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Work and Career Experiences of Men from Families without College Experience

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A dearth of research exists exploring the career and work development of adult men and the influence of family-of-origin on that development. In this qualitative study, the researchers used a phenomenological approach to examine the career and work experiences of men whose parents have no education beyond high school and the influences of family on these experiences. We describe five constituents: (a) what work is like; (b) preparation/education; (c) who or what influenced them; (d) how to act at work; and (e)challenges/opportunities/choices; and one essence: mottos from father, which articulate the meaning of the experience of work and career and the family influence on the experience. In conclusion, we provide implications for counselors working with adult men whose parents lack post-secondary education. Keywords: first-generation, work, career, family influence, men

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Early career development research focused almost solely on white, college-educated males from moderate socioeconomic households (Sharf, 2010). Researchers (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008; Whiston & Keller, 2004) later found, however, that contextual factors such as parent education level, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as gender, dramatically impacted career development. Researchers are now focusing on a more varied group of male participants, the subjects of this study, but research is still fragmented (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Two foci, in particular, warrant further investigation. First, family-of-origin issues seem to affect later career development in men (e.g., Marks, 2008; Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007), but more information is needed. Second, parent education level directly affects college attendance and completion (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), and many people from low-education backgrounds are from low-income or ethnic minority households (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Information on this population, however, focuses almost solely on adolescents and college students. In an attempt to add to the broader career research agenda related to males and parent education level, the purpose of this study is to explore the career and work experiences of men whose parents have no education beyond high school and the influence of family on those experiences.

The Influence of Family on Career

A few studies examine the effects of family-of-origin on men. Hartung, Lewis, May, and Niles (2002) linked cohesion in family-of-origin to more investment in current

family roles but found no relationship between family-of-origin, and later, vocational identity. A study of young adults entering the information technology field noted that parents' messages about work in general during childhood directly affected their later view of career (Messersmith, Garrett, Davis-Kean, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). Schoon, Martin, and Ross (2007) discovered that parent socioeconomic class and educational expectations for their children directly influenced later career paths in men. In their analysis of the career paths of males from high-crime, low-income neighborhoods, Wiesner, Vondracek, Capaldi, and Porfeli (2003) found that participants who experienced current employment difficulties also experienced social problems and family distress during adolescence. Their results highlighted the link between family-of-origin and societal influences on later career development. Marks (2008) also identified family-of-origin as a direct influence on career development of men, specifically related to parent education level and occupational status. Two other studies examined parenting style related to career. Feldt, Kokko, Kinnunen, and Pulkkinen (2005) noted that parenting style and parent socioeconomic status indirectly affected later career stability in men, while Lease and Dahlbeck (2009) found that attachment to fathers predicted later career decision self-efficacy in males. Overall, family-of-origin appears to influence career and work in adult men.

Men Whose Parents Lack Postsecondary Education

One sub-group of men being researched is those whose parents did not attend college. Most of these studies focus on first-generation college students, or students who continue their education but come from families without postsecondary experience. These students are more likely to come from lower income households and represent an ethnic minority (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Research indicated that parents' education level influences a host of decisions and experiences including career choice (Helwig, 2008; Kniveton, 2004; Whiston & Keller, 2004), identity development (Orbe, 2004), and overall college experiences (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). These students are more likely to struggle while in college (Collier & Morgan, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008) and are less likely to complete their college experience (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Clearly, being the first in the family to attend college is challenging for many students.

A few studies examined differences between K-12 students from non-college educated families and their peers. Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that seventh graders from families without postsecondary education had lower college-going self-efficacy, perceived more barriers to college-going, and perceived less educational support from family than did their peers from college-educated families. Additionally, they noted gender differences, with male students from low education families having lower self-efficacy beliefs and perceiving more barriers to college-going. Similarly, Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, and Davis (2006) surveyed ninth graders and noted differences by parent education level, with students from low-education families indicating less likelihood they would attend college than their peers from families with college coursework. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) noted similar differences in high school students, including less perceived family support. Parent education level appears to affect career and educational planning.

