career-related expectations.

Instead, some students articulate a more generalized expectation that their whole life will be

"successful." I ask Jacob what he means when he says "people expect me to be successful."
He replies,

> People expect me to be a practicing lawyer. People expect me to run and win for
> public office. People expect me to, um, have a nice house. People expect me to have
> a trophy wife. People expect me to have this nice little family, with picket fence and
> possibly the coach of a-a-a little league football team-or baseball team. I don't know.
> Um, people just kind of expect me to kind of live like *The Cosby Show*, you know,
> just kind of, you know, the a, the, the, the-uh American Dream, I guess.

Amaya echoes a similar image when I ask her what people expect her do to in her future:

> Amaya: To own, like, a company, and make billions of dollars, and have a mansion,
> and have the perfect life [laughs slightly].
>
> Teresa: What would the perfect life look like?
>
> Amaya: I don't know, um, big house, some kids, husband, CEO of a company, that
> kind of thing.
>
> Connected to the expectation that students should excel is the imperative that students

should "do their best." As Sophia says,

> The people that I care about would think that what's appropriate for me is doing the
> best I can do and I guess I don't know yet what that is. I want to think that it's
> something really good (sure) and I guess, I guess the, my parents, also want to think
> that it's something really good.

For the most part, the students in this project have performed well academically in high

school and college. For them, the expectation to do one's best equates to an expectation of

high performance. This connection is seen in the comments students make. Specifically,

students explain that their past high performance has fostered an expectation of future high

performance. As Amaya says, "I think, there's a lot of expectation just cuz I've done so well

thus far. They just want to see me continue to excel." Or as Isabella states, "Cuz I-I've

always done well in school, so they always had high hopes. They were like, 'you can go to

an Ivy league, and then you should be a doctor or, like, an engineer, or a lawyer.'" Although

for Isabella the concept of "high hopes" is attached to particular outcomes, often what counts as excelling is not clearly defined. Instead a standard of "doing well" is set without specific benchmarks attached to it. For example, Amelia says that she feels like people "just want to know that you're doing something *really grand* with your life." Similarly, Charlie states, "I'm always known as that person who's gonna do big things."

The students' past performance leads to people expecting "big things" from them in the future. One aspect of their past and current performance that is repeatedly mentioned is that the students are graduating from a respected university. Among public universities, Southeastern University has a strong reputation for academics. Students report that the positive reputation of SEU increases the expectation placed on them to excel. As Emran explains, people will know he graduated from SEU and so will think "he must have re-you know, he must have this level of performance." The expectation that SEU graduates will go on to "excel" is reflected in the anxiety Rose feels in telling people that she is going to a smaller, less prestigious school for graduate studies. She says she feels like she has to work to explain "Why would I go there after I've been here?" Similarly, Shlea believes that after she graduates she will face ridicule if she continues her job as a waitress. Although she loves the position and would enjoy working in it a while longer, she says, "you go to Southeastern, you get done, and people are like, 'No, you're not supposed to be serving people anymore, they're supposed to be serving you.'" The degree from SEU adds to the expectations students face. They are supposed to excel because they always have and because they are SEU graduates. The connections between the expectation of excellence, academic performance, and attending SEU are succinctly stated by Samantha:

> Samantha: They've [parents] seen you through high school, make good grades, and get into Southeastern, and yeah, they expect a lot, your family but -

Teresa: If only you had done worse in high school [group laughter].

Samantha: Yeah, then they wouldn't expect anything.

Discourses of Waste and Use

In analyzing the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices, it is evident that students are expected to make certain types of choices. These include both specific occupational choices as well as choices that meet broader standards. The broader standards are that post-college choices should require the student's degree, provide financial security, be prestigious, and be career-focused. Additionally, students are expected to excel in whatever they choose to pursue. Underlying these expectations is a discourse of waste and use. This underlying discourse forms the rationale for the expectations. Students are expected to pursue appropriate post-college choices because to do otherwise would be to waste the resources they possess. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, the students articulate this rationale for why they are expected to make certain choices. If students do not make appropriate choices, they are seen, and in most cases see themselves, as wasting something. What they are wasting varies depending on what resources they see themselves as possessing. Possible resources that can be wasted include: intelligence, education, and opportunity.

Wasting Your Intelligence

"If you're a really smart person, why are you going to sit around and do something that, like, is not utilizing your talent to help you benefit yourself and other people."

-- Becca

As Becca states, if you are smart, you should "utilize your talent." Throughout this study, students express the belief that a person's intelligence is wasted unless it is applied in

a career or educationally focused manner. This belief is particularly resonant for students in this project because, for the most part, they have excelled academically throughout their lives. This means that they have received numerous messages about what post-college choices are appropriate for them considering their intelligence. In many cases, underlying these expectations is the idea that if one is smart and does not choose a path that requires those forms of intelligence, then that intelligence is wasted.

Elaine is a student who has repeatedly been told that she is wasting her intelligence by making particular choices. An excellent student in high school and college, Elaine is graduating with honors in biology. In the interview and focus group, she talks about how people expect her to go to graduate school. Elaine has decided that this is not what she wants to do. Instead she would like to work in a research lab. During the interview she recounts telling a fellow student of her choice: "He's like, 'you're gonna, what, you're just gonna be like a *tech* for awhile? Like, you're, no, you're writing a thesis. You're too smart to be a tech.'" For Elaine, this response is not new. She also recalls being told, "No, no, you can't be a dental hygienist, you need to be an actual dentist, because you're too smart to be a dental hygienist." In these statements, a discourse of waste is evident. If a person does not choose an occupation that is seen as requiring that person's full intellectual capacity, then his or her intelligence is considered to be wasted.

The idea that intelligence is wasted if certain choices are made is also seen in how some students view other people's choices. For example, in both the focus group and interview, Anna discusses an acquaintance who had decided to study massage therapy. His decision was surprising for Anna because she considers him to be very intelligent. She says,

"It was kind of a shock because he was very-he's a very smart guy." While Anna resists explicitly judging him, she says,

> I mean, I mean, that's great that he's doing that and he's passionate about it, but, but he was a very smart guy, not that he's not, you know, I don't want to, like, judge him for doing that, but he definitely could have been used in a more academic field.

In this statement Anna expresses the discourse of waste as it relates to intelligence. This discourse says that if people possess the intelligence required to pursue something and they do not do so, they are wasting their intelligence.

Wasting Your Education

Teresa: What if it [post-college choice] didn't require a college degree at all?

Seun: That would be messed up because, you just wasted four years of college. I think, that would be people's reaction to that.

Mark: Yeah, I wrote down a lot of things that he just said and, uh, I mean another thing is the fact that we've been at this school for four years, training to do one particular thing and if we don't do it, that's quite inappropriate, and it's, like, a waste of [someone in background agrees] our whole college experience, you know, so, like, we're all science majors and if we get a job being a waiter or something that'd be totally inappropriate for what we've been trained for.

In the above conversation, Mark and Seun express the idea that one's education is wasted if it is not required by a post-college choice. The discourse of wasting one's degree is present throughout the interviews and focus groups. According to most of the students, a college degree is wasted if it is not "used" by obtaining a job that requires it. Cameron expresses this belief saying, "I think it's anything that doesn't, like, require, like, a college degree or if you have a Masters, you can't get anything below that because if you do then what was the point of you going to college [Amelia and Carol nod]." This idea is echoed in the following statements about jobs that do not require a college degree:

> "No, you know, you didn't go to college to get a job like that." (Jane quoting her father)

"And a lot of it would be, you don't need a college degree to go do that [Anna, Jessica, and Charlie nod] so you just *wasted* a huge amount of money and time." (Miles)

You want to ask these people, "Why'd you go to college?" [said in a snide tone], you know. (Meghan)

Woven throughout these statements and others like them is an understanding of education only in terms of its use in the marketplace. Education for the sake of learning or personal growth is not present in this view.

Part of the discourse of wasting one's degree is the idea that if a degree is not "used," the money and time that were spent in earning that degree are also wasted. This perspective is heard in the following statement from Joan:

Even if it was a job that made me happy, and paid the bills, I think the way my parents see it is my sister and I are the first generation to go to college and they see it as an investment basically. So even if I found this really amazing job, like, it sort of like, would maybe seem, like, money down the tube. Like, "Oh, we paid for four years of college for you." So.

In Joan's comment it is clear that for her to not get a job that required her degree would be considered a waste of the monetary "investment" her parents have made in her. Meghan also sees the potential to waste the money her parents have spent on her tuition. For her, though, it will not be enough for her to obtain a degree-requiring job. She must also work in the field she has studied in college. She says, "Yeah, I mean, my dad's, like, pretty much said from the beginning, you know, 'Don't, don't waste my money and everything.'" When I ask her what would count as wasting the money she says, "If I didn't go into broadcasting, like, if I just did something completely different."

Adding to the notion that one's degree can be wasted is the fact that these students have a degree from a respected school. For many, the prestige of this degree is another

resource that they may potentially waste if they do not attain the appropriate post-college positions. As Emran says, "Well, I mean, to come to school like this, um, I mean it is a big school, and to not in some way be rewarded for it, it just, I don't know, it just feels like, like you just wasted all that time." So not only are students expected to attain positions that require a four year degree, but those positions also need to require a degree from a well-respected institution. Cameron says she regularly encounters this belief. She is studying education and has "come up against a lot of people that are like 'well why did you come to Southeastern?' like, you could've gone somewhere, of a, I guess, a less school to get that degree." Cameron believes that those people consider the Southeastern degree a waste if it is not needed for entrance into a chosen field.

Just as the prestige of a SEU degree is seen as being potentially wasted, so is the prestige of certain majors. This idea recurs frequently in discussions with science majors. Based on the idea that a science degree is particularly difficult to earn and therefore more prestigious, it can also be wasted. If one earns a science degree and does not seek employment or graduate work that requires it, that science degree is considered a waste. Teri has encountered this belief since she decided to pursue teaching science. She explains,

> And so I thought I would do research and then I just became, like, well I really want to do teaching. And the funny thing is when I decide I want to do teaching, people are like, "Why, like, why are you wasting-like, why did you go into science to do teaching?" Which is why they don't have like any science majors teaching because by the time you get through it, it's kind of like people think you're taking a step down to go and teach [all group members nod; male said "yeah"] like, "Why aren't you doing research? Why aren't you going to med. school? Like, surely you could have done that." You have to apologize for having any career that's outside of science [all group members nod and laugh mildly].

Although Teri will still be involved in science, since she is not following the expected track for a science major, she is viewed as wasting her degree.

Wasting Your Opportunity

Another aspect of the discourse of waste and use is the idea that students can waste

opportunities. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, students discuss how not

pursuing a possible opportunity would be considered a waste. In these cases, the students

encounter a discourse that says if one has access to a range of opportunities, that person

should take the most prestigious one. To not do so is wasteful and therefore inappropriate.

In talking about possible wasted opportunities, students focus on educational and

work opportunities. Several students discuss the struggles they have had in choosing a

graduate program. For example, June is an exercise and sports science major. She discusses

her struggles in choosing a graduate school saying,

> We face a lot from our program directors about going to *certain* grad schools.
> And that's been a big conflict with me. Because I kind of wanna get away from this
> atmosphere and go somewhere a little different, somewhere a little newer, um, with a
> younger program. To kind of start, you know, um, at something different . . . so I've
> faced a lot of conflict with that, people, staff members and professors going, "well
> you know, that's not what we pictured, you know, where we pictured you being and
> that's not, you know, it's not, you know, we want, you know, how about - have you
> thought about here, or have you thought about, I mean higher profile names, the
> Temples and the Kentucky's, and places that all have really good graduate programs"
> . . . Like you face, I face, not just from my parents, who paid for my education
> [laughs slightly], I mean from people outside who've taught, you know, taught my
> clinical hours or taught, taught my classes going, "you know, that's not, that's not
> where we want to send our students, that's not where we pictured you going" I mean,
> it kind of feels like they're being like, "well, you're wasting what I've given you"
> [Carol nods].

June feels as though her professors think she is wasting the opportunity she has to go to a

high profile graduate program. Her choice of a less prestigious program is positioned as

negative.

While June experiences the discourse of wasted opportunity in her interactions with

faculty, most students discuss family interactions. This is because for some students the

main reason they should not "waste" opportunities is because of the sacrifices family members have made. Specifically, the logic behind this view is that since people (generally parents) worked hard for the students to have the opportunity to go to college, the students have an obligation to not waste that opportunity.

In some cases it is the financial sacrifices that have been made for students that are emphasized. In such cases, that someone has paid for their education obligates the student to pursue an appropriate post-college choice. Adi explains this saying,

> I mean because like, any, any, any parent who pays, like, their kid's tuition, or whatever, especially, like, if they paid, like, a lot of money, for tuition, you know, it's, you, you gotta do something with that. You can't just, like, "oh, yeah, you know, I'm sorry, I screwed up, I'm sorry I used your money" [slurred "slacker" voice].

Students' sense of obligation to those who paid for their education is particularly reflected in the language some use to talk about this issue. Repeatedly students talk about people having "invested" in them. The students then say they need to provide a return on this investment. That return is to do "something" appropriate after college. As Cameron says,

> For me I just feel like, you know, financially I know my parents have put a lot into me . . . thank goodness they don't throw that in my face. But, I still know that it's in the back of their minds [Frankie smiles] because it would be in the back of my mind anyway. But I know they're our parents and they look at it as if, you know, that's just something that comes with being parents, but yet inside, I do know that if I wasn't doing anything, that would be the first thing that they would say like, "you know, we put, you know, we've invested so much into you."

For other students the investment they are obligated to make good on is more than just a financial one. This is particularly true for students whose parents were immigrants to America. In such cases, the students feel obligated to live up to their parents' hard work and sacrifice. Isabella talks about this saying,

> I think there's kind of obligation I feel, and also like my parents came to the United States, like, 30 years ago, so, like, they came to the United States and my dad put

himself through grad school. And, like, they didn't know very much English and, like, so there is that feeling, like, they've done so much for us and, like, gotten us to this point so far that it would be kind of, not, not lazy per se but unappreciative if we just threw it all away and did something, like, when they've worked so hard in their life. So there's that kind of, like, obligation to them because they, um, because um, for them doing so much for us that we should, like, show appreciation by, like, taking advantage of it all.

The children of immigrants are not the only students who discuss this sense of obligation. Students whose parents had not gone to college express a similar belief. This view is expressed in the following conversation:

Teresa: How, in general, would doing something that doesn't require a college degree go over for yourself, your family, friends, faculty, whoever? Community?

Becca: My parents would beat my ass [mild group laughter].

Shlea: Yeah, mine too. Cuz, my, well, they didn't really, my mom doesn't have a real college degree and my dad, like, they both joined the Air Force, like, right out of school and they, they see this as, like, they've provided me this opportunity, I need to make the best of it [Joan nods].

Amaya echoes this idea of obligation based on parental sacrifice in the following exchange:

Teresa: Um, so why is it important to do better financially than your family?

Amaya: Because I think it shows my parents that all that they did wasn't in vain.

Shlea, Amaya, and others feel a responsibility to use the opportunities their parents have provided. Their parents' sacrifices create a sense of obligation in the students to not waste what has been given to them.

