

Call Me, Maybe?

Student-Parent Value Differences and its Effects on their Communication

Karen Berglund, Michelle Pluth, and Kristen Svoboda

Abstract

Our research seeks to examine how students' values differ from the values their parents maintain and how students navigate communication with their parents considering the differences in these values. Through interviews of various college students at a small, private liberal arts college in Minnesota, our research looks at the quality and quantity of students' communication as well as their political and religious values in comparison to their parents' values. Our study found that parental communication does not necessarily affect student values but, rather, value differences between students and their parents tends to affect and possibly limit communication.

Main Points:

- What influences student-parent communication
- What influences student-parent communication, who initiates contact, and shifting power dynamics results
- Differences in parents' and students' religious values
- Cultural transmission's effect on political and religious beliefs
- Higher education's effect on religious beliefs
- Differences in parents' and students' political values
- Subculture theory
- Cultural transmission and differential associations theory

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Abstract

Our research seeks to examine how students' values differ from the values their parents maintain and how students navigate communication with their parents considering the differences in these values. Through interviews of various college students at a small, private liberal arts college in Minnesota, our research looks at the quality and quantity of students' communication as well as their political and religious values in comparison to their parents' values. Our study found that parental communication does not necessarily affect student values but, rather, value differences between students and their parents tends to affect and possibly limit communication.

Introduction and Literature Review

Students come from somewhere. There are a plethora of factors that influence the existence, status, and success of students that often go overlooked by those who seek to understand and work with college demographics. The relationship that students have with their families, and especially their parents, have substantial implications on the greater realm of student lives. We began this investigation after discussing how the different ways in which we communicate with our parents has uniquely shaped our college experiences and the values that we maintain. Much research has been done that examines the dynamics of student-parent relationships. Primarily, these studies focus on the transitional period that occurs for students as they move away from full dependency and cohabitation during high school to a more independent lifestyle in college. The student-parent relationship has a longevity to it, though, that has lasting implications beyond this simple transition period. The relationships that students maintain with their parents

during the entirety of college have been studied much less frequently and with rather inconclusive results.

Freshman year is a particularly unique year for college students in a variety of ways, especially the way the college transition affects student-parent relationships. One article by Bers and Galowich (2002) that addresses the freshman year experience, entitled *Using Survey and Focus Group Research to Learn About Parents' Roles in the Community College Choice Process*, found that parents expect to be closely involved with their progeny's college education. These expectations, which sometimes take the form of desiring grades to be sent home, notably violate the Family Education and Privacy Act. Bers and Galowich also found that parents tend to have high expectations for their children. Often times, these expectations are unreasonably high given the realities of college attendance and the actual academic capacity of the student. These dual expectations of the parents leave many of them feeling as though the college should make a greater effort to connect and inform them, especially considering their role in paying for college tuition (Bers and Galowich, 2002).

Another study entitled *Conflict Management Styles, Family Communication Patterns, and Electronic Screen Media Use among First-year College Students*, conducted by Ssu-Yun Chen (2010), found a connection existing between family communication patterns and the use of electronic screen media among college students. Specifically, Chen found that first-year college students coming from families in which familial conformity is highly valued significantly increased their use of electronic screen media upon their arrival at college. In contrast, freshmen from families who value open and honest conversations spend a similar amount of time on media before and after

attending college. On average, first-year college students from families that make decisions based on consensus and that embrace a plurality of expressions, displayed tendencies of relying less on electronic screen media than their peers do, while students from laissez-faire styled families tend to use media on a more consistent and less varied basis. Students from protective families were found to have the most significant increase in reliance on technology upon their enrollment in college (Chen, 2010).

Changes in communication and independence from parents can prove to be challenging for many students. These challenges regarding mental health were addressed by Kanter and Renk (2009) in her article, *College Students' Affective Distress: The Role of Expectation Discrepancies and Communication*. In this article, the authors examined the relationship between the discrepancies of parental expectations of communication with their college-aged child and affective distress experienced by the student. The results of this study suggest that there is a notably strong relationship between the way in which college students perceive problems in communication with their family and the way in which students experience depression and anxiety. With this data, researchers saw that parental communication habits influence the mental health of college students (Kanter and Renk, 2009).

Additionally, researchers Larose and Boivin (1998) addressed the changes in communication that occurs when students go to college entitled, *Attachment to Parents, Social Support Expectations, and Socioemotional Adjustment During the High School-College Transition*. In this study, students were found to be more secure in their identities upon attending college. This perceived experience of increased security in their identities is notable considering that students who left their families for college also experienced

lessened perceptions of social support, and greater feelings of loneliness and social anxiety (Larose and Boivin, 1998).

A study on the relationship between family closeness and self-regulated learning discovered a positive correlation between familial closeness and the students' ability to learn on their own and to adjust to college. The study's findings were based on considerations in terms of attachment theory and overall college performance. These findings make sense considering that close families produce independent and self-assured offspring (Hamman, 2007).

In their research titled *The Relationship Between Attachment to Parents and Psychological Separation in College Students*, Walter Buboltz and Jonathan Shwartz (2004) found a link between attachment and psychological separation from parents for both male and female undergraduates. Additionally, for both genders an association was found between psychological separation anxiety and incidences of low trust in paternal relationships. Buboltz and Shwartz also found that male students place importance on not losing the strength of their paternal bond. Because male students put so much importance on this paternal bond, the researchers speculated that college students must assert their independence in a way that does not break the trust of their fathers. Buboltz and Shwartz theorized that high trust in parents may symbolize reliance or dependence; therefore, low trust may be necessary for separation (Buboltz and Shwartz, 2004).