Despite the substantial amount of literature on first-generation college students, less is known about the post-college work and career experiences of adult men whose parents did not attend college (Whiston & Keller, 2004). In their comprehensive review of the literature on career influences, Whiston and Keller only found five articles in a 20-year time span examining family influence on adults, only one of which was specific to men, and none focused on parent education level. Parent education level and the role of family-of-origin influence on later career development seem salient, but more information is needed for practitioners to truly help students who would be the first in their families to attend college. We sought to better understand career development in diverse men, specifically in men from low-education backgrounds, and we wondered about family-of-origin influence on this group. Using a phenomenological approach, our areas of inquiry were: (a) What is the meaning and essence of the experience of work and career for men whose parents have no education beyond high school and (b) What is the meaning and essence of the influence of family-of-origin on the experience of work and career for men whose parents have no education beyond high school? We considered both the experiences of work and career and the influence of family on those experiences as a single phenomenon.

Methodology

This study used the phenomenological method to richly and deeply describe the career and work experiences of men whose parents lack postsecondary education. The phenomenological method explores the experience of participants as it is lived in every day life with the objective of describing the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The focus on the essence of an experience provides a unique perspective. While other qualitative approaches contribute a description or in-depth understanding of people's stories (narrative analysis), of cultures of a group (ethnography), or of a bounded case or system (case study), phenomenology seeks to understand the element or structure of a phenomenon. The philosophy of phenomenology is based on the assumption that there is an essence or meaning of a commonly shared experience across different individuals (Merriam, 2009, p. 25; Patton, 2002, p. 106).

Trustworthiness of the Data

To address trustworthiness of the data, the authors used the method and analysis suggested by Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2002). First, we named and set aside the researcher frame of reference (Moustakas, 1994). Second, we provided a rich description of participants' experiences. Third, we used triangulation in the analysis of the data with iterative independent and group negotiating of meaning (Patton, 2002). The nature of qualitative research depends upon the inherent biases of the researchers, the interviewer's skill level in eliciting rich descriptions from participants, and the willingness or lack thereof of participants to discuss their experiences. The process of examining the data is ongoing, and therefore without a concrete endpoint.

Participants

Researchers based participant selection upon two criteria: the participants' experience matches the research question and the participants' willingness to talk about that experience (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). In other words, participant characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status varied among participants who met research criteria (Creswell, 2009). In this study, participant criteria included gender (men) and family-of-origin (parents without postsecondary experience).

The male participants came from a larger group of 17 participants, 11 of whom were women. Researchers distributed flyers to faculty colleagues and posted them on bulletin boards throughout the campus and the community. We made a purposeful decision to analyze participants by gender, so only the men's interviews provide data for this study. Six males responded to the flyer: four Caucasians and two African Americans with ages ranging from late 30s to early 60s. Educational background varied, with one participant having a master's degree, three participants with bachelor's degrees, one with a high school diploma and a welding certificate, and one with less than a high school diploma. Two of these men currently worked in maintenance for large organizations (one as supervisor); one worked as a home repair business owner; one worked in sales; one worked as a television writer/producer; and one participant taught science. For their full participation, participants received a $15 gift certificate.

Procedures

Prior to beginning the research study, the authors articulated their interest in and attraction to the research topic to help identify preconceived notions about their topic. The first three authors analyzed the data and wrote the manuscript. The first author comes to this topic primarily from an interest in phenomenological inquiry as a way to understand more deeply the experiences of others. The second author has an interest in first-generation college students and was looking to continue research on this population. The third author's interest comes from work with first-generation college students and the influence of parents' education on the career and work experiences of adults.