Some students discuss a different type obligation not to waste their opportunity. Jacob and Amaya are both academically successful African American students. They have the opportunity to attend prestigious graduate programs and obtain high-status jobs after graduation. During the focus group they discuss the pressure they feel to maximize these opportunities. Both feel as though they need to take these opportunities because many

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members of their race have not and continue to not have the same opportunities. Jacob

describes this expectation saying,

> As a black male, I guess, I kind of feel pressure in my, my home community, and a lot of my friends aren't in school, and a lot of my friends are in and out of the criminal system, and I have friends that, you know, they're, they have kids or whatever, so I'm pretty much one of the few of my friends, that's kind of, uh I guess, making something of themselves. It's kind of like that expectation that Jacob's going to be the token, he's going to be the savior [drawn out slightly] or whatever the case. And, um, so I kind of have pressure coming from that aspect and I also feel I have pressure, um, coming from, uh, people that just didn't have the opportunity to be where I am. Like, not even those that personally made a decision not to be here, but for, um, I feel it just, I feel it, like, for all the people who, my ancestors who had, who couldn't go. Like I'm the second generation of college students, my grandfather, who couldn't go to school. For, for, you know that person who *died* because he tried to pick up a book. I feel, uh, you know, I feel as though I have some kind of responsibility for - one of my best friends died um, like, like, the week before I came to college freshman year, so I feel, like, you know, I, I feel, like, obligated to his parents, so I mean, it's the least I can do. Their son couldn't even graduate from high school, so um, like, I just feel, like, I'm pressured by just kind of, like, a lot of forces that you know, even though people aren't gonna directly say, "Jacob, Jacob, I'm looking, I'm looking up to you or whatever, something like that" I definitely feel, like, I - I owe it to those who came before me and I owe it to those whose coming- those who are coming after me [Amaya nods] my children, to, you know, you know, make their lives better.

For Jacob to not "do well" would mean not living up to his obligation to his community, his

friends, his friend's parents, his ancestors, and his future children. He has an opportunity that

many do not. He is graduating from a respected school. He has been accepted to several

respected law schools. To not pursue something that is viewed as "good" by society would

be failing to meet his obligation. This sense of obligation is not universal. Of the African

American focus group participants, Jacob and Amaya are the only ones who discuss a sense

of obligation to their racial community. I do not know if this is because as Amaya says, it

"might be taboo to talk" about or if others do not feel this same sense of obligation. I asked

questions related to race during the interviews and two other African American students

specifically said that they do not feel this same obligation. Regardless of its universality, for those students who experience it, this form of obligation seems particularly powerful.

Amaya and Jacob's particular experience of the discourse of wasting opportunities is not widespread among study participants. However, the idea that people should maximize their opportunities is prevalent. The discourse of waste and use says that if they do not do so, they have wasted that opportunity. Just as with the other discourses of wasting one's intelligence and one's degree, in this discourse, waste is positioned as a universal negative. Underlying all of these discourses of waste is the premise that certain choices are more appropriate than others. If one has the resources to pursue an appropriate choice, the person is wasteful if he or she does not do so. If a person can pursue a range of appropriate choices, then it is wasteful to not pursue one of the *most* appropriate choices possible. If not, that person may be wasting intelligence, a degree, the time and money spent earning that degree, the sacrifices others have made for the opportunity, or even as a few students were told "your life."

Conclusion

The college seniors participating in this project face a set of expectations regarding what they should do after college. While their families may tell them to do what makes them happy, that message is conditional. Students are expected to make choices that make them happy only as long as what makes them happy corresponds with what is seen as befitting a college graduate. Furthermore, students' choices need to measure up to what is expected for a graduate from Southeastern University with their major. The specific expectations students face differ based on their family backgrounds, experiences, majors, and so forth. Some students also face expectations regarding specific occupational choices, such as parental

pressure that they become doctors or do not study art. While the specific expectations

students discuss vary, there are broad standards repeatedly articulated by students. They say

that they are supposed to know what they are doing after college and that choice should

require their degree, ensure financial security, be prestigious, lead to advancement, and allow

the student to excel. For a student to deviate from these standards is to be inappropriate. In

discussing why such choices are inappropriate, students often position deviations as wasteful.

To not meet the standards is discussed as wasting one's education and opportunities.

 While the discourse of appropriate post-college choices and its connection to a

discourse of waste and use is articulated widely by the students, the students do not

universally adopt these understandings. In the next chapter, I address the ways students

respond to these discourses.

CHAPTER SIX

RESPONSES TO THE DOMINANT DISCOURSES OF APPROPRIATE POST-
COLLEGE CHOICES

Throughout their lives, the college seniors in this project have been socialized about

work and career. Through explicit and implicit messages from family, friends, teachers,

media, and other sources they have come to understand the dominant discourses of

appropriate post-college choices. These discourses construct an appropriate post-college

choice as having decided on a plan that requires one's degree, ensures financial security, is

advancement oriented, is prestigious, and allows one to excel.

In this chapter, I examine how students respond to the dominant discourses of

appropriate post-college choices. Students accept and resist the discourses of appropriate

post-college choices. They accept the dominant discourses by making discourse-aligned

choices and judging other people's choices. Similarly, they resist the dominant discourses by

making alternative choices and using resistant discourses. These processes of acceptance and

resistance do not happen in isolation from one another, but instead also occur simultaneously.

In the following sections, I address these various responses.

Accepting the Dominant Discourses

Many of the students in this project at least partly accept the dominant discourses of

appropriate post-college choices. This acceptance is seen in two ways: students making

choices based on familial and societal expectations, and students judging others who deviate

from the dominant understandings of appropriate work. In addition to discussing these two

forms of acceptance, in this section I also address the three rationales students give for making a choice based on the dominant discourses.

<p style="text-align:center">Making Discourse-Aligned Choices</p>

During a focus group, Jane says,

> Well, I, um, I don't know, it's the whole thing about what other people sort of think of you, and I think, whether you want to believe it or not, that affects, like, how you feel about your job and, and what you eventually do decide you want to do for a career.

Like Jane, many of the students in this project have made or are making career choices based on what is expected of them. In doing so, these students are accepting the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices. Acceptance of these discourses is seen most clearly when students acknowledge that their decision to either avoid or pursue an option is because of the expectations.

Avoiding What Is Inappropriate

One way the students accept the dominant discourses of appropriate work is by choosing *not* to pursue a particular option that is considered inappropriate. Examples of this include: Jane who is not going to substitute teach after graduation because her father disapproves; Carol who did not follow up on an interest in being a flight attendant after her mother disapproved; and Charlie who did not major in drama because it was not considered acceptable in her family. In each of these cases, the student discarded an option she was interested in because of the responses of others. Amelia discusses this experience saying, "if there wasn't that pressure, you know, hey, I'd get a job in India and, like, work there, you know." Amelia cites pressure from her family, particularly her grandparents. Other students discuss broader social pressures. For example, Elaine talks about her current job at a scrapbooking store. She says that after graduation, "If I could, I mean, I would love to do

that but, I just, I don't feel like it's something that I would ever be completely satisfied with, knowing that everyone was going, 'Why are you doing that?' [Amaya and Jacob nod]."

Choosing What Is Appropriate

While some students accept the dominant discourses of appropriate work by not considering inappropriate options, other students consider options simply because they are appropriate. One of the most vivid examples of this is Reysanne. She says that if her parents were not a factor she "probably would not have majored the way I have." Instead she might have majored in environmental science. Also, if she "just had the kind of parents who didn't care, there is no way in hell I would go to Harvard." As it is, Reysanne is facing a great deal of pressure from her parents to make a series of career choices based on prestige and pay. The most pressing of those choices is that her parents want her to go to Harvard Law School instead of law school at the University of California at Berkeley. Reysanne's post-law school choices also are affected by her parents' standards. She explains that if they were not a factor, "I would probably still go to law school [said slowly], but I would probably, like, upon graduation, like, do something totally, like, bizarre." When prompted to explain this she says, "Um, I, I think that I would, like, work for, like, um, I don't know, like, maybe a non-profit or just, like, some sort of law center, um, that does pro bono work." As it is, Reysanne predicts she will do corporate law.

While Reysanne's choice is specifically related to her parents' expectations for her, students also discuss decisions they made in response to societal expectations. For example, Jacob discusses the expectation that

> Like, now grad school is, is the standard . . . that's the expectation now. I added a minor because I feel as though I was the only one who didn't have one so (female: yeah) I just feel like you have pressure coming from that angle, I was pressured to

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pick up public policy as a minor and I feel as though, you know, I'm kind of pressured to go into grad. school because that's kind of like the norm now.

Similarly, when I ask a focus group how they feel expectations have shaped their behaviors,

Amaya, an African American female, responds,

> They've kind of modified mine, but not wholly. Like, I always knew I wanted to do business. But, before, like, when I first started applying for jobs, I was actually looking at smaller companies, and then even more specifically I was looking at black owned companies and then once I started telling people about them, they were like "ooooh, ok" [said weakly] and then I started throwing out like "maybe, I'll look at the Coca-Cola or maybe I'll look at Nike and, you know, these other larger more well-known companies" and they're like, "OK, yeah!" [said in a very upbeat and positive tone] and so I kept pursuing those and I guess now that's where I'll be working.

At the time of the focus group, Amaya had accepted a job with General Mills. This position fulfills the expectation of her working for a "well-known company." This position also meets her father's pay standard. Both in terms of pay and the type of company, Amaya has limited her job choices based on others' expectations for her.

Rationales for Making Discourse-Aligned Choices

In discussing discourse-aligned choices, students use three different rationales in explaining their decisions. The students frame their choices in terms of a) accepting societal expectations as standards for themselves; b) seeking to avoid disappointing others; or c) an obligation they have to society or family.

Accepting expectations as standards for one's self. In discussing the expectations others have for them, a number of students state that they have those same expectations for themselves. These students are using the dominant understandings of appropriate work as standards for their own behaviors. In most of these cases, the students talk about always knowing that certain things were expected of them such as graduating from college and getting a "good" job. As Elaine says,

Like, in my family, it was under-like, there was a never a question, we were going to college. (Sure) Like, there-there would have been a huge fit had I decided not to. But it was-it was never an issue. It was like, "Well, I get good grades, I'm going to go to college and then I'm going to get some fabulous job and be able to support myself."

Similarly, Amaya states,

Always knew I was gonna do well. That's what, I mean, that's how my mom always talked. It's just, "You know, Amaya, you're always going to do well, you're going to do fine." Just as generic as that, and, I think it's cuz it was my mom . . . it wasn't ever hard pressure on things (right) I didn't feel bad about it (yeah). And plus, I wanted to do it for myself (sure). I think, of course, everybody wants to go to the good school, get good grades.

In this statement, Amaya not only accepts her family's expectations as her own, but she also generalizes that these expectations are universal. For Elaine, Amaya, and others, a reason they make discourse-appropriate choices is because they have adopted the dominant expectations as standards for their own behaviors.

Accepting expectations to avoid disappointing others. Students also discuss making conventional choices out of a desire not to disappoint others. Repeatedly, students say that they do not want to disappoint others by making an inappropriate choice and so they are going to choose something more appropriate. For example, Jane says about her father's negative reaction to her interest in substitute teaching: "He's like, 'I want you to shoot for better.' So then you feel, like you don't want to disappoint anybody [Amaya nods], so yeah, exactly. I was just thinking about it so, it's kind of difficult." In this case and others like it, the students' acceptance of the dominant understandings of appropriate post-college choices is mediated through a desire to not disappoint other people, particularly family members. This same process is seen in Kelly's statement:

You just don't want to disappoint them kind of thing. Like, they wouldn't hate me or turn on me or anything like that if I decided, you know, I wanted to travel the world, but they'd be like, "Ok, well, you do it and then let us know," you know, kind

of thing, like, "Is that what you really want to do?" Cuz, you know, my parents, my dad's put me through school and, like, everything so, I just think, I mean, they wouldn't hate me, but it would be, like, for me, I just think, he'd be disappointed and then I'd be disappointed [Sophia nods] in myself for disappointing him kind of thing, so.

Jane and Kelly both say they made appropriate post-colleges choices partially out of a desire to not disappoint their families. Students also express concern about disappointing people outside their families. For example, June discusses her fear of disappointing her faculty mentors if she turns down a prestigious graduate program. She says,

So, so that's hard, I think, so I mean, because you feel like you're disappointing people and I think that, that's really hard for me because that's like the worst thing somebody can say to me, is that, you know, that disappoints me. And that's what it feels like.

Whether it is faculty or family who might be disappointed, one of the main rationales students give for considering or choosing discourse-appropriate options is a fear of disappointing others.

Accepting expectations because of an obligation to others. A third rationale students use in discussing their discourse-consistent choices is obligation. Using this rationale, students frame their discourse-aligned choices as fulfilling an obligation to others. In these cases, the students articulate a sense of duty to their families and communities. To meet this obligation they must make certain choices in their futures. If they do not, they have not just disappointed others as discussed in the rationale above. Instead, they have failed to live up to their responsibilities.

Most frequently the obligation is based on finances. In several cases, students feel obligated to make an appropriate choice because their parents paid for their college education. As Kelly says in the statement quoted above, "my dad's put me through school and, like, everything so." For Kelly and others, familial financial contributions mean that

students have a responsibility to go along with family expectations. As Collette explains about her parents' having paid for college,

> It plays into this guilt and it plays into maybe now I kind of *owe* them. Don't I kind of owe them to kind of listen to some of the things they want me to do in my life, right? (Why?) They invested this much in me.

It is not just family financial contributions that add to the sense of obligation some students feel. As discussed in the previous chapter's section on the discourse of waste and use, students of parents who have sacrificed a great deal to provide their children with a range of opportunities often feel an obligation to take advantage of those opportunities. Typically making use of those opportunities means making an appropriate post-college choice. All the students who discuss this obligation also accept it.

Primarily, students express feeling obligation to their families. However, a few students also discuss an obligation to people other than family members. The two students who most strongly articulate a larger sense of obligation are Amaya and Jacob. African American students who have performed well in college, both Amaya and Jacob discuss an obligation to their race. To meet this obligation they must take advantage of the opportunities they have. This means they need to make career choices that are aligned with the dominant understandings of appropriate work. Amaya explains this expectation in the following conversation:

> Amaya: My influences - I know I keep saying parents and and stuff like that, but the other thing is, and it might be taboo to talk about, is like, because I'm a black female and I have been so successful in school, it's like I get pressure from, like, everywhere. Like, I have to go out and represent my race or black females in general in the business world. And that's why, like, when I say I have to go work at a big company, or I'm expected to, that's why. Like, I'm supposed to be that face that, you know, that black face in the sea of white corporate America that's really standing up and being successful, like, and I can't just go work in the company, like, being a secretary. Like, I have to *raise up* [said very strongly], and, like, if not become president, and, like, just represent really.

Christine: How does that make you feel?

Amaya: It's a lot of pressure [there is mild group laughter; Amaya has a bright and fast tone to her voice as she speaks] like, it drives me crazy because people still do it here, even before I was talking about going to grad. school or going into the business world, people were like, "Amaya, you know, Amaya's that one with, like, the 3.9 g.p.a., you know, she's so tight." And everybody would always throw . . . it's like, Amaya always has to be up there. Like, if I, if, I don't know, it's just, it's just a lot of pressure, because, I just want to be *me* and you know, but, it's like, no, Amaya, the black female that's really smart. Amaya, the black female that has the high g.p.a. Amaya, the black female that's gonna run a company some day or something.

Teresa: And how - what happens if you don't? If you say, "I did this for five years and you know what, it's not me?"

Amaya: I can't even think about that [said a little slower than before]. It's scary. It really is [Shana nods].