In similarly gender-focused research, Michael Williams (2012) investigated the gender difference in the relationship between gratitude and family satisfaction among college students in his research titled *Exploring the Relationship between Gratitude and Family Satisfaction Among College Students*. The findings illustrated that a significantly

positive relationship exists between gratitude and family satisfaction, but that no significant difference was found in the relationship when compared between the genders. Thus, students who feel grateful tend to stay in communication with their parents more so than less grateful peers, but this gratitude is experienced equally between the genders, much to the surprise of the author (Williams, 2012).

Lastly, technology is a definitive force in the lives of the younger generations, including current college students. Notably, technology has enhanced the ability and ease of college students to maintain communication with their parents. In research titled *Extending Family to School Life: College Students' Use of the Mobile Phone* researchers Chen and Katz (2009) examined the pattern between college students' cell phone usage and the cell phone usage of the family members at home, and to what degree it affects their college experience. Their findings suggest that the mobile phone may be described as an "umbilical cord" between college students and their families, especially students and their mothers. Furthermore, the findings suggest mobile phone communication between college students and their families fosters stronger student-parent relations (Chen and Katz, 2009).

Additionally, in an article titled *College Students' Use of Electronic Communication with Parents: Links to Loneliness, Attachment, and Relationship Quality*, Gentzler (2011) and Oberhauser examined the reliance on technology and the ramifications of the form of communication used on relationship and adjustment abilities with their parents. The researchers confirmed the positive aspects of technological communication in their study and found that phone conversation between students and parents is best for the emotional stability of the students. College students who reported

more frequent phone conversations with their parents also reported having more satisfying, intimate, and supportive parental relationships. Furthermore, the students who use social-networking sites to communicate with parents reported higher levels of loneliness, anxious attachment, and conflict within the parental relationship (Gentzler, 2011).

Setting/Community

Our research was conducted at St. Olaf College, a small liberal arts college of the ELCA Lutheran Church located in Northfield, MN. 3,176 undergraduate students were enrolled as of the fall of 2012. With nearly 95% of students living on campus and the majority of the rest living near campus, the student body is mostly geographically independent from their parents. The students living on campus reside within 9 dormitories and 18 honor houses. Students often experience relative independence from their parents when they go to college, except for the authority of what St. Olaf calls Residence Life - a group of students and staff that “assist residents in establishing respectful, cooperative communities. Through a variety of activities and services, they work toward developing a community atmosphere that is conducive to study and socializing” (www.stolaf.edu). As of the Fall of 2012, 49% of students are from Minnesota with the top other states being Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa, all from the Midwest region. This shows that the majority of the St. Olaf student body attends school fairly close to their families.

We chose to interview a relatively varied group of students; relatively varied in that they are all associates of the interviewers. The participants in the interviews range from sophomores, juniors, and seniors. By excluding freshmen, we had the ability to

examine the more evolved nature of student-parent relationships at St. Olaf College. In addition to being in different grades, our interviewees come from various academic, socioeconomic, gender, religious, and geographical backgrounds.

Methodology

Our data was collected via in person interviews with thirty students who are currently enrolled at St. Olaf College. We chose to interview students one-on-one rather than via focus groups to avoid potential conflict among participants, as politics and religion – topics that come up in the interviews – can often become a volatile discussion. The interviewees were contacted through word of mouth or through emails sent to department or organizational aliases. The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes each and were conducted between one researcher and one interviewee on a personal basis. They took place in April 2013, the middle of the Spring Semester for St. Olaf students. Interviewees were informed that their participation in our research was completely voluntary and that they could choose to refrain from answering any questions for any reason. Steps, such as keeping only locked digital files of the notes of the interview, were taken to ensure the confidentiality of those who were interviewed. Another step taken was to remove any identifying characteristics of our interviewees from our write up of our research. From our notes of the interviews, we conducted group conversations that focused on general trends and themes as well as specific meaningful quotes in order to analyze our findings.

While a variety of students were interviewed, we recognize that our sample may not be representative of the St. Olaf student body at large. Though the interviewees come from diverse backgrounds, we cannot claim a representative sample because the size of

our sample was fairly limited (30 people) and many of those that we recruited were our acquaintances, friends, or involved in common organizations and areas of study. These similarities may be reflected in some ways in the data that we collected. The familiarity that we had with many of the interviewees likely had an impact upon the answers they gave. On the one hand, many participants felt comfortable speaking with the researcher because it felt more natural and casual than it would have felt if the interviewer had been a stranger. But, friendship dynamics may have also skewed responses in ways that are difficult for us to detect. Additionally, many of the interviews took place in public spaces, such as the Cage (St. Olaf's College's on-campus cafe) where being surrounded by peers is not uncommon. This setting may have limited the honesty of responses from our interviewees. These limitations prohibit us from making generalizations from our work onto the greater St. Olaf community. Nonetheless, our research provides an important qualitative look into the relationship between parents, students, and values on campus. There is great potential for further work to be done based upon our