Phenomenological interviews typically consist of a limited number of open-ended questions designed to elicit the fully lived experiences of each participant (Wertz, 2005). In our study, two specific questions were asked, followed by prompts to draw out details. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and started with the question: "Tell me about your career and work experience – how did you get to where you are now?" The researcher then encouraged participants to provide additional details about their experiences using prompts such as "tell me more" and "give me an example of that". Following responses to the initial question and subsequent prompts, the interviewer followed by prompting, "Tell me about the influence your family has had on your career and work experience." After the completion of the audiotape sessions, each tape was transcribed and sanitized to remove identifying information.

According to Sharf (2010), work is defined as a "purposeful activity to earn money or other reward and possibly to produce a product or service to others," whereas career is a more general term describing the "roles individuals play over their lifetime" (p. 3). We used both terms interchangeably in our interviews to create an easy

understanding of what we were asking of the participants. Because of the phenomenological methodology used in the study, however, participants defined these terms in their own ways. We provided no information to them that might alter their perceptions of these terms.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis adheres to the phases outlined by Moustakas (1994) and Wertz (2005) for phenomenological research. A description of the three phases of phenomenological analysis follows.

Phenomenological reduction and epoche. When studying a life experience, the researcher approaches the analysis with curiosity and a sense of exploration, accepting the uncertainty of the research process (Wertz, 2005). The researchers maintain sensitivity to participants and their world and develop empathy for them while gaining new understandings. To obtain a fresh perspective, each of the researchers described his or her prior awareness of the research topic by taking part in a bracketing interview (Wertz, 2005), where each researcher participated in an interview paralleling the participant interview. Together, the first three authors analyzed their bracketing interviews and depicted themes. For the first author, emergent themes included support from parents, lack of support from parents, working hard, and struggling to balance family and work responsibilities. For the second author, themes that emerged included importance of education, parental support, and work-life balance. For the third author, emergent themes were hard work, being ethical, and persistence. During the data analysis process, we talked about the ways our own experience might have affected our understandings and asked each other about evidence for emergent themes as a check for individual biases.

To begin the analysis we established meaning units, or the focus of a given part of the conversation. We read aloud each transcript and marked when the focus shifted. Additionally, we viewed each meaning unit as having equal value, an approach known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, we read the individual transcripts individually and suggested meanings and themes in the text. For each participant we listed possible meanings and themes; we also developed written summaries for each, focusing on what happened and how it happened. Summaries included how the possible themes related to the whole of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). We determined we had reached saturation. Saturation occurs when data analysis reveals no new understandings or themes of the experience (Creswell, 2009). For this study, we found no new themes after analyzing the first five transcripts. We reviewed the sixth so as to strengthen our experience of saturation.

As part of the triangulation process (Patton, 2002), we then met together to develop a negotiated set of themes for each participant and reached an agreement for the description of individual experiences. We conducted seven rounds of independent analysis, each followed by a group meeting to create sets of themes across the six participants, before we agreed on the core of the experience. A second part of triangulation occurred as participants were contacted and asked to review the themes and provide feedback. No participant responded.

Imaginative variation. Next, we returned to the themes and supporting data and asked, "What does this information tell us about the meaning of the experience of work and career and the influence of family on the experience?" and "What perceptions or understandings of work and career and influence of family does this suggest?" We studied the relationship between themes, what the experience as a whole looked like, and differences between individual descriptions and the contexts in which they occurred. This process allowed us to identify an overarching essence of participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005).

Findings

We begin the discussion of our findings by describing how the participants told their stories as if each aspect was an unfolding *chain of events*. Next, we introduce five themes, *what work is like, preparation/education, who or what influenced them, how to act at work,* and *challenges, opportunities, choices* that describe the meaning of the experience of work and career and family influence, We discuss the commonality or essence of *mottos from father*.

Chain of Events

As we read the transcripts, a theme emerged related to how participants told their stories. As they conveyed their experiences, each linked one event with another event. This pattern emerged without our prompting for chronology or connections. For example, as one participant described his college experience, he indicated, "I left college to take a position with my dad's business as plant manager because his plant manager died suddenly at work one morning." Another explained how he began his work as a writer for a prestigious cable series. "Kind of happened by accident. . . . I happened to be standing right there next to the secretary [when the production manager called] . . . and she said, 'Hey do you want to talk to these people?'" Even though many of the links related to "being at the right place at the right time", they included having the necessary skills and experience to do the next job offered. Phrases such as "one thing led to another" and "getting ready" for the next job exemplified the description of the connections between experiences that make up work and career.