Teresa: For you-for your own identity, or for how you feel like it would come off to other people or both?

Amaya: Both.

In the discussion above, Amaya articulates a strong sense of obligation to her race.

Elsewhere in the focus group, she states that her post-college work preference would be to

work for a small black-owned business. She also humorously, but with a tone of longing,

describes how wonderful it would be to work at a miniature golf arcade. However, these

choices would not meet her obligation to excel in the business world. If she pursued one of

these alternatives, she would be wasting her opportunity and letting others down. While

Amaya struggles with the pressure involved in living up to the obligations she feels, she also

accepts them as her responsibility. Furthermore, she places the same standard onto others.

In the interview, she expresses her frustration with other young African Americans with

potential who do not work hard to achieve career success.

Judging Others

In addition to making choices because of expectations, students also demonstrate that they accept the dominant discourses of appropriate work by using them as a standard for judging others. Participants most commonly discuss judging others for violating two standards for appropriate post-college choices. The first of these is that students should have a plan for what they are going to do after college. Several participants negatively judge people they know who are undecided about their future plans. Participants are particularly negative about students who do not seem to be putting a lot of effort into securing their next option. This sentiment is seen in Isabella's statement:

> I see people who, it's like we're about to graduate in a month and they have no idea what they want to do. I'm sort of like, I don't know, like, "you have been given so much and you are here and have this education, and you haven't even looked at jobs yet [said with mild distain]?"

It is not just acquaintances who are negatively judged for not making "appropriate" choices. Participants also judge friends and family whose choices do not meet the dominant standards. For example, Jose judges friends who do not know what they are going to do after graduate saying,

> I have a lot of friends like that. It's, I don't understand it. I mean, I just, I, I, it just doesn't make sense for me. I've always had a plan of something I want to do, you know, a goal, you know, I really want to do this, I wanna be happy doing this and, like, for somebody to, like, not know, like, my, my uh, my ex-girlfriend was literally the same way. She's a senior now and she, you know, she's graduating, actually I think she's going to graduate sometime next semester, so if she has no idea what she wants to do, it's just - kind of blows my mind. How could you not have, like, direction? I don't know. It's just a really alien concept to me, I don't know.

Along with judging others for not having a plan, some participants judge the particular choices of others. Specifically, some participants negatively judge choices that do not require a person's education or will not promote advancement. For example, Jacob says,

Even myself, I don't see how people do it at college, just like, "Yeah, I'm a so and so major but I'm gonna be a manager of this company." Or something like, I have a friend who I think he was a sociology major, he ended up being, like, a manager of a grocery store chain . . . Even myself, I'm like, "Ok" [said in negative tone] you know, "Why'd you go to college for that? Why'd you go to college to be a personal trainer? You know?"

Jacob's statement indicates an acceptance of the discourse that appropriate choices require one's degree. It also reflects an understanding of education as something that can be wasted if it is not used through workplace requirements. Similarly Meghan says, "You want to ask these people, 'Why'd you go to college?' [said in a snide tone]." When she says this, another focus group member, Miles, nods and say, "yeah."

In addition to judging students negatively for making choices that do not require their degrees, some participants criticize people who make choices that are not explicitly connected to future employment or advancement. For example, Patrick discusses his two housemates, who are both joining the Peace Corps. He says,

For one of them it really makes sense. For one of them, she's always worked with special ed. kids and they have a bunch of camps in Jordan run through Peace Corps that are for special ed., (um hmm) special needs kids. So that makes sense. The other one, I sort of thought would end up, like, sort of doing what I'm doing. Um, working in DC or something like that . . . but I always wonder, like, what he's gonna get out of it. Afterwards, like, he'll be able to speak Russian very well . . . so that'll be good, and I guess he'll have a general idea of, like, the Eastern (um hmm) European countries, um, and I don't know, so he kind of surprised me.

Patrick is surprised because his housemate's choice does not seem to "make sense." He attempts to understand what career skills his friend will "get out of it." This indicates Patrick's acceptance of the idea that appropriate career choices allow one to develop qualities that promote career advancement.

Similarly, Amaya judges her sister's consideration of an option that is not career advancement-oriented. Her sister is considering teaching English in Honduras for a year.

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Amaya disapproves of this choice and has worked to convince her sister not to pursue it. In discussing this, Amaya says, "I just, I didn't see where it was going for her. I-we all have expectations for each others' futures and I didn't know how that was gonna benefit her." Amaya goes on to say that she told her sister, "Anya, you can't take this job . . . It's not good. I don't know why you're even looking at it." Amaya's acceptance of the discourse that appropriate choices lead to career advancement is complete enough that she expresses no doubts about judging and confronting her sister. Instead, she frames her expectations as a normal part of family life. She sees herself as trying to help her sister.

Resisting the Dominant Discourses

Most of the students involved in this project accept many of the dominant understandings of appropriate post-college work. They make choices that fit the dominant discourse and judge others for not doing so. However, many students also resist some or all of the expectations. In this section, I discuss the resistant choices students make. Then, I explain the alternative discourses students use in explaining their resistant choices.

Making Resistant Choices

A few students are resisting the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices in clear and dramatic ways. For example, Dirk is planning to pursue writing fulltime—a career which lacks financial security. Similarly, Jim is going to go to Colorado and work in construction until he saves up enough money to travel. Of the options students discuss, these two come the closest to rejecting mainstream understandings of work. Dirk's writing does not come with a paycheck nor has he ever earned money through his writings. His positioning of fiction writing as a "job" would be contradicted by many. Similarly, Jim's indefinite plan to stagger income generation with travel violates mainstream approaches to

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career. Therefore, Dirk's and Jim's choices resist not only the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices, but also broader understandings of work and career. Their choices would be considered resistant for non-college graduates as well.

Most of the students who are making resistant post-college choices are not as divergent from the mainstream as Dirk and Jim. Instead, other students are making resistant choices that often are considered more acceptable. Such choices do not call into question conventional notions of work and career. However, they do violate some of the standards for appropriate post-college choices. Examples of such choices include: Elaine who is not continuing on with graduate school even though she is an honors student; Tim who is pursuing a career in the non-profit sector instead of becoming a scientist; Patti who is doing Teach for America instead of earning more money doing something else; and Jessica who is going into human services work instead of audiology, even though the pay is lower. While these students' choices are not dramatically resistant, each understands his or her choice as somewhat resistant to dominant notions of appropriate post-college choices.

A third group of students who express resistance are those making choices that oppose their parents' wishes. In these cases, the students' choices are aligned with societal understandings of appropriate post-college choices but violate familial conceptions. Examples of this include Ella and Patrick who are not becoming doctors but instead are pursuing marine biology and international relations respectively. Similarly, Reysanne is (most likely) attending Berkeley Law School instead of her parents' much preferred Harvard. While these choices meet mainstream societal expectations for appropriate choices, the students still frame them as resistant choices because they do not correspond to their family's wishes.

Discursive Strategies of Resistance

Regardless of the extent to which outsiders might or might not recognize a choice as resistant, the students discuss it as such. In talking about these choices, the students use several alternative discourses to counter the dominant societal or familial discourses of appropriate work. Some students simply refuse to pursue a more appropriate option by saying "NO!" as Isabella did in the following statement:

> They [her parents] were like, "you can go to an Ivy League, and then you should be a doctor or like an engineer, or a lawyer." They're like, "maybe one of you guys can be a doctor and one of you guys can be a lawyer and then like we'll have it all in the family so then, like, whenever we have problems, we come to you girls." Because I have two sisters, and we're kind of like, "yeah, no."

For Isabella just saying no was enough. However, other students use more complicated discursive strategies to resist the expectations that are placed on them.

These discursive strategies consist of alternative discourses the students articulate to explain their resistant choices. The alternative discourses include a discourse of differing priorities, a discourse of individuality, and a discourse of confidence.

Resisting through a Discourse of Differing Priorities

One alternative discourse students use to resist dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices is a discourse of differing priorities. In using this alternative discourse, the students position an alternative choice as appropriate because their personal priorities are different. Therefore, the standards for appropriate choices are also different. The two primary alternate priorities that students articulate are service to others and happiness. In both cases, they assert that the alternate priority is more important than wealth. This viewpoint forms the basis for making and justifying resistant post-college choices.

Service as a top priority. Several of the students articulate service to others as one of their top priorities. As Jamie says, "I really wanted to do something that would kind of have an impact, um, help other people." Similarly, Sophia states her desire to "find a place where I, where I'll-I'll be able to give something rather than just keep taking." For students such as Jamie and Sophia, their prioritization of service plays a key role in their career decision making. Jamie is joining Teach for America. Sophia is uncertain of her future plans but emphasizes the following:

> It sounds so cheesy, but, like, I just really want to do something that makes a lasting contribution, I just feel like I have to figure out exactly what it is that I'm capable of that's going to contribute and then how do I do that.

In articulating the priority of service, students resist the dominant discourses emphasis on career-advancement and pay. This is evident in Patrick's discussion of his future. He says,

> I, I feel like I have an obligation not to just live life and enjoy it and make a lot of money, but to do something that's helping others because if I make an extra $30,000 but I'm not really doing anything that directly helps others then I'm not creating that much good in the world. So I have that, I have that sort of, like, idealistic drive behind what I'm doing.

In this statement, Patrick positions serving others as more important than earning more money.

For the students cited here and others including Jacob, Tim, and Jessica, service is a top priority. Their commitment to service provides them with a discourse they use in resisting dominant constructions of appropriate post-college choices.

Happiness as a top priority. While several students prioritize service, even more students assert happiness as a top priority. As Amber says, "really I just want to be happy, I want to have someone to share my life with and I want to have kids who are happy too."

Similarly, Elaine states her priority of happiness saying, "I've worked too hard to not be happy with what I'm doing and I know I wouldn't be happy pursuing a Ph.D."

These statements about prioritizing happiness are not just flippant comments the students are making. The prioritization of happiness is often at the basis of students' explanations for their alternative choices. This is particularly true when their choice is not the choice others would expect from them. Charlie expresses this, saying:

> Biggest fear. Just not being happy. With what I do. That's why I didn't do financial services even though my dad *really* pushed me to do. The guy had people *talk* to me. (Why'd he want you do it?) Cuz it's so prestigious. "That's banking! You know, that's where the money's at" and all this stuff. Bores me to death. I'm really good at it, but it bores me to death. (um hmm) Um, (Did he come around or did you just say, "No, I'm not.") No. He-he would write to me saying, and explaining and get frustrated with me when I didn't want to. And that's when I had to start, you know, yelling back, "Why don't you do it!" (um hmm) "I don't want to do it, why don't you do it?!"

In this statement it is clear that it is a struggle for Charlie to prioritize personal happiness over pleasing her father and gaining prestige and wealth. Yet she continues to make happiness her priority.

As Charlie's statement indicates, the discourse that happiness is a top priority is often connected to the idea that money is not a top priority. Jessica succinctly states this saying, "I don't see the money as the most important thing." Rose echoes this idea, saying, "I wouldn't feel bad with not having money *because* I don't value my life based on the money I make (um hmm) and if that's their value system, then I feel sorry for them, but I'm not gonna get caught up in that kind of comparison." Similarly, Jamie asserts, "it's not really a concern of mine, making money or getting high status."

In discussions of money not being the top priority, typically students assert that money does not equal happiness and they are more concerned with being happy than being

wealthy. The discourse prioritizing happiness over money is heard in each of the following

statements:

> And the main thing, I guess, is just, like, having a family, enjoying life, and, and part of enjoying life is family, it's enjoying what you do**.** I don't necessarily have to be filthy rich to enjoy life, I can be making just enough and if I'm doing something that makes me want to go to work everyday, (um hmm) then I'd be, I'd be really happy about that, cuz I know that the chances of being 50 and loving what you do (yeah) and going to work everyday are-are slim from what I've heard. (Patrick)

> You don't need to earn 100,000 dollars a year to be happy. People are earning 25,000 dollars a year and being *very* happy. (Tim)

> I don't *need* money to be happy. I don't want a big house. (Rose)

> I'm just worried about getting stuck with something I don't enjoy. I mean, I don't really think too much about what my parents will judge it on, because I've seen people that are in jobs, you know, that maybe pay a lot but, I mean, they come home and they're just like, "Thank God" [Anna nods] you know just, that's the last thing I want, because I mean, that's your life for the next 30 years or so, so I mean. (Miles)

In considering the students' prioritization of happiness over money, it is important to note

that they are still nearly always prioritizing a measure of financial security. This is seen in

Anna's statement:

> I would rather be happy than the big bucks [Rose nods]. I mean, yes, that would be nice, and I definitely want to be comfortable, but I think, I mean, I don't, I don't need like material stuff. So it's really, that isn't so much a motivator for me.

Anna states that money is not "so much a motivator." However, she also wants "to be

comfortable." Like Anna, most of the students who articulate the discourse of prioritizing

happiness over money seem to assume that it will be feasible for them to have both happiness

and financial security. It is not that finances are not a priority for the students. However,

they are not the top or only priority.

Resisting through a Discourse of Individuality

Implicit in the discourse of differing priorities is an emphasis on the student as an independent person who can make his or her own choices. Aside from statements about individual priorities, students articulate a discourse of individuality more broadly. In using this discourse, students assert that their own choices and values are more important than those of their family or the larger society. As Dirk says, "I just gotta be me." Throughout the statements using the discourse of individuality, students claim their own agency in making decisions for their lives. The discourse of individuality is heard in the following statements:

> It's like *my life*, it's my time, so, leave me alone. Lead your own life. Stay out of mine [laughs slightly]. (Shlea)

> I'm not your puppet, you know. (Jacob)

> I definitely feel like my life is my own and (um hmm) if anybody's getting screwed over by a bad decision, it's myself. So I'm gonna do it for myself and not for anybody else. (Patrick)

> I've-I've just learned to do what's good for me. And a lot of that's just came in the last 10 months. I think, as, basically as graduation ahead of me and I realized what I want to do and know where I am and what's good for me, what's gonna make me happy in the future. (Jim)

In each of the above statements, the students use a discourse of individuality to assert why they do not need to follow the dominant constructions of appropriate work and career. In doing this, the students claim that since they are the only ones who can know what is best for themselves, the decision of what they should do next is best made by them. The discourse of individuality is not always an easy one for students to assert. For some students, asserting their individuality requires them to disregard their parents' wishes. As Collette says, "it's not about pleasing them it's about pleasing myself and I believe in what I'm doing."

Resisting through a Discourse of Confidence

A third discursive strategy students use while resisting the dominant understandings of appropriate work is asserting that they are confident. The confidence students articulate is directed toward and comes from different places. Students express confidence in their own plans and abilities as well as in their faith. Each of these forms of confidence aids students in resisting the dominant discourses of appropriate work.

Confidence in plans and abilities. The first form of confidence students express is in their plans. Students express confidence that they have a plan; that they do know what they are doing even if outsiders do not agree. Collette discusses this saying, "I think sometimes people misinterpret and maybe for my family especially, because they think I'm following my dreams that means I don't have a plan, I do have a plan [said very emphatically]." Similarly, Jim states, "I think a lot of people are, some people might say that, 'oh, well, he's kind of floating. He doesn't know what he wants to do.' But, I mean, I really do know what I want to do. I know *exactly* what I want to do."