Themes

What work is like. As participants talked about their work and career, they described their work, their feelings related to work, and the salience of relationships at work. Descriptions of work included telling about the actual work (e.g. supervision, production, travel). Participants portrayed work environments as stressful, fun, competitive, constantly changing, boring, interesting, and challenging. Each varied their descriptions about work depending upon the setting itself. For instance, one participant described his first job as competitive and challenging. His second job was stable and his third had just the right amount of challenge. The emotions related to jobs ranged from "hating it" to "enjoying the fact . . . that it was different everyday."

When participants talked about what work was like they included their experiences with others and described those relationships. Relationships linked to work meant different things to each of the participants. For example, for one participant, relationships at work meant having friends; for another it meant taking care to be positive and provide support. Each participant told at least one story about personal connections or the lack of them as related to what work is like. For instance, one participant remembered traveling to "retail markets, big flea markets, all over the country" and sitting around every evening and talking with folks from varied places. For this participant, his time with the individuals he met on the road was significant. One outcome of building good relationships was the trust that developed. One participant stated, "I have to keep a fine line . . . to know how to manage those [older] and manage the young college kids working on our front end. . ." He then talked about how management trusted him to supervise a range of people, since he had people skills. Relationships for him meant trust; trust was essential for him to perform his job.

Preparation/education. Each participant described the details of preparation or education that supported his work and career experience. Preparation included skill development, earlier job experiences, and personal characteristics that supported work and career. The fact that he built a "wide range of management skills" for one participant became key to his current job success. Not being prepared for work and career explained two participants reduced opportunities for employment or advancement.

Education did not necessarily support the work and career experiences of the participants. One participant followed his brother's footsteps as a machinist, but he ultimately chose another occupation. Two others indicated their college education did not help them in their chosen work and career. One stated, "I don't know that I can say particularly one class or any part of my education that really prepared me to do what I'm doing right now, because I don't think it did…" Conversely, two participants showed how college study related to work and career. One described going back to school to prepare to teach; he changed work and career from engineering and business to high school teaching. Education allowed him to "find his bliss." For this participant he needed the education if he was going to enter a new field.

Who or what influenced them. Influences on career and work manifested themselves in terms of people. Five of the six participants talked about the influence of the father; for the sixth participant who grew up without a father, his brother, as a father figure, and sister provided support in his activities related to work and career. Each of the participants spelled out how the father's (or brother's) behavior and interaction affected them. This influence is described in more detail in the essence, *mottos from father*. Relationships, especially spouses and children, affected choice of work. The spouses, for four of the participants, provided support for their work. One participant stated, "So just out of necessity when she changed careers, [we decided] I would change." For two other participants, a divorce meant a time to change jobs and directions. Three of the participants talked about the responsibility of raising children, making time for them, and choosing jobs that allowed them to spend more time at home. One stated, "I have to grow up in a hurry" after the birth of his first child. For this participant, work meant something different to him after becoming a father.

How to act at work. Each of the participants talked about the behaviors, attitudes, and values that were important to success at work. This included how to treat others, a strong work ethic, and demonstrating honesty and integrity. All six participants recounted ways in which they learned to treat people with respect and kindness. One participant stated what he learned from watching his father: "[He] sat in the workshop with the men and had lunch with [them] just like regular people." Another participant talked about "going out of his way to . . . help the custodian, the secretaries . . . and my students."

The strong work ethic participants described meant "working hard," "doing the best that you can do," and doing "quality work". Working hard encompassed working "long hours," "trying harder," being "driven," "not missing any days," "work is . . . first and foremost," and "being a go-getter". For many of the participants working hard began at home early in their lives. Two traced their work ethic to their life on the farm and one remembered, "We worked hard all of the time." For the participants, work ethic began with watching their fathers or listening to them; the working hard continued in their own lives.

The participants imbued notions of honesty and integrity as they talked about their work. Being responsible meant that others could count on them. "When they give me a job . . . They already know it [sic] going to be right." "I want to do a good job . . . don't want to do half." It also included continuing to learn and develop new skills as work demands and needs changed. One outcome of their work ethic and commitment to honesty and integrity was the trust others expressed. Another outcome was personal pride in their work. One participant summarized his work ethic by stating, "It teaches you to do the best you can, regardless of what you get paid, always take pride in yourself . . ."

Challenges, opportunities, choices. As each of the participants described his work and career experiences, challenges and opportunities presented occasions for choices. Challenges included difficult work experiences ("I realized that selling cars was not what I wanted to do the rest of my life . . . I hated so many aspects of the gray areas of the truth"), changing job circumstances ("This other company merged with us [and I was out of a job]"), and changing life circumstances ("When you have your second child . . . you know you need to be home more."). The participants did not plan the opportunities that emerged for work and career, but they welcomed them. In response to choices, whether they sought the choices or they "just happened", participants evaluated them. Making choices became a time to consider their current situation, skills, change of goals, or preferences.

Limitations were part of the experience. One participant, recognizing the difficulties with his work, contemplated teaching history. He was planning ahead just in case he might have to change his career. Other limitations included not wanting to take a job requiring traveling, turning down a high-stress job, and not wanting to be in sales. Participants discussed limitations and then talked about other options. For example, one participant focused on the lack of options after he completed college. So he looked at other opportunities for work. "When I left college . . . I graduated with a 3.74 . . . it means squat . . . I began to seek another career, so I took at job in a manager in a [type of] store."

The Essence

We describe the essence, or underlying message, of the career and work experiences of men whose parents have no education beyond high school and the influence of family on those experiences as *mottos from father*. The essence captures what the whole of the experience is for the participants; for many individuals their understanding of the essence is tacit and for a few it is explicit. Table 1 presents the mottos from the father for each participant, describing the motto and the way in which it influenced the participant in the participants' words. Also included is our conceptualization of the mottos.

Table 1. The Essence: Mottos from Father

Participant	Motto	Researcher Theme	Ways It Influenced Participant
#1	"The effort he put into making his business successful, that influenced what, how I run my business. The effort, the fact that people liked my father, they trusted my father, they knew that he was a man of his word and if he said he was going to do this, he did it."	Hard work Being trustworthy Respect	"I've still got customers that I started out with 15 years ago . . . they are still calling me . . . if you have to advertise you aren't very good." "If you do quality work you should be in demand." "People trust me to do this . . . this is their home . . ."
# 2	"As far as actual impact, my dad when we sat down we had a conversations we talk and to this day about how proud he is that I've decided to do that [work hard in school and work while in school] . . . that I'm not just went out and taken the first job y'know without any experience . . . the talks and lead by example."	Work hard Get work experience	" I had strong influences that were able to push me forward . . . I could have very easily [said] 'well I don't want to go to school . . . my parents didn't go to school . . ." "I worked even through college . . . I worked 30 hours at the gym . . . it kept me active kept me going."
# 3	"You take pride in yourself no matter what and that's what daddy taught me, see all though he went to the 3rd grade . . ."	Take pride in your work	"I wind up doing jobs like this cause I didn't get no education . . . low paying jobs . . . teaches you to do the best you can regardless of what you get paid . . .

	"He you know he believed in doing even if you digging a ditch or whatever you do the best you can . . ."	Do the best you can	take pride in yourself." "I try to pay my bills."
# 4	"But whenever I think about him good things about him…kind of find your bliss you know just you know you got to work but don't do something that you are going to be miserable at just so you can draw a paycheck."	Do what you love	"I don't know maybe I will . . . teach history one day 10 years from now when I get tired of being on the road 120 days out of the year . . . I don't think I want to do this forever . . . I'm never going to be a supervising teacher because I'm not that ambitious. I don't care to work 100 hours a week."