While students like Collette and Jim express confidence that they have a plan, other students focus on the confidence they have that their plan is the best choice for them. For example, in explaining his switch from a potential career in the sciences to one in the non-profit sector, Tim says, "I can say, like, there's *no way* that this is not the best option for me." In this statement, Tim uses a discourse of confidence to resist the idea that he should be doing something other than pursuing his non-profit career option.

Students also resist the dominant discourses of appropriate work by expressing confidence in their abilities to enact their plan. In using this discourse of confidence, students assert that they have unique abilities, skills, or training that the average person does

not. Therefore, they will be able to succeed in an alternative choice that many people would consider too risky to be practical. As someone who wants to pursue a career as a science fiction writer, Dirk faces a lot of criticism. People often tell him that his chances of succeeding are slim and so he should pursue something more practical. In response to these claims, Dirk says, "I'm like, well you haven't even read what I wrote so (Collette: yeah) you how would you know how good I am, you know." Dirk's confidence in his abilities is a central discursive resource he uses in defending his choice.

Confidence in God. For some students, confidence in their plan comes from their religious faith. Several say that they are confident that they are following God's desires for their future. This confidence allows them to worry less about what others think of their choices. As Jamie says,

> The bible also says, um, that you should live to please an audience of one, and one is God. Um, so I don't really need other people to validate my, what I'm doing. I prayed about it, I think that this is what God wants me to do, so, what's the rest matter.

Faith in God also gives some students the confidence to pursue less stable post-college choices than they otherwise might. For example, Meghan is applying for television broadcasting positions. This is a very competitive process. She says,

> A lot of people in my situation are really stressed out right now, um, we're all in the same boat, you know, we're all going in this business which is incredibly competitive, but I-I've felt called to journalism since I was in elementary school. I love it. It's just, um, and then, after, you know, building my relationship with God and really having a strong foundation with him, I just, I know that what he says, he's going to take care of me. His plan has been in place for years and I just don't need to worry about it, and if I can stay focused on him and give him my whole heart then he's going to take care of it.

Similarly, Dirk says that his faith is a key reason he feels confident pursuing full-time writing even though many people have advised him against it. He explains, "I have that faith that I'm

gonna be fine, you know." It is this faith that helps Dirk resist the dominant understandings that he should pursue something that would provide him with financial security.

<div align="center">Simultaneously Accepting and Resisting Dominant Discourses</div>

As students interact with discourses of appropriate post-college choices, they do not simply accept or resist the discourses. Instead, in many cases, they simultaneously adopt and resist the dominant understandings. In this section, I discuss two patterns of simultaneous acceptance and resistance. The first of these is that students simultaneously accept and resist dominant discourses by supporting deviations only within limited circumstance. The second pattern is that students discursively position alternative choices in ways that both accept and resist dominant understandings.

<div align="center">*Limited Acceptance of Deviations*</div>

The most frequent way students simultaneously accept and resist dominant understandings of appropriate post-college choices is by allowing for alternatives only within specific circumstances. Repeatedly students support the idea that it is acceptable for people to make alternative choices if, and only if, certain conditions are met. These conditions include: the alternative will get the person ahead; the person has already proven him or herself; and the deviation is temporary.

It's Ok if . . . It'll Help You Get Ahead

One way the students simultaneously accept and resist the dominant understandings of appropriate post-college is to articulate that alternatives are only acceptable if they will help one further his or her career. In doing so, the students are resisting the dominant notions of appropriate post-college choices by considering a wider range of options acceptable.

However, they are also accepting dominant understandings by placing a career advancement condition on the deviation.

This simultaneous acceptance and resistance is seen in Amber's statement about why the Peace Corps is acceptable for her situation, but not for others: "And, it's a really good resume builder. I mean, at least for the things I'm thinking about doing." In this statement, Amber positions the Peace Corps as acceptable because it fits into her future plans. If it did not, it would be less appropriate. Similarly, Carol talks with approval about the expectation that she get a job that requires her degree. In doing so she allows for one deviation from that expectation. She would consider it acceptable to get a job that did not require her degree if "I had this master plan, 'well, I'm gonna start here, and then I *know* how I'm gonna get here and then' (um hmm) Yeah."

It's Ok if . . . You've Proven Yourself

Another way students simultaneously accept and resist the dominant discourses of appropriate work is by saying that deviations are acceptable when a student has already proven him or herself. Once again, in allowing for deviations, the students are resisting the dominant notions of work. However, they are only conditionally doing so. Amelia articulates this pattern of conditional acceptance in both the focus group and interview. She talks about how since she is "graduating with a *great* deal of honors and awards" it means it is also "much more understandable" that she is going to do something that does not meet the typical standards of appropriate work. She explains that if she had not done so well in college,

> The sort of the parameters for, for doing the *other* (um hmm) and thinking outside the box would, um, be a lot more constrictive . . . I think I would be-it would be more, it would be more expected for me to find a more traditional, higher paying, higher prestige job. Um, jus-or, or something at least *secured* by now.

She goes on to say that because she has performed so well, "it's-it's like I've allowed myself some leeway." Amelia is critical of the dominant understandings of appropriate choices throughout the interview and focus group, but she also acknowledges that she is affected by the expectations. However, she feels that for her the expectations are not as constricting; since she has performed well, she can pursue a broader range of opportunities. By positioning herself and her alternative post-college choices as exceptions to the norm, she accepts the norm as a standard for most people.

For Amelia the proving of herself is already done. She feels as though she can choose alternatives because of her past performance. Other students articulate the same idea with a focus on proving themselves in the future. In these cases, students say that once they have proven themselves in a conventional career then they will be able to choose something that would not meet the dominant understandings of appropriate work. For example, in the following conversation Isabella talks about where she would like to be career-wise when she is 50 years old.

> Isabella: I hope at that point, I can just do, not have to, like, feel the need to prove myself continually (right) and just do what I want. I don't know.
>
> Teresa: Do you feel that need now?
>
> Isabella: To a certain extent, yeah. I feel like, um, coming out of college, you kind of have to pay your dues. And prove that you are capable and you can do stuff (sure) and then you kind of gain the respect to be in the position, be able to do the things that you want to do. (Um hmm).

In this statement, Isabella simultaneously accepts dominant ideas about appropriate work, but also allows for alternatives. The condition is that before she can pursue any alternatives, she must prove herself in a traditional career. Carol articulates this same idea, saying,

I feel like before you do something, like, that maybe violates traditional gender roles, like staying, stay-at-home dad, or you have a college degree and you go for like a job lower than what it is, I feel like, it's ok, it's okay to be different, but first you have to prove yourself [Amelia nods] that you can be what everyone expects you to be, you can turn around and say, "I've already done that and I don't like it." So, I think that's where I'm probably headed. Like, I'm just [Carole is prompted by group members and Teresa to say more] Like, I'll probably try my best to get a job at a bank because I know that's what people want me to do, like, especially my parents. I don't want to disappoint them. Maybe I'll do that for a few years, if I'm lucky, or not, and then afterwards, like, I'll see if I like it or not and if I don't then I can turn around and say like, "You know, I've done this, cuz, I feel like you wanted me to. I don't want you to worry but, I just want you to know that *I can do it,* so I should be able to do what I really want to do [Tim nods] because I've proven that, I can, you know, I can."

Whether the students feel as though they have already proven themselves or that they will someday prove themselves, they are accepting the idea that alternative choices are only acceptable under limited circumstances.

It's Ok if . . . It's Temporary

The most frequent condition students place on alternatives to the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices is that of time. Repeatedly students state a belief that alternative choices are acceptable as long as they are temporary. Specifically, students say that alternative choices such as travel or working at a non-degree requiring job are acceptable for a short period of time. This is reflected in the following conversation about waitressing:

Sarah: My lease doesn't run out until August so I'm definitely [group laughter] staying and then if need be I guess I'll join the inappropriate list, and just become a waitress.

Christine: Is it inappropriate if you're looking for a job while you do it? Like if you're looking for the job while you just take another job?

Sarah: No, I think, no, I mean, no.

Kelly: I think, as long as you don't settle for that and say, "Okay, well, I guess this is what I'm doing for the rest of my life." (Sarah: yeah)

Teresa: So if it seems temporary?

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Kelly: Yeah, if it's temporary, I mean, yeah [Sarah nods].

Typically, students say that it is acceptable to do something different, such as travel or work at a non-degree requiring job, for up to a year. After that year the alternative choices are no longer considered acceptable. As Elaine says, "I figure you get, like, a year for leeway after you graduate before you, like, where you can just kind of chill, travel, see the world, um, depending on your financial situation." The one year maximum is also echoed in Reese's statement, "Anything over a year would probably be inappropriate." Similarly, when discussing traveling after college Sasha states, "I definitely think a year is the maximum." I ask Sasha, "Else what would people think or what would you think of yourself?" and she responds, "You're getting kind of sidetracked, maybe, if you stay away from the real world too long." In this statement Sasha positions paid work as "the real world." In contrast, traveling is an unreal alternative that is acceptable only for a limited amount of time.

Discursive Positioning

Above, I discussed how students simultaneously accept and resist the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices by articulating a set of circumstances under which deviations from the dominant approach are acceptable. Another way that students exhibit their simultaneous acceptance and resistance of dominant discourses of appropriate work is through the ways they talk about their future plans. Students who are resisting the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices by making an alternative choice talk about those choices in ways that adopt the dominant discourses. Specifically, this occurrs when students lie to cover up their resistant choice and when they frame their alternative choices within the dominant discourses.

Covering Up the Truth

The dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choice hold that students should know what they are going to do after graduation. Several students talk about pretending to have a plan when in fact they do not. In doing this the students acknowledge the expectation that they should have a plan while simultaneously maintaining some measure of agency in the situation. In these situations, the students have not bowed to the expectation to have a plan by choosing something just to have a plan. However, they are also not willing to face the social stigma that would follow admitting their situation. Therefore, covering up their lack of future plans can be seen as both accepting and resisting the expectation to have a plan. Examples of students covering up their lack of a plan include Mary Jane who says,

> I make up these answers, like, um, someone will ask you that question and you talk about finding a short answer, like, I usually just say law school or "Oh, I'm moving to DC" um, "to work for like a federal agency." I'll pick one or the other depending on what I feel like that day and just, like, say that.

Similarly Amber says, "Sometimes I just, like, kind of say things that I've been thinking about, like, nonprofit or something, but I really, I really have no idea." Another example of this is Reese who states, "sometimes I'll throw out something like, 'Oh, I think I might be a teacher.' You know, I had, that's not my intention at all, I can't stand kids."

Students do not just cover up that they do not have a plan. Some students also refrain from telling the whole truth about their plans. For example, Elaine routinely tells people she is going to go to graduate school in a year or two even though she does not intend to. She explains she does this "just so that people won't, like, they're all going to say, 'Well, what are you going to do with a B.S., like you can't do anything with that, you need to go get a Masters or Ph.D.'" So to avoid this conversation, Elaine tells people she is going to get an advanced degree. Dirk also avoids telling people his true plan. After graduation Dirk

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intends to pursue science fiction writing. However, telling people this usually results in

lectures about being practical. So he says,

> I tell them something else [group laughter]: "yeah, you know, I'm looking at publishing firms in Raleigh, I might do some editing work" [said in a drawn out voice with a comical tone]. Like, I have experience as an editor [said in a tone that implies he doesn't; group laughter follows] . . . I mean, it's so easy, you know, it's so much easier than because like I said that, that whole backup plan thing just annoys me. It just pisses me off, you know, and then, rather than them saying that and me being mad at them for the rest of the day or until I see them again or whatever, I just go with that and just you know. Because, um, like I said, again, I'm thinking realistically, like, my goal is, is really a slim possibility you know. Um, and that's, that's for a lot of creative arts you know. Um, and so it's, it's much easier for me to say something else that I'm, that I'm doing. Something that they're satisfied with [Collette laughs softly]. Basically: "Yeah, grad school, you know, UMASS, who knows, [mild group laughter] so many options, I don't know what to do, you know."

While some students like Dirk give specific answers as part of their cover up, other

students take a different approach as indicated in the following conversation:

> Shlea: I try to come up with as smartass of remark as I can possibly think of. [group laughter]
>
> Teresa: Like what?
>
> Shlea: Well, like, you know, the last three years since I added, well, the last two years since I added the linguistics major, English major's my first one, um, they're like, "So what are you going to do with that?" [in rude voice] and I'm like, "Uh, graduate!?" [said in a sarcastic tone].

Putting Alternative Choices in Conventional Language

In addition to covering up uncertain or less appropriate plans, students also frame

alternative choices in terms of the dominant discourses. In these situations, the students are

making alternative post-college choices, yet they talk about those choices in terms that are

consistent with the dominant discourses of appropriate work. In doing this, the students are

both accepting and resisting notions of appropriate work and career.

Framing post-college choices in terms of the dominant discourses occurs when students use pragmatic rationales to explain complex choices. For example, Jessica has decided to join the Peace Corps. In talking with me about her decision she explains her choice primarily in terms of a desire for personal growth and a commitment to helping others. However, when she talks with others about joining the Peace Corps, she says, "I feel like I definitely have to make them believe why it's, what I'm going to get from it . . . they want hard core tangible, like monetary or like direct incentives from it." In response to this, Jessica tells people that the Peace Corps will help pay for future graduate studies and that it will train her for future work with people with disabilities. In doing this, Jessica is acquiescing to a dominant discourse by framing her choice in terms of career advancement. Yet, Jessica's choice itself resists some of the standards of appropriate post-college choices.

The framing of resistant choices within conventional terms can also be seen in Jim's discussion of his post-college plans. Of the students I met with, Jim's plans may deviate furthest from the dominant discourses of appropriate work. After graduation he intends to move to Colorado with a friend. There he wants to work in construction for several months, save up some money and then travel indefinitely. Although Jim is certainly resisting many notions of appropriate post-college choices, when he talks about his future he discusses these choices in instrumental language. He says,

> I guess, once I'm ready to do that [get a conventional job], I'm gonna do-be more qualified or more experienced in so many things than so many other people coming straight out of college. Where they'll be motivated to get a job and they'll be like, "Yea, I'm graduating and I want to make that money." I will have a little more, I don't know, life experience and I think that can help a whole lot.

In this statement, Jim discusses the ways his Colorado experience and other travels will benefit him in the workplace. In doing this, Jim exhibits some measure of acceptance of the dominant discourses of career while his choices reflect resistance to those same discourses.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the complex ways students interact with the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices. The students cannot be easily categorized into accepting or resisting the dominant discourses. Instead, students accept and resist mainstream understandings, sometimes simultaneously. Their acceptance of the dominant discourses is seen when they make discourse-aligned choices and expect others to do the same. Similarly, they resist through making and defending post-college choices that do not align with the dominant discourses. However, students do not just make post-college choices that go along with or deviate from what is expected of them. The complexity of students' interactions with discourses of work and career is seen in their simultaneous acceptance and resistance of dominant discourses. By supporting a set of circumstances under which alternative choices are acceptable, students manage to deviate from the mainstream while reinforcing its place as the standard. Similarly, in lying about resistant choices or framing them in conventional language, students engage in resistant acts while positioning them as less than appropriate or ideal.

In the following discussion chapter, I connect the dominant discourses and forms of responses addressed in chapters 5 and 6 with a dialectical understanding of control/resistance. In doing so, I address the complex ways the dominant discourses and responses to those discourses both control students and foster their resistance. Additionally, I examine the ways student resistance paradoxically reinforces the dominant discourses.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCOURSES OF CAREER CHOICE: DIALECTICS OF CONTROL AND
RESISTANCE

In the preceding analysis chapters, I discussed the ways in which a group of college

students experience and respond to dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices.

In this chapter, I explore how the dominant discourses of career operate as a form of control.

This form of control is not direct or necessarily overt. Instead, it operates through the

dominant discourses' creation of standards of appropriateness and normalcy. Certain

occupational choices, approaches to career, and values that influence career decision-making

are discursively constructed as more appropriate or better than others. College seniors

frequently adopt these standards. I argue that this occurs through a process of disciplinary

control. However, this control is not total. Students also resist the dominant understandings

of appropriate post-college choice. In this chapter, I explore how the students' resistance

exists in a dialectical relationship with control (Mumby, 2005). The same dominant

discourses that exercise control also foster resistance. Similarly, resistant discourses

reinscribe dominant ones.

In this chapter, I discuss how the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college

choices exercise control through limiting occupational choices, privileging certain

approaches to career, and promoting corporate decision-making values. Throughout this

analysis, I address the ways in which the same discourses that control students also enable

resistance. Additionally, I highlight ways that student resistance perpetuates dominant understandings.

Occupational Choices

The dominant discourses experienced by the students construct an appropriate post-college choice as one that requires one's degree, ensures financial security or pays well, is prestigious, is career-focused, and will allow the student to excel. These expectations combine to create a limited "zone of acceptable alternatives" (Gottfredson, 1981) for future occupational choices. In other words, the dominant discourses circumscribe the occupational choices that are considered acceptable for college graduates. In this section, I discuss how this circumscription both controls students' choices and enables resistant acts. Further, I discuss how the resistance that is fostered reinforces the dominant discourses.

Controlling Students' Choices

The dominant discourses of career construct entire categories of occupations as inappropriate for college graduates. While some students do resist these expectations and make "inappropriate" choices, many students restrict their options in accordance with the dominant discourses. As Clair (1996) writes, "communication disguises alternative work realities limiting the work choices of individuals" (p. 264). In this study, the limiting of choices is seen in students who make decisions based on what is expected of them. These students' post-college choices are not based solely on a combination of what they are interested in and what is feasible. Instead, familial and cultural expectations operate as forms of control that restrict the options the students consider and pursue.

The extent to which the dominant discourses of appropriate work operate as a form of control can be seen most easily in the situations where students desire to do something

deemed inappropriate by the dominant discourses. In such situations, students report anxiety

and familial discord as they consider doing something that violates expectations. This is

apparent in the following focus group exchange between Patty and Reysanne. They are

discussing talking to their families about the "inappropriate" choices they are making.

>Patty: It takes a lot of mental preparation.

>Reysanne [over Patty]: It does!! It does!!

>Patty: I mean, you really have to expect it [the conversation with parents], you have to like think about it, think like, "How would I deal with this?" Yeah, I understand that.

>Reysanne [over Patty]: You'll be like, my parents will be mad, my parents will hate me.

>Patty: You have to have a conversation with them before you have it. "This is what I'm doing [the group laughs and Seun says "yeah"]." You have to write out the script, you know.

>Teresa: Predict their answers.

>Patty: Yeah, like, the guilt and shame and the, like, yeah.

As is seen in this example, there is a cost to students who violate the commonly held

standards. They experience anxiety and guilt. They have to repeatedly defend and explain

their choices. As discussed in chapter 2, Clair (1996) argues that the mental anguish

experienced in this situation can be severe. She writes, "the depression induced by holding a

marginalized job or wanting to hold a marginalized job can be nearly overwhelming" (p.

264). Conversely, students who make occupational choices aligned with these standards

typically face little stigma. Instead, they are often encouraged by family members, mentors,

and friends.

In the face of potential stigma, students discipline themselves to meet the standards of

the dominant discourses. They shape their behaviors to match what is expected of them. In

the most extreme form of disciplinary control, students make discourse-aligned career choices when they would rather do something else. Examples of this include: Amaya seeking employment in large corporations rather than small black-owned businesses; Jane eschewing substitute teaching; and Charlie not pursuing her desired major of drama. In disciplining themselves in this way, students seek out, accept, and may remain in jobs they would not otherwise choose. If they do, they may experience long term career dissatisfaction, as found in a survey of retirees who when asked, "What do you most regret in your life?" 80% selected "Staying in a job or a career I did not like" (Welch, 1995, cited in Gini, 2000). I am not asserting that everyone who dislikes his or her job selected it because of familial or cultural expectations. Nor am I arguing that everyone who begins a job because of familial and cultural expectations ends up disliking it. Rather, I am arguing that young people's career choice options are circumscribed by familial and cultural expectations. Because of this, people may discard career options they were interested in and enter occupations they otherwise would not have. In this way, the dominant discourses of career operate as a powerful, if diffuse, form of control.

Students discipline themselves not only in their occupational choices, but also in how they talk about those choices. This is a subtler form of control that shapes the ways students present themselves and their choices to others. The students engage in these subtler forms of self-discipline when they: cover up non-discourse aligned decisions with lies; frame their alternative choices in conventional language; and articulate exceptions as only acceptable under certain circumstances.

As described above, students' choices and behaviors are circumscribed by the dominant discourses. While it is important to note the ways individual occupational choices

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are controlled by the dominant discourses, it is also critical to consider how the dominant discourses value and devalue various forms of work. By constructing well-paying, advancement oriented, degree-requiring, and prestigious jobs as appropriate, the dominant discourses promote certain types of work as more important and of higher status than others. At the individual level, this affects the choices that are viewed as appropriate for an individual. At the societal level, this perpetuates constructions of what counts as valuable work in contemporary U.S. society. The dominant discourses privilege paid white-collar work as more important and prestigious than unpaid and blue-collar work. Domestic labor, human services occupations, and work in the service industry are all devalued. These are the same forms of work that Clair (1996) found to be devalued through college students' understandings of the use of the colloquialism "a real job." This valuation of paid white-collar work perpetuates capitalist notions of worth. What one earns for a job is a key factor in how that job is valued. This understanding devalues labor done outside of the wage economy. Additionally, insofar as the devalued forms of work remain predominantly associated with the feminine, current discourses of appropriate work contribute to the privileging of the masculine/public over the feminine/private spheres.

Fostering Resistance

As discussed above, the dominant discourses operate as a form of control limiting the choices considered appropriate for college students. However, the same discourses also enable resistant occupational choices. This happens when some students use the dominant discourses as a backdrop of normalcy. They then position their choices as purposefully different from what is normal or expected. In other words, students discursively construct

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themselves as different from the norm. In this process, the dominant discourses are

necessary as a representation of the status quo against which students position themselves.

The primary way in which students position themselves as different from the

dominant discourses is through their prioritization of happiness over pay in career decision

making. In doing this, the students challenge the dominant discourses' emphasis on pay.

They instead emphasize the importance they place on liking what they do for work. Students

claim to be willing to accept lower paying jobs in order to have jobs that bring them

happiness. Some students are already making choices and sacrifices to promote the

happiness they seek. Examples of this choice include students such as Tim and Rose taking

jobs in the non-profit sector, and students joining service programs like the Peace Corps

(Jessica) and Teach for America (Jamie and Patti). In these cases, students prioritize

potential happiness over monetary gain in career decision making. In discussing their plans,

the students position their choices as alternative from mainstream expectations. However,

prioritizing happiness over pay is not separate from the dominant discourses. Instead, it is

connected to them. This can be seen in the following statements from Jane and Anna:

> In general I feel like our, just the world we live in is very future oriented. (Dirk: um hum) and nobody cares so much if you're enjoying yourself right now, but you're constantly working towards that goal and, like, I guess, I don't, I don't know, I don't have that goal, like, perhaps, maybe I don't see that but, I don't know, I really just want to enjoy whatever it is that I'm doing right now. (Jane)
>
> My definition, my personal definition is different than I think society views it. Because, as long I'm not worrying about money and I know that, like, my family's being taken care of, you know, and I want to be happy, like, happy and, that's basically all, you know. (Anna)

In these statements Jane and Anna discuss their prioritizations of happiness as being counter

to societal norms. In this way, students' alternative priorities are both a challenge to and

reliant on the dominant discourses.

Perpetuating the Dominant Discourses

As discussed above, the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choice exercise control and foster resistance. Further, the students' positioning themselves as alternative to the dominant discourses reinforces the dominant discourses. Students such as Jane and Anna resist by setting themselves up as different from the norm. In doing so, the students position their own choices as outside of the status quo. They do not, then, directly challenge the normalcy of the expectation, but instead position themselves as outside of it. This reinforces the dominant discourses as the standard and anything else as an exception.

Approaches to Career

In addition to limiting the occupational choices that are considered appropriate, the dominant discourses of career articulate the approaches to career that are most acceptable. Specifically, the dominant discourses of career perceived by the students enable the contemporary mainstream discourses of career and constrain alternative approaches to career. In this section, I explain the ways the dominant discourses privilege contemporary mainstream career discourses. I discuss how this serves as a form of control. Further, I address how this same understanding of career enables student resistance while also perpetuating the dominant discourses.

Enabling Contemporary Mainstream Career Discourses

As discussed in chapter 2, the traditional discourse of career positions an appropriate career path as linear advancement within one organization. In this understanding, an individual's career path is closely linked to the organization for which he or she works (Hall, 2002). The students' discussions of career reflect little of the traditional view of career. Few

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students in this project spoke of their potential careers in these terms nor did they articulate that such a career is expected of them.

Instead of corresponding to the traditional view of career, the students' experiences more closely align with contemporary mainstream discourses of career. Within these understandings of career, the worker does not expect loyalty from the organization, nor does the worker offer loyalty to the organization. Instead, workers are expected to change jobs and organizations multiple times throughout a career (Hall, 2002). As the students discuss their futures, they articulate this expectation. The students seem to assume that whatever they do directly after college will not be permanent. For example, Joan says,

> I do think it's harder when people ask you like, "What are you going to do for the rest of your life?" Because for me I can think of, in terms of two years. Even the question "How do you see yourself in five years?" is difficult to answer because I really don't know, you know, maybe I'll pursue a job opportunity that I'm hoping to get, but maybe I'll get into my field and discover I hate it [Marija nods] and then I don't know, it's just, it's frustrating.

While students face familial discord over other career-related attitudes, the expectation that they would change jobs throughout their career is not challenged by others in their lives. It appears to be taken for granted by students, parents, and other involved individuals.

In the following section, I discuss two ways this approach to career operates as a form of control. The first is through constructing students as entrepreneurial subjects who are responsible for their careers and must remain continually marketable. The second is through privileging work over non-work aspects of life.

The Entrepreneurial Self and Career

Taking up the new career discourse means more than just expecting to work in several different organizations over the course of one's career. The new social contract of career perpetuates the discourse of the entrepreneurial self. This discourse constructs a

particular relationship between the self and work. Within this discourse, what one does for work is intimately connected to one's sense of self. Further, one's selfhood is constructed as a perpetual project in which people are continually striving for excellence. Conceptualizing selfhood as a perpetual project creates a sense of insecurity. The end goal is ever-shifting and therefore one's identity is never stable (Collinson, 2003). Since work is an integral part of selfhood and selfhood is a continual pursuit of excellence, then one's career is also constructed as a perpetual pursuit of excellence (Grey, 1994). This is manifest in students feeling responsible for their career success and engaging in behaviors that will enhance their marketability as employees.

Responsibility for career success. The discourse of the entrepreneurial self promotes an understanding of the self as intimately tied to and responsible for career success (Grey, 1994). As opposed to the discourse of career as improvisational (Arthur et al., 1999), the new career discourse does not account for luck or circumstance. Instead, it places the sole responsibility for one's career trajectory on the individual (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). The new career discourse purports that there are a set of practices that promote one's employability. These include gaining credentials, networking, and procuring jobs that lead "somewhere." People are responsible for engaging in these career-promoting practices. If they do not do them, they are to blame for any career stagnation or unemployment.

The students' sense of personal accountability for their careers can be seen in several students' reactions to what they view as having made a career-related mistake. In these cases the students criticize themselves for not meeting conventional standards. For example, Anna discusses being embarrassed for not knowing what she was going to do after graduation saying, "I was definitely like, 'Oh my gosh, like, ev-how could I *not* know what I'm

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doing!?'" Similarly, Jessica states, "I-I feel like I'm just still experimenting, maybe I should

have-what steps should I have taken to be clear in it already and not keep experimenting."

The language of self-blame also can be seen in Emran's statement, "Except-except that I

didn't do the work, except that I didn't do what I was supposed to."

The notion of personal responsibility also is seen in the students' belief that they will

be to blame in the future if they do not accomplish their goals. Amber expresses the

following fear:

> Just that it's not going to even work, like, I'm not really going to get a good job
> because I went to the bar at school or something, just that I'm going to be a secretary
> for the rest of my life or something.

In this statement, Amber seems to ascribe near-total responsibility for her potential future to

her actions during college.

Enhancing marketability. In the new social contract, loyalty to the organization is

replaced with a focus on maintaining one's own employability. This might occur through

activities such as: increasing one's skills, gaining new credentials, or networking. In this

section, I discuss how the college seniors strategically work on themselves in order to

enhance their future marketability. While this process has been documented among

professional workers (Grey, 1994), this project shows that these behaviors begin even before

people enter the professional workforce.

For some of the students in this project, a focus on increasing one's chances at

employability has been part of their lives for many years. In these cases, decisions about

high school courses, colleges to apply to, leisure activities, and summer jobs have involved

an understanding of how the choices would affect the students' future options. A particularly

vivid example of this is Charlie. From the time she was in the sixth grade, Charlie has

maintained a resume. Her mom encouraged her to keep it updated with activities and awards. While this example is extreme, more commonly students discuss options in terms of "resume building" (Reysanne) or looking good to future schools and employers. During high school, this typically involved taking certain classes and joining numerous activities. In college the selection of majors and minors is viewed in terms of future marketability. The following focus group exchange illustrates this:

> Samantha: That's probably why I'm doing a chemistry minor is because, um, well, I had had all the classes to get the marine science minor. You can only declare one, but then the chemistry was a possibility, and it just looks a lot better, it's good to take those hard classes, even though I don't enjoy it *at all* [Jane nods; group laughs].
>
> Jane: That's Spanish for me; I despise it.
>
> Teresa: Why have you done it?
>
> Jane: The same reason. It just looks, it looks better.

Students also select summer activities that reflect well on them. Some students have spent every summer during college adding impressive lines to their resumes through completing prestigious internships. Other students express dismay at the emphasis placed on internships. This is because either they feel like they have found out too late about the importance of internships or because they can not afford to take an unpaid internship. Regardless of whether or not students are able to engage in activities that would promote their employability, the belief that they should is widespread.

The students' focus on enhancing their marketability can also be seen in some of the ways they talk about their future plans. In many cases, the students talk about their next choice in terms of how it will affect their later career. This occurs even when students are making non-discourse aligned choices. For example, Jim, who plans to intersperse working construction and traveling for the next few years, frames his choice in terms of how this

experience will prepare him for future career possibilities. In framing future choices through

the lens of marketability, the students exhibit an understanding that they are responsible for

continually accruing skills, training, and experience.