These six participants described the advice their fathers (or sibling) gave them and the things they learned from observing their fathers at work. We designate both advice and observation as *mottos* in the present discussion. Mottos permeated the experiences of work and career conveyed by the participants. It most directly related to *how to be at work*, with the sense of being a good worker appearing in four of the mottos from the father. The lessons learned from the mottos also appeared in the other themes. For example, participants often described *what work is like* in relationship to how well it fit with their perspective on work, again based on their mottos. *Challenges and opportunities* led to *choices*, again related to their view of work based on lessons learned from their fathers. The *influence* of the father represented much of the total discussion about who affected their career and work experiences.

Overall, each participant alluded to a primary male figure as highly influential in their career choices. Not only did they include the mottos, but they also described ways the motto influenced their lives. For example, the mottos related to how to be at work directly connected to their actual work behaviors; alternatively, a participant who heard the motto about doing all jobs well described turning down a position because he felt he lacked the necessary skills to do it well. In all cases, the mottos directly related to how these participants thought, felt, and behaved at work.

Discussion

We used a phenomenological approach to examine the work and career experiences of men whose parents lack postsecondary education and the influence of family on those experiences. The six participants represented many of the typical characteristics of adults from families without postsecondary experience. Typical of low-education families, several participants came from low-income households (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), several mentioned family responsibilities interfering with their

educational and career choices (Bui, 2002; Pascarella et al., 2004) and the majority mentioned difficulties navigating college, including lacking general college knowledge, being uncertain about how to select a college or major, or needing a role model of college success (Collier & Morgan, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008). Of the five men who went to a postsecondary program, three entered directly after high school, with the other two taking time off or attending part-time. Additionally, four of these five participants described difficulties navigating college, including lacking general college knowledge, being uncertain about how to select a college or major, or needing a role model of college success. Also, all six participants connected school with work, and three specifically mentioned that their education did not provide them with the financial rewards they had assumed would come with a college degree. The participants appeared representative of what we know about the influence of parent education level on career development. Throughout our analysis, we identified similarities across their experiences and perspectives about work, which we believe are related to being men from low-education families.

Several important concepts are worth noting, including father influence, current family influence, the role of education, and the desire for personal meaning in work. For our participants, it is apparent that fathers influenced them greatly. The essence of *mottos from father* related to how participants learned about the value of hard work. These lessons permeated their overall perspective on work, including their work ethic, relationships with colleagues, leadership skills, and overall feelings about the work they do. In most cases, however, participants were unaware of the depth of this influence. The influence of family on career development is well-documented in the literature (e.g., Marks, 2008; Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007; Whiston & Keller, 2004). For these six adult men from low-education backgrounds, however, it appears that fathers are the primary influence on how they view career and work, even though they may not be aware of the depth of the influence.

Related to the messages received from their fathers, the pride these men felt about their work also was important. Pride in work, regardless of the type of work, relates to the concept of work ethic. Miller, Woehr, and Hudspeth (2002) described work ethic as a learned, multidimensional construct relating to work in general and referring to beliefs and attitudes about work. Beliefs about work include the importance of all work, working hard, delayed reward for work, fairness and justice, self-reliance, and working productively. Examining just the aspect of work importance, ter Bogt, Maaijmakers, and van Well (2005) found that work ethic is modeled and taught to children by their parents as part of an overall social perspective. Additionally, they noted that parents from lower SES and lower educational backgrounds are more likely to present a strong belief that all work is important, which is subsequently passed along to their children. The participants in our study demonstrated these beliefs about work and clearly learned them from their fathers.

Current family status also appears to affect career choices. For the four men with families of their own, these new relationships affected their career plans and decisions as well. Spousal support seemed important to these men. Additionally, their view of work changed with the arrival of children. They felt a financial responsibility to provide for their children, but also a moral responsibility to be positive work role models for them.