The students' attitudes about graduate school also reflect the new social contract's

emphasis on enhancing employability. Students repeatedly brought up graduate school as an

assumed future plan. As Jacob states, "now it's just, the expectation is changing, so it's like

now grad. school is, is the standard" [Elaine and Jane nod]. In some cases, graduate school

relates directly to the students' occupational goals. However, in a number of cases the

students articulate a plan to go to graduate school even though they do not know what type of

graduate degree they will seek. For example, when I ask Sarah "Do you think, like, there's a

trajectory that you're supposed to be on for your life in general?" She responds,

> I do, but I think I've set it for myself [Amber, Kelly, and Sophia nod]. Like, I have
> this little trajectory of finish college, you know, work for one or two years, apply to
> grad. school, go to grad. school and then [pause] something.

In this statement, Sarah conveys her plan to attend graduate school without a specific purpose

for the advanced degree. Sarah attributes her graduate school-oriented trajectory to her own

choosing. She does not acknowledge outside forces. However, I would argue that to some

extent Sarah's plan is influenced by contemporary discourses of career that position her as

responsible for maintaining her own marketability.

The students' desire to maintain/enhance their marketability could be seen as purely

pragmatic. One could argue that the students are doing these things because that is how the

current system is most successfully navigated. However, the students show that their

acceptance of these behaviors goes beyond pragmatics and into an understanding of how

things "should be." This can be seen when the students judge others for not also engaging in

these behaviors. For example, Amelia scornfully comments about her high school classmates who "aren't doing 'anything' with their lives." Similarly, Rose says that she has friends who are "like not even putting an effort" into developing professional post-college careers. In commenting on this Rose says, "and *that, that* makes me angry." Reysanne specifically judges a friend for not enhancing her owning marketability, stating:

> I mean, I don't even know if she can get a job, cuz she hasn't, and the other thing is, is that, um, she hasn't done, like, any internships *at all*, um, I-I I don't-I really feel like she hasn't tried. Like, I really feel like she hasn't really applied to any. And she's been, like, working at Subway which really doesn't help you find a job afterwards.

Together the construction of individuals as solely responsible for their careers and the related emphasis on enhancing one's marketability serve as a form of control. By constructing people as intimately connected to and responsible for their careers, the new career discourse promotes choices and relationships that advance one's career. As I discuss in the following section, this results in the marginalization of non-career related priorities.

Privileging Work over Non-work Priorities

As discussed above, the new social contract of career emphasizes an individual's responsibility for his or her own career. Within this model, the good worker continually strives to enhance his or her marketability. In emphasizing this, the dominant discourses provide little space for prioritizing family, hobbies, service, or other interests over work. As Nadesan and Trethewey (2000) write, the ideal entrepreneurial worker "lacks family commitments, never tires, and never ceases to acquire precisely those new skills that will foster innovation in his/her workplace" (p. 242).

For most of the students in this study, tensions between family and career are not very salient. Instead students discuss their desires for full lives that involve families, careers,

service to community and personal hobbies. They express a desire, and even an expectation, to "have it all." Their desire for full, well-rounded lives is consistent with research on this generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Most of the students discuss tensions in achieving these desires as potential future concerns, not present issues. However, for one group of students the priorities of career and personal life have come up against each other already. These are the students who are in long-term romantic relationships. Graduating from college means making decisions about where to live. In several cases, students are faced with choosing between living in a place that would allow them to be close to their partner or moving to where they would have the best job opportunities. In every case, the students say that they are being discouraged by others from prioritizing the relationship over the job opportunity. In this way, optimizing one's career is being enabled while prioritizing personal relationships is being constrained. However, the students are not following this expectation. In the next section, I address how the same discourse of enterprise that promotes work priorities over non-work priorities is, at times, transformed to resist the emphasis on career advancement.

Fostering Resistance

As discussed above, the dominant discourses of career articulated by the students emphasize the contemporary mainstream approach to career. Within this approach, individuals are constructed as enterprising individuals who are responsible for their own career outcomes and should therefore work to maintain their own marketability. Scholars have argued that the construction of individuals as enterprising subjects results in an emphasis on traditional career advancement over family life (Grey, 1996; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). This is true in some cases for the students in this project. However, in other cases, students utilize elements of the discourse of the entrepreneurial self as a resource

in making alternative career choices. Specifically, students adopt the notion that they are personally responsible for their careers. This idea is central to the discourse of the entrepreneurial self. However, instead of claiming personal responsibility for making career-advancing choices in discourse-aligned occupations, some students claim that they are responsible for making the career choices they view as most suited to their own interests. In this way, students transform the discourse of personal responsibility into one of personal freedom. Students use the discourse of personal freedom in making career choices that do not meet the dominant discourse of appropriate career choices. For example, Dirk says, "I just gotta be me," and Samiyah says "that was [pause] me finding or determining my own path." This discourse of personal freedom serves as a resource that allows Dirk to pursue full-time science fiction writing and Samiyah to major in communication against her mother's desires. In claiming responsibility for their own choices, students transform an aspect of the new career discourse into a resource for resisting aspects of the dominant discourses of career.

<center>*Perpetuating the Dominant Discourses*</center>

The students' resistance through the discourse of personal freedom does promote alternatives to the dominant discourses of career. The discourse of personal freedom serves as a discursive resource that the students call upon in making sense of and discussing discursively non-aligned career choices. However, while fostering resistance on an individual level, the use of this discourse also constrains systemic change. In using the discourse of personal freedom to make sense of and defend alternative choices, the students position themselves as autonomous individuals who are in control of their choices. This reinscribes the notion that career trajectories and decisions take place at the level of the

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individual. While this discourse may allow people to make sense of and defend alternative choices, it does not acknowledge the extent to which career choices are influenced by numerous factors including: family influence, access to education, societal influences, economic conditions, and job market concerns. In this way, privileges related to race, class, and educational background are minimized. For example, both Jamie and Meghan have chosen risky, low-paying jobs because of their interest in the opportunities. Both articulate their choices as based on what is "right for them." However, when specifically asked, both Jamie and Meghan acknowledge that their family's financial stability allows them to more easily make their "free choice." Knowing that they had a financial fallback promotes their willingness to pursue an alternative career option. In repeatedly situating career choice as an individual, free choice, students mask the ways such "free choices" are limited for many people due to material constraints.

Appropriate Decision-Making Values

In addition to enabling certain career choices and approaches to career, the dominant discourses exercise control by privileging one set of career decision-making values as the "correct" way to make choices. Therefore, alternative decision-making logics are marginalized. In this section, I discuss the logic of economic rationality that is privileged by the dominant discourses. Based on this logic, the students are expected to make pragmatic decisions that maximize the use of their time, education, and potential. This expectation is manifest most clearly in the students' deployment and acceptance of the discourse of waste and use. In this section, I explain how this discourse is used in relation to the students' education, intelligence, and opportunities. In explaining the prevalence of this logic, I argue that it is evidence of corporate values colonizing non-work aspects of life. Finally, I address

how the students' articulation of the waste/use discourse simultaneously challenges some of the corporate values it embodies.

Controlling through Instrumental and Economic Logics

As I discussed in chapter 4, a discourse of waste and use provides an underlying rationale for much of the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices. The discourse of waste and use positions "use" as a moral imperative. The students articulate the belief that if a person possesses a resource, that resource should be parlayed into socially acceptable gains. If people do not parlay their degrees, potential, or opportunities into such gains, they are "wasting" those resources. Repeatedly students position such "wasteful" choices as unacceptable. While students resist some of the dominant meanings associated with appropriate post-college choices, they very rarely resist this underlying rationale of waste and use. While they might make a post-college choice that defies expectations about pay or prestige, they still talk about "using" one's degree or "wasting" an opportunity.

The acceptance of the discourse of waste and use can be understood within the wider process of corporate colonization. Corporate colonization occurs when corporate interests and values permeate non-business related aspects of life such as family, schools, and community (Deetz, 1992). While some of the most obvious forms of corporate colonization involve the extent to which modern corporations play a significant role in current political and educational practices, corporate colonization also occurs at the level of decision-making values. As Deetz (1992) writes, with corporate colonization,

> Efficiency and effectiveness become the primary criteria for the evaluation in all of life. This is not to claim a distinct new age or to hold that past forms of reasoning are gone. Competing forms of reasoning and discourses do coexist but not as equals. (p. 42)

In other words, corporate colonization occurs when the corporate world's emphasis on rationality and efficiency frames choices and meanings in other Lifeworld contexts. Corporate decision-making values become the basis for decision making in personal relationships, life choices, and community decision making.

The students' acceptance of the waste/use discourse is evidence of corporate values colonizing the career decision-making process. The students' discourse of waste and use relies on instrumental and economic logics. It positions education and life as resources to be maximized. This emphasis on resource maximization is common in the business world. If a company has resources that are not adding to the bottom line, that is considered to be poor management of those resources. They should either be channeled into something productive or excised from the organization. The students' understandings of career reflect similar beliefs. This manifests in their attitudes about education, the language they use to talk about marginalized options, and the way they view the relationship between intelligence and occupation.

Wasting/Using Education

The rationale of waste/use is seen most often in the students' conception of a degree as something to be used and, if not used, then it is wasted. According to the students, a degree can be wasted by not having a plan for after graduation, having a long-term post-graduation plan that does not require a degree, getting a long-term job that does not pay well, or making a choice that does not require the specific degree one has earned. To choose one of these options is to waste one's degree, the time it took to earn that degree, and the money that has been spent in the process. According to this discourse, a college education is only useful to the extent that it can be translated in the economic marketplace. This understanding

precludes alternative "uses" of a college education, such as an enhanced understanding of self and society.

The Language of Waste/Use

Another manifestation of the waste/use discourse is some of the language students use to describe options that are considered wasteful. They talk about options that do not meet the dominant discourses' standards of appropriate post-college choices as doing "nothing" or not doing "anything." Examples of this include Cameron's commentary on working in a hometown factory. She says, *"*If you work at Perdue, you're doing *nothing* with your life. So, if I were to go back home and work at Perdue, it would be the, it would just be devastating, the end of the world." Or as Tinkerbelle says, "It's kind of like a waste of those 4 years. Like, 'Oh, she graduated, got her degree, and now she's not doing anything, she's back home.' Even though-it is like a step backwards, I feel like." In these statements, a whole range of occupations and life choices are stripped of value. Since they do not make sense within the economic rationale, they become "nothing."

Wasting/Using Intelligence

Just as a college degree is seen as wasted if it is not translated into a professional job, a person's intelligence is also seen as wasted if it is not maximized. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, students talk about the expectation that they should do their best. While that message may seem innocuous, in terms of career choice it adds to the marginalization of a set of options. For students who have been recognized as academically talented, certain jobs are considered inappropriate. Such choices are seen as "wasting" the student's intelligence. Clear examples of this include Elaine who was told she was "too smart to be a dental hygienist and needed to become a dentist" or Teri who says, "And the

funny thing is when I decide I want to do teaching, people are like 'Why, like, why are you wasting; like why did you go into science to do teaching?'" In both of these examples, and others like them, the underlying logic is that one should choose a career option that makes optimum use of his or her intelligence. There are options that are appropriate for "smart kids." Not to choose one of those is to waste one's intelligence. Again, as with the idea of wasting one's degree, this understanding of wasting one's intelligence relies on an economic rationale. To the extent that students adopt this understanding, their career decision-making processes can be seen as colonized by corporate logics.

Dialectics of Control and Resistance in Decision-Making Logics

The discourse of waste and use is not understood and articulated solely in rational terms. Instead, the students link the discourse of waste/use to moral obligation. A primary reason a person is not supposed to waste is because doing so will let others down. It might disappoint one's family or community. It also might involve failing to meet one's obligations. As Samantha says, "So anyone who's done a lot for me, not to mention my parents who've paid for my whole college career [everyone nods] I feel like I do owe, um, something." So while the dominant discourse of waste/use perpetuates an economic rationality, it is based on a moral and emotional foundation. People are not expected to "use" their degrees and opportunities because that will further their careers or enhance their earning potential. Instead, not wasting one's degree, intelligence, or opportunity is constructed as an emotional and moral issue connected to family and community.

The connection of the waste/use discourse to family and community illustrates the dialectical nature of control and resistance. The discourse of waste and use perpetuates corporate values of economic rationality and efficiency. It privileges career and life choices

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in accordance with such values. However, the students' articulation of the discourse of waste and use relies on a deep connection to family and community. Students are concerned with not wasting their education and opportunities because they feel a moral obligation to others. So at the same time that students are perpetuating corporate values they are also prioritizing non-corporate logics of family, community, and moral obligation. Therefore, while the waste/use discourse operates as a form of control promoting corporate colonization, it can also be read in part as promoting non-corporate values.

There is another way the privileging of economic rationality over other decision-making criteria serves to enable resistance. While students' decisions and priorities are controlled by the emphasis on economic rationality, they also use this form of rationality to defend alternative choices. This can be seen when students discuss alternative career options in terms of how they will lead to future career options or how they are fiscally responsible choices. In these cases, the same logic that serves to constrain students to make discourse-aligned choices also is transformed, in some cases, to resist the dominant discourses. However, the students' use of economic rationality to resist dominant career discourses serves to perpetuate the normalcy of economic rationality as a key career decision-making value. This again highlights the dialectical nature of control and resistance in students' experiences of career discourses.

Challenges to the Dominant Discourses

Above I have written about the ways dominant career discourses simultaneously exercise control and foster resistance. However, not all student resistance operates in a dialectical relationship with the forms of control exerted by the dominant career discourses. In this section, I address two forms of student resistance that seem most clearly antithetical to

the dominant discourses. These two forms are the students' emphasis on service to others and their emphasis on religious/spiritual faith. While certainly not true for all students, a number of students discuss their desire to make career choices that would allow them to be of service to others. Several students also talk about how their religious faith factored in to their decision-making process. These discourses of service to others and religious faith are not typical aspects of mainstream career discourses. They do not perpetuate the focus on the individual. Nor do they establish advancement, pay, and prestige as the criteria for appropriate post-college choices. The students' use of these discourses highlights the contested nature of the career decision-making process. While corporate values of economic rationality and instrumentality pervade student discussions of career, those values are not the only ones in play. Instead there are logics at work that are antithetical to the economic rationality of the dominant discourses. The students' prioritization of service emphasizes non-economic priorities in career decision making. It positions the good of the community/environment/world over the economic good of the individual. The students' prioritization of faith also challenges the rationality that permeates the dominant discourses of career.

I am not arguing that the students' emphasis on service and faith are examples of "pristine" resistance (Kondo, 1990, p. 224). These forms of resistance also exist in a dialectical relationship with control, but not with the control exerted by the dominant career discourses. Instead, constructing service or faith as key career decision-making criteria enables forms of control that are not currently widespread. For example, if an appropriate career is one that serves others, more lucrative, for profit options are constrained. Students may feel guilt for choosing higher paying or more prestigious jobs. Similarly, the discourse

of faith can serve as a form of control. One possible constraint of the emphasis on faith can be seen in Jessica's experience. A devout Christian, Jessica believes that there is something she is "supposed" to do. She is frustrated that she has not had what she called a "burning bush signal" where God's plan for her was revealed. So while Jessica's faith is a resource she uses in resisting the dominant discourses of career, it is also a form of control.

Conclusion

The college students in this project articulate dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices. These discourses operate as forms of control privileging certain occupational choices, approaches to career, and career decision-making values. Students discipline themselves according to the dominant discourses. In doing so, they often make career and life choices that meet the standards of the dominant discourses. However, the dominant discourses do not simply operate as a form of control. At the same time as students are controlled by the dominant discourses' standards for careers and values, they also transform those standards into resistance. They use the dominant discourses' standards in order to justify alternative choices and as a backdrop against which to position themselves as different. However, the students' resistance often perpetuates the same dominant discourses that it resists. In this way, the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices operate dialectically, fostering control and resistance in complex inter-related ways.

The complexity of the control and resistance processes associated with the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices does not negate the power of the dominant discourses. Material consequences emerge out of this set of dominant discourses. Students' lives are different because they face these standards instead of a different discursive

construction of appropriate post-college choices. In the following chapter, I address the

disciplinary and practical implications of these findings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

For college seniors, the question "What are you doing after graduation?" is fraught

with anxiety and expectations. The students have expectations of themselves. They are also

faced with the expectations of others. Underlying these expectations are various discourses

of appropriate post-college choices. In this project, I examined how 56 college seniors made

sense of these discourses. Through a grounded theory analysis of focus group and interview

data, I identified the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choice articulated by

the students. I also analyzed how students responded to those discourses. In doing so, I

concluded that the dominant discourses operate dialectically to exercise control and foster

resistance in students' career-related choices.

This analysis of students' experiences of and responses to dominant discourses of

appropriate career choices has implications for the organizational communication discipline

and for applied settings. In this chapter, I discuss disciplinary and applied applications of

these findings. I also discuss the limitations of this project and potential future research.

Implications for Organizational Communication

Organizational communication scholarship has traditionally focused on the study of

communication *in* organizations. However, contemporary organizational communication

scholars are expanding the purview of the discipline to include communication *about* work,

organizations, and organizing. From this viewpoint, organizational communication does not

just occur within organizational boundaries, but exists in multiple and varied communicative

contexts, including the family, schools, and the media. It is in these contexts that "notions of work" are communicatively constructed. Recent scholarship into this expanded notion of organizational communication includes analysis of discourses of work and career (Grey, 1994; Lair et al., 2005; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Such studies have focused primarily on professional workers' interactions with career discourses. Little scholarship has investigated the ways people make sense of career discourses before they enter the workplace (see Clair, 1996, for an exception). This project expands Clair's (1996) work in addressing this gap. In this section, I discuss the disciplinary implications of this project. Specifically, I address how this project argues for further organizational communication scholarship on vocational anticipatory socialization processes. Then I discuss how this project contributes to the scholarship on dialectics of control and resistance.

Vocational Anticipatory Socialization

The students in this project articulated a set of career-related expectations others have for them and they have for themselves. This suggests strongly that career discourses shape people's views of career long before they enter the workplace. In examining this process, this study begins to address organizational communication's lack of focus on vocational anticipatory socialization (VAS) processes. Jablin's (1987, 2001) often-cited model of organizational socialization acknowledges that people are socialized about work before they enter the workplace. However, little organizational communication scholarship has investigated this process. Instead, the scholarship cited in the brief discussions of VAS included in chapters on organizational socialization (e.g., Jablin, 1987, 2001; Vangelista, 1988) is almost entirely from other disciplines. Such research is invaluable in examining various attributes related to young people's career-related attitudes, but it typically does not

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engage in cultural critique or an analysis of the power dynamics at play in career socialization. This is why critical, feminist, and postmodern organizational communication scholarship is well positioned to contribute to the research on how young people are socialized about work and career. Such perspectives examine the ways taken-for-granted meanings are actually power-laden discursive constructions. For example, the meanings of "work," "success," "achievement," and "career" are all discursively constructed in ways that support capitalism. By neglecting to study the ways that such understandings are made sense of by young people, the organizational communication discipline fails to interrogate how people's ideas of work are shaped early in life. The findings from this project clearly demonstrate that such socialization not only occurs, but has material effects. The career and life choices students make, the ways they view career, and the career decision-making values they use are all a product of vocational anticipatory socialization. As organizational communication continues to expand its focus to include examination of meanings of work and career, VAS is an important area of study. If organization studies scholars only examine how career and work discourses play out once people enter the workplace, important sites of career sense-making are missed. In the following section, I address three aspects of career sense-making illustrated in this project: the discourse of the entrepreneurial self, the corporate colonization of career decision-making process, and the complex nature of professional identity construction.

The Discourse of the Entrepreneurial Self

One aspect of career sense-making highlighted in this project is the understanding of the self as entrepreneurial. The discourse of the entrepreneurial self and the corresponding construction of a successful career as central to one's professional identity have been studied

(Du Gay, 1996; Fournier, 1998; Grey, 1994; Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). This project shows that these understandings shape young people's beliefs and actions long before they enter the professional workplace. While workplaces may promote this discourse, they do not originate it. Instead, young people enter the professional workplace already socialized to view career as a perpetual project of the self. They understand themselves as responsible for maintaining and enhancing their marketability. This influences the decisions they make about colleges, majors, summer plans, and future jobs.

Future research on this issue is needed to identify the ways discursive and material practices perpetuate the discourse of the entrepreneurial self among young people. One potential line of research in this area is an examination of elementary and secondary school practices. For example, how are young people advised by teachers and counselors regarding grades, courses, college, and extra-curricular activities? These practices may relate to discourses of enterprise in which young people are encouraged to view themselves as projects in need of perpetual improvement. Another area of potential research is discourses of parenting. Similar to Lair et al.'s (2005) analysis of management self-help books, an analysis of parenting texts and websites could provide insight into how children's futures are discursively constructed. To the extent that their futures are constructed as vulnerable unless parents take various steps, buy certain products, and ensure their children learn particular skills, the texts may be invoking the discourse of the entrepreneurial self.

Corporate Colonization of Career Decision Making

In addition to providing a case study of the discourse of the entrepreneurial self, this project is also a case study of the corporate colonization of career decision making. This is particularly evident in the discourse of waste and use that undergirds many of the students'

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discussions of inappropriate career choices. This discourse reifies an understanding of use as being that which is translated into the marketplace. For example, to earn a degree and then not get a job that requires it is to waste that degree. This emphasis on economic rationality marginalizes other decision-making criteria such as passion. This is an example of how the values of the corporation have become standards outside of that environment. For critical organizational communication scholars concerned with the corporate colonization of the lifeworld, this project's findings argue that VAS processes are an important site of inquiry and possible intervention.

Future research into the corporate colonization of career decision making could further this project's examination of the ways people's choices are constrained by dominant career discourses. Potentially rich areas of inquiry might include further research into stay-at-home parents, people who switch from high-status to low-status jobs, non-profit workers, and high school high achievers who choose not to go to college. While some research has been done with some of these populations (e.g., Smith et al., 2006), there is still much more room for scholarly inquiry. An additional line of research related to the corporate colonization of career decision making would be a more widespread and detailed analysis of the language used to discuss career options. For example, at a university career center, I saw a brochure entitled "Want to take a year off?" The options listed included teaching abroad and the Peace Corps. Analysis of language such as "a year off" and "the real world" would add insight into the ways corporate values permeate career decision-making processes.

Career Identity Construction

A third aspect of career sense-making illustrated in this project is the students' construction of career-related identities. Even though these students have not joined the

professional workforce, they are engaged in constructing their work-related identities. Scholars such as Collinson (1992), Kondo (1990), and Jorgenson (2002) have examined the ways workers construct their identities at the nexus of multiple discourses. Similarly, this project's findings highlight the contested nature of constructing a professional identity.

The students struggle to craft their career-related identities within a field of powerful and at times conflicting discourses. It is, perhaps, not surprising that some of the students who spoke with the most passion and angst about their career choices are also, in some way, different from the "average" college student. Some like Amelia and Sophia are extremely gifted students who have earned numerous scholarly awards, including Sophia's Fulbright Scholarship. Others, like Shlea and Patti come from families where going to college at all is a huge accomplishment. For Reysanne and Ella, their Chinese and Filipino heritages play a big role in familial expectations. And Jacob and Amaya feel pressure to make good on opportunities many other young African Americans lack.

In each of these cases, students confront tensions among the dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices, their own interests, and discourses of academic ability/potential, class, ethnicity and race. Amaya highlights this, saying, "I just want to be me and you know, but, it's like, no, Amaya, the black female that's really smart, Amaya, the black female that has the high GPA, Amaya, the black female that's gonna run a company some day or something." In this statement, Amaya articulates a sense of her own interests, saying, "I just want to be me." However, her career identity is also shaped by discourses of race that interpellate her sense of what it means to be a smart, black, female. Additionally, Amaya experiences many of the same dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices identified in this project.

While this project primarily focused on trends across students' experiences with career discourses, it also provides evidence of the complexity of students' professional identity construction processes. Future investigation into VAS processes could enrich organizational communication's understandings of professional identity construction. Specifically, the field would gain an understanding of the ways these processes occur before people enter the workplace. Then, these findings could be used to inform research on professional identity construction within workplaces and occupations. For example, an examination of women engineers (e.g., Jorgenson, 2002) could be enhanced through an understanding of how young, academically gifted women make sense of discourses related to science, self, career, and so forth.

Findings such as those related above regarding the discourse of the entrepreneurial self, corporate colonization, and professional identity construction are not the only reasons for studying VAS. However, they do provide a glimpse into the richness of VAS processes. While vocational anticipatory socialization has not received much attention within organizational communication scholarship, this project's findings argue for its relevance. VAS processes are highly relevant to understanding how people construct work as meaningful and the ways career-related discourses are taken up, transformed, and resisted. Notions of work and career are salient to people long before they enter the paid workplace.

Dialectics of Control and Resistance

In addition to its exploration of vocational anticipatory socialization, this project adds to the burgeoning literature on dialectics of control and resistance. While organizational communication scholarship frequently has examined issues of control and resistance, often such scholarship has emphasized either control or resistance (Mumby, 2005). In examining

how career discourses operate dialectically, this project supports other efforts to problematize conventional understandings of control and resistance (e.g., Ashcraft, 2005; Kondo, 1990; Mumby, 2005).

As a case study of dialectics of control/resistance, this project examines how career discourses simultaneously foster control and resistance. Dominant career discourses have shaped the choices many students have made throughout their lives. The classes the students took in high school, the organizations they joined, the college they chose, the majors and minors they selected, and the summer activities they pursued were to some extent shaped by discourses of career. However, such control is not total. The same discourses that limit the range of appropriate choices also foster possibilities for agency and resistance. In this way, the dominant discourses and resistant ones are inseparable. Furthermore, the students' transformation of discourses for resistance purposes can often be read as partially reinscribing the status quo. By examining career discourses as dialectical, this project demonstrates the nuances such an approach permits.

Applied Implications

In addition to its implications for the organizational communication discipline, this project also has practical applications for people advising college students and those seeking to recruit college graduates. In this section, I address some ways the findings from this project can aid career advising efforts aimed at college students. Additionally, I discuss how these findings can be used to inform recruitment efforts for non-traditional career options.

Applications for Advisors

The experiences of the students in this project offer a glimpse into the ways cultural and familial discourses of appropriate work affect the choices students view as appropriate.

These findings can be useful to career counselors, mental health professionals, academic

advisors, educators, and parents who assist college students in making career decisions (all

such individuals will hereafter be referred to as advisors). Specifically, these findings argue

that advisors would serve students well by considering the salience of career to their advisees

and by helping advisees to examine the influences affecting their career decisions.

Consider Career Salience

Throughout this project as students talk about their career choices, they do so in a

way that places career as one part of their sense of self. Their families, romantic partners,

hobbies, spiritual beliefs, and so forth, also factor into their life/career choices.

Conceptualizing work and career as one aspect of life is an important consideration for

advisors. When advising students, these results emphasize the importance of understanding

the role work/career play in a student's life. Instead of presuming that career is of paramount

importance for a student, advisors would serve students well if they sought to understand the

salience of career for that individual.

Seeking to understand the salience of career for a student is emphasized in career

counseling theory. Specifically, Super's (1990) life span-life space approach acknowledges

the various roles one plays including: work, school family, leisure, and community. As

Hartung and Niles (2000) write,

> Although the work role certainly figures prominently in people's lives, it is not the
> only role that counselors should consider when working with college students or
> others. From a developmental perspective on careers, the work role is best perceived
> in terms of its salience or importance relative to roles played in other theaters, such as
> school, leisure, the community and the family. (p. 13)

However, career counselors may emphasize the role of student and worker to the neglect of

other roles (Hartung & Niles, 2000). In doing so, career counselors and other advisors fail to

understand the complexity of the student's decision-making process in which career is only one aspect of his or her identity. In cases where a student's career salience is not high, advisors' guidance and comments may not be well-suited to the student's needs. Instead, the advisors' comments may further marginalize choices that do not privilege work over non-work aspects of life. If the goal of career counseling is "to promote clients' abilities to create satisfying lives for themselves" (Krumboltz, 1996, p. 61), then part of this process is helping students understand their own priorities for what a satisfying life entails.

Assist Students in Examining Influences

In addition to highlighting the importance of considering career salience in assisting college students with career decision making, this project also emphasizes the need for advisors to consider the importance of significant others in students' decision-making processes. The participants in this project repeatedly discussed the numerous ways family, friends, teachers, and others affected their career decision-making process. This included direct statements about options others felt the students should pursue as well as indirect comments about career/life priorities and occupational status. This finding supports Krumboltz's Learning Theory of Career Counseling (Krumboltz, 1994). Krumboltz writes that people "tend to prefer an occupation if . . . a valued friend or relative stressed the occupation's advantages to them and/or they observed positive words and images being associated with it" (p. 19). Similarly, people "tend to avoid an occupation if . . . a valued friend or relative stressed its disadvantages to them and/or they have observed negative words and images being associated with it" (p. 19).

By understanding the importance significant others play in college students' decision-making processes, advisors can better assist the students. Career counseling researchers have

identified some specific techniques for addressing this issue. For example, Schultheiss (2000) recommends that career counselors ask clients to "identify the relationship that has been most influential in his or her career exploration and decision making" (p. 55). Then, the counselor facilitates the student's exploration of how this and other relationships have affected his or her decision-making process. Another counseling technique that might be used to investigate the role of significant others is to encourage students to discuss the options that they have eliminated from further consideration (Brown & Lent, 1996). Discussions of discarded options can be used to explore the experiences and beliefs that resulted in a student's disinterest. While these techniques have been advocated as part of formal career counseling, they can also be used informally by others who are involved in career-related discussions with college students.

In addition to the influence of significant others, students also discussed a generalized sense of societal expectations regarding appropriate and inappropriate career choices for college graduates. It is in this area that I believe this study has the most to contribute to the advising of college students. While career counseling research investigates barriers students encounter in making various career decisions, the effects of the mainstream culture receive little mention. Instead, most often cultural influences are discussed in terms of ethnic minorities (e.g., DeVaney & Hughey, 2000) and women (e.g., Rainey & Borders, 1997). While certainly it is necessary to examine the barriers ethnic minorities and women face in pursuing career options, this study identifies additional barriers that many college students may face, regardless of their sex or race. The dominant discourses of appropriate post-college choices articulated by the study participants are a barrier to certain career choices, such as non-professional occupations and lower-paying jobs. Students face constraints

regarding "using" their degree, selecting prestigious and well-paying jobs, advancing, and excelling. An examination of these discourses as a type of barrier would aid students' exploration of career options and allow them to choose more clearly in their own interests.