These results mirror previous research on fathers providing financial and emotional support to their families (e.g., Carr, 2005; Roy, 2004).

These men saw education as a means to an end; they went to school for practical reasons such as financial reward and career attainment. In several cases, however, the participants were unable to link their college experiences to their current jobs, which was disappointing for them. Previous studies on first-generation college students (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) support this finding. For example, in a recent study of reasons why college students choose a specific career (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007), participants from low-income families and all of the male participants were more likely to value career for financial reward or prestige.

Most of these men found personal meaning in their work only after being in the workforce for a long time. Nearly all mentioned the importance of being happy or personally satisfied with their work now, but expressed that this had not been the case early in their careers. Several participants discussed actually changing careers completely in order to feel more fulfilled or intrinsically content through their work. Other researchers document this desire in career changers as well. For example, two studies (Donohue, 2006; Oleski & Subich, 1996) surveyed adult career changers and found they were changing to careers that better matched their work personalities and interests, an example of intrinsic desire versus external reward.

Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

Practitioners

For career practitioners, these results reveal the need to focus on paternal influences on career development. Male clients may be seeking counseling because of the disconnect between the types of messages received from their fathers, such as working hard or doing what you love, and the realities of the current economic hardships facing the country. For example, they may fear being able to support their families even though they are working hard, or may be forced to keep or find jobs that do not represent their interests in order to put food on the table. Counselors may need to help clients discover where these work beliefs arise from (i.e., their fathers), and encourage them to determine alternative ways of viewing their current situations.

The results suggest other important issues for counselors to address as well. For males with families, counselors can explore how their spouses and children affect their career choices. They can build upon feelings of financial and moral responsibility by increasing spousal connections and acknowledging clients' needs to be role models for their children. Also, counselors can help these clients acknowledge and embrace the changes that having a partner and children created related to career choice. These men may not be fully aware of the impact family has on decisions related to travel, workload, and income. Discussing these issues during counseling may help these men understand how personal and work choices are interrelated.

Because these men directly link educational choices with future career plans, career counselors can be aware of this perspective on education and work within it, rather than promoting the concept of education for personal growth or enrichment. For example, these men were surprised that college did not necessarily lead them to financial and

career security, while those who did not have a college education noted this lack of education as the reason for their career insecurity. Perhaps counselors can help clients recognize that although college can help with career options, it does not always lead to financial security or direct career rewards. Proactively addressing this fact with men from low education families may help them have reasonable expectations related to their educational experiences.

The men in our study recognized the importance of personal satisfaction with career only after being in the workforce for an extended period. It is possible that men from low-education families might be served by exploring personal meaning in career earlier in their lives; this might create greater satisfaction in their early careers and increase feelings of empowerment over career, something these men lacked. For example, several participants described their career experiences as happening to them, with external forces driving job changes. Perhaps exploring meaning-making using a constructivist approach or explaining planned happenstance via Happenstance Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 2009) would help empower these men to embrace intrinsic desires when selecting a career path.

Researchers

As mentioned earlier, research on parent education level, gender, and other contextual factors is still emerging. Findings from this study suggest several new avenues for exploration. First, researchers could explore common themes in father mottos among large groups of men to add to the information on this topic. Learning more about the specific types of influence from fathers could help expand this finding. Second, researchers might examine what being a role model means for men from low-education backgrounds. This is particularly salient for men with children. Our participants mentioned the importance of continuing the influence of the father to the child related to work and career. Third, researchers can work with prospective first-generation college students to help them be better prepared for and have an increased understanding of college (see Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Determining what type of concrete information is most helpful and conducting longitudinal research on educational and career choices would be particularly important.

In summary, this study qualitatively examined the career and work experiences of men from low-education backgrounds and the influence of family on those experiences. Multiple themes and an overarching essence were identified as representing these career and work experiences. Men from families without college experiences have unique and specific work experiences that seem to be influenced by their family background. Both counselors and educators can use the results to better assist this population with their career development needs.

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