Applications for Employment Recruitment and Retention

In addition to assisting college students and those who seek to help them, this project also can inform organizational recruitment and retention efforts. Particularly, these findings could be used by organizations who want to recruit and retain people in occupations that are not aligned with the dominant discourses. For example, by understanding the ways college students resist the dominant discourses, organizations can develop recruitment strategies that appeal to resistant discourses. However, if students' beliefs as described in this project are widespread, recruiting recent college graduates into alternative occupations may be less difficult than keeping them there. Students articulated widespread agreement that alternative choices may be acceptable *if* they are temporary. The findings in this project could provide information for alternative organizations to aid in retention. By understanding the cultural discourses that marginalize certain occupational choices, organizations can acknowledge the stigma members may face in taking or keeping certain jobs. Similarly, by understanding the alternative career discourses people often take up in resisting the dominant discourses, organizations can reinforce those understandings of career. For example, a non-profit agency can ensure that its members have a clear understanding of the good outcomes their work is creating. This may provide sustenance for members who are resisting through a discourse a service.

Limitations & Future Research

This project provides an in-depth investigation into how a set of college seniors make sense of career discourses. As discussed above, this investigation has disciplinary and practical implications. However, in considering these findings, the limitations of the project must be acknowledged. The dominant discourses and responses to those discourses that I identify represent the experiences of a few students. I am not arguing that these findings are necessarily generalizable to other college students. Further, these conclusions are not the only ones that could have been derived from the interviews and focus groups. Instead, my own background and theoretical perspectives provide a particular lens through which I viewed the students' disclosures. In considering these findings, it is also important to note that the diversity of the participants in this project was limited in terms of geography, socio-economic background, and academic achievement. Future research could address how more diverse populations are socialized about work and career.

A second limitation to this project is that I structured the focus groups and interviews around a set of questions that presumed students experience career-related expectations. For example, I started the focus groups by asking students to list post-college options that would be considered appropriate for them and then to list inappropriate options. This activity structured the discussion that followed it. Therefore, I directed students to notice and highlight issues of career decision-making expectations. To avoid this limitation, future research could examine naturally occurring interactions. For example, studying young people's blogs for any mentions of work and career would allow access to career-related experiences that are not prompted by a researcher's questions.

Another limitation to this project, as well as one of the most important areas for future research, is the examination of the sources of career discourses. In this project I asked students about the sources of career expectations. This allows me to comment on the range of sources students identify. It also permits me to discuss the importance of family members in forming students' senses of what is expected of them. However, an investigation of the various manifestations of these discourses is outside the scope of this project. Possible areas of future investigation include: how career is conceptualized in elementary and secondary education; how popular media--including that directed at children--depict vocations; and how career counselors discuss life and career. In addition to examining institutional and mediated discourses of career, familial discourses need to be examined closely. The students in this project discussed familial expectations, but I only talked with students. A similar project involving parents would create a fuller picture of the ways families foster various career discourses.

In addition to considering the various communicative practices (institutional, mediated, and interpersonal) that contribute to career discourses, further research needs to investigate the material conditions that promote and privilege certain relations to career. Current scholarship, particularly that of Moen and Roehling (2005), provides a starting point for research into the ways contemporary healthcare, childcare, and career advancement structures create material constraints to alternative approaches to careers.

Research into the topics discussed above would enhance understanding about the complex meanings people bring to career-related decisions. Career choices do not take place in a vacuum. Instead, people make career-related decisions within a set of discursive and material conditions. Studying these conditions and how people make sense of them is critical

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if organizational communication scholarship seeks to understand not only communication

within the *workplace*, but also how people construct the meaning of *work*.

Appendix A

Recruitment Materials

Recruitment email (sent through the university's mass email system)

Subject: Are you a graduating senior? Want $10?

Are you a graduating senior?

Uncertain about what you?re going to do next?
Already have a plan?

Either way ? I would like to hear your thoughts and feelings about life after college (and there's $10 in it for you).

What: A research focus group. This will be an informal discussion of your thoughts about deciding what to do after graduation. Focus groups will last 1.5-2 hours and will take place on campus.

Why: You will receive $10 and food during the focus group. Also, your participation will help make a dissertation project possible.

Who: UNC graduating seniors who are 25 years old or less.

How: If you are willing to participate, or have questions, please reply to this email or call Teresa at (919)641-9004.

This study (COMM 05-023) has been approved by the Behavioral IRB as of 12/21/2005. This research is being conducted by Teresa McAlpine, a doctoral student in the Communication Studies department.

This email is sponsored by: Communication Studies

Math/Science Recruitment email (sent through the university's mass email system)

Subject: Science or Math Major? Graduating Soon? Want $10?

Are you a graduating senior majoring in mathematics, chemistry, physics or another hard science?

If so, I would like to hear your thoughts about life after college (and there's $10 in it for you).

What: A research focus group. This will be an informal discussion of your thoughts about life after graduation. Focus groups will last 1.5-2 hours and will take place on campus.

Why: You will receive $10 and food during the focus group. Also, your participation will help make a dissertation project possible.

Who: UNC graduating seniors studying math or science. Participants may be graduating anytime during 2006. Participants must be 25 years old or less.

How: If you are willing to participate, or have questions, please reply to this email or call Teresa at (919)641-9004.

This study (COMM 05-023) has been approved by the Behavioral IRB as of 12/21/2005. This research is being conducted by Teresa McAlpine, a doctoral student in the Communication Studies department.

This email is sponsored by: Communication Studies

Are you a graduating senior?

Uncertain about what you're going to do next?

Already have a plan?

Either way . . .

I would like to hear your thoughts and feelings about life after college **(and there's $10 in it for you).**

The Details

What: You are invited to participate in a research **focus group**. The focus groups will be informal discussions about **your thoughts and feelings about deciding what to do after graduation.** Focus groups will last two hours and will take place here on campus.

Who: UNC graduating seniors who are 25 years old or less.

Why: Your participation will help make a dissertation project possible. Beyond that intrinsic motivation, you will receive **$10** and **_all the brownies you can eat_** during the focus group.

How: If you are interested, or have questions, **please e-mail** me at **mcalpine@email.unc.edu** My name is Teresa McAlpine and I am a doctoral student in the Communication Studies department.

This study (COMM 05-023) has been approved by the Behavioral IRB as of 12/21/2005.

Life after college **Focus Group**

Life after college **Focus Group** mcalpine@email.unc.edu

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Appendix B

Consent Forms

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants – Focus Group
Social Behavioral Form

_____

IRB Study # COMM 05-023
Consent Form Version Date: __12/29/2005_____
Title of Study: College Students' Perspectives on Career

Principal Investigator: Teresa McAlpine
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Communication Studies
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-962-0012
Email Address: mcalpine@email.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Dennis Mumby

Funding Source: N/A

Study Contact telephone number: (919)641-9004
Study Contact email: mcalpine@email.unc.edu

_____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.
You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason,
without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help
people in the future.   You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research
study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this
information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.
You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above,
or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this research study is to learn about college students' thoughts and
experiences related to future career choices. This will include hopes and concerns students
have for the future as well as perceptions of societal and parental expectations about career
choice.

Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?
You should not be in this study if you are not a senior at UNC-CH who is planning to graduate by December 2006. You also should not be in this study if you are over 25 years old.

How many people will take part in this study?
If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 50 people in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?
The focus group will last approximately two hours. If you also consent for me to contact you in the future, I may ask you to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group. The follow-up interviews and focus groups will also be approximately two hours long. All focus groups and interviews will be conducted this semester (Spring 2006).

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be part of a small group discussion. The group will include three to five other college seniors as well as the researcher and a research assistant. After an initial writing exercise, the focus group will consist of a moderated discussion. Topics for the discussion include participants' post-graduation plans, parental and societal career expectations, and thoughts about appropriate career choices. During the discussion, you have the right to choose not to answer any question for any reason. The discussion will be tape-recorded.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?
Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There is minimal chance of risk in this study. The potential risk would be that through engaging in the focus group, you may experience additional stress regarding future plans. Even though we will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is conceivable that participants may repeat comments. Therefore, because we cannot guarantee the control of actions of study participants, and that no one will share your responses, we would caution you to be as honest and open as you feel you can without taking an undue risk. There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

How will your privacy be protected?
To protect your privacy, all participants in the focus group must agree to not reveal anything they learn from the group discussion. You will also select a pseudonym. You will not need to reveal your name. This pseudonym will be the only name attached to my notes or tape recordings. This form is the only document that will include both your name and your

pseudonym. It and other materials will be kept in a locked cabinet. In any reports or articles based on this research, you will be referred to by your pseudonym.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

The focus group will be digitally recorded. The recording will be downloaded onto a personal computer that is password protected. The recordings will also be burnt onto a cd and kept in a locked filing cabinet. The cd's may be kept indefinitely.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?
You will be receiving $10 for taking part in this study. If you withdraw from the study, you will still receive the money. You will receive refreshments during the focus group.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?
There will be no costs for being in the study.

What if you are a UNC student?
You may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at UNC-Chapel Hill. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

What if you have questions about this study?
You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

- -

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time.
I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ I agree to be contacted for possible participation in follow-up interviews or focus
groups with the understanding that I may refuse further participation if I so choose.

For any future publications and for use in research documents, I select the following
pseudonym (first name only)_____.

_____   _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants – Interview
Social Behavioral Form

_____

IRB Study # COMM 05-023
Consent Form Version Date: __12/29/2005_____
Title of Study: College Students' Perspectives on Career

Principal Investigator: Teresa McAlpine
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: Communication Studies
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-962-0012
Email Address: mcalpine@email.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Dennis Mumby
Funding Source: N/A

Study Contact telephone number: (919)641-9004
Study Contact email: mcalpine@email.unc.edu

_____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.
You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason,
without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help
people in the future.   You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research
study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this
information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.
You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above,
or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this research study is to learn about college students' thoughts and
experiences related to future career choices. This will include hopes and concerns students
have for the future as well as perceptions of societal and parental expectations about career
choice.

Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?
You should not be in this study if you are not a senior at UNC-CH who is planning to
graduate by December 2006. You also should not be in this study if you are over 25 years
old.

How many people will take part in this study?
If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 20 people in the interview portion of the research study.

How long will your part in this study last?
The interview will last approximately two hours.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you choose to participate in this component of this study, you will be interviewed about your thoughts and experiences related to your upcoming graduation and potential plans for thereafter. If you agree, the interview will be tape recorded. You may request the recording be stopped at any point and it will be. During the interview, you may choose to not answer any question for any reason.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?
Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?
There is minimal chance of risk in this study. The potential risk would be that through engaging in the interviews, you may experience additional stress regarding future plans. There may be uncommon or previously unknown risks. You should report any problems to the researcher.

How will your privacy be protected?
To protect your privacy, the pseudonym you selected during the focus group will be used throughout the interview. This pseudonym will be the only name attached to my notes or voice recordings. These materials will also be kept in a locked cabinet. In any reports or articles based on this research, you will be referred to by your pseudonym.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

The interview will be digitally recorded. The recording will be downloaded onto a personal computer that is password protected. The recording will also be burnt onto a cd and kept in a locked filing cabinet. The cd's may be kept indefinitely.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?
You will receive refreshments during the interview.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?
There will be no costs for being in the study.

What if you are a UNC student?
You may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at UNC-Chapel Hill. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research.

What if you have questions about this study?
You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

- -

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date

_____
Printed Name of Research Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix C

Focus Group Guide

Process: Explain project and consent form. After consent form is completed, give participants envelopes with incentive enclosed. Remind them that the discussion is tape recorded and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Do ice-breaker activity and introductions.

Guiding Questions:
1. Focusing exercise: You are all graduating in the next few months. On your paper, please list 5 things you could do after college that would be considered **appropriate for you**.

   List 5 choices that would be considered **inappropriate** for you.

   Then, please note by your choices where you think you got that idea from or who in your life would consider that choice inappropriate.

2. What are some of the characteristics of appropriate and inappropriate choices?

3. What would happen if you didn't do something from the appropriate list?
   Follow-ups: How would your family/friends respond?

      How would you feel telling people?

4. What if you did something on the inappropriate list?
   Follow-ups: How would your family/friends respond?

      How would you feel telling people?

5. What if you do choose something on the appropriate list?
   Follow-ups: How would your family/friends respond?

      How would you feel telling people?

      If the following choices haven't come up, ask how they fit in:
         Graduate school, Law school, moving home
         Hourly/non-advancement oriented job that you enjoy & pays enough to live on
         Service work (Peace Corps etc.)

      Do you feel any sense of *obligation* to choose something on this list or something similar? Like you owe it to someone/something?

6. Do you ever worry about disappointing your family/teachers/friends or not living up to what they expect of you?

7. In what ways do you think their expectations have affected your choices? About coming to UNC? Your major? Your future plans?

Explain project in more depth – Researching what college seniors think and feel about their future careers, what expectations they perceive from others and how they respond to those expectations.

8. With that brief explanation, what other thoughts come to mind?

9. We've talked about what plans are better. How important is it to have a specific post-college plan? To have an answer to the "what are you doing after graduation" question?

        Follow-ups: How do you feel if you don't?

                       What do you say if you don't?

                            How does that seem to go over?

                            Ever make something up? Lie?

10. Those of you who have specific plans, how do you feel about them? How do other people respond to them?

        Follow-ups: Do you ever feel like you have to defend your choice?

                            When?

                            How do you defend it?

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Process: Explain project and consent form. Ask permission to tape record. If permission is given, start tape recorder.

Guiding Questions:

1. Thanks again for participating in the focus group. What did you think about what was said there?

2. To start, can you just tell me about yourself in terms of how you chose UNC, your major, your future plans etc.?

(today I just want to ask a few more questions)

3. As graduation is getting closer, what are your thoughts about finishing college?
    a. Are you nervous? If so, about what?
    b. Are you excited? If so, about what?

4. How are you feeling these days when people ask you what you're going to do?
    a. What do you say in response?
    b. How does that response seem to go over?

5. If the responses to question 2 reveal the student has a fairly specific plan:
    a. How do you **feel** about your plan?
    b. When did you decide on it?
    c. What led to your choice?

6. If the responses to question 2 reveal the student does not have a fairly specific plan:
    a. How do you feel about not being sure what you'll do next?
    b. How do you explain your situation when others ask? Family? Friends? Instructors?
    c. Ever make something up?

7. We talked at the focus group about choices that might be considered appropriate or inappropriate.
    a. What sort of things do you think people expect you to do after graduation?
    b. Why do you think those are the choices they expect from you?
    c. How do
        - academic success
        - family background/class
        - race/ethnicity
        Factor into what is expected of you?
            What else factors in?

<div align="center">- religion</div>
<div align="center">- doing as well/better than parents</div>

8. Do you ever find your self judging or wondering about other people's choices?

9. Critical incident visualization: I'd like to try something different for a moment. If you'd close your eyes and remember back to a moment when you were very aware of a career choice someone expected you to make or not make. Notice what the situation was. Notice who was involved. Remember how you felt. What came to mind?

10. Can you think of other incidents in which you were encouraged by teachers or parents towards or away from certain possibilities? If so, what were your experiences?
    a. What about in choosing a college?
    b. What about in choosing a major?

11. Do you ever worry about disappointing your family/teachers/friends or not living up to what they expect of you?
    a. What expectations are you afraid of not meeting? Financial? Status? Family? Location? Service to others? Happiness?
    b. Do your parents or siblings' choices affect what is expected of you? In what ways?

12. If it was legal, you were paid "well" and you enjoyed it, are there choices you couldn't make in your family/friends' eyes?

13. You are 50 years old and you consider yourself a success. Describe your life to me.

14. On a slightly different note, have you had any interaction with the University Career Center?
    c. What types of interactions?
    d. What happened?
    e. How did you feel?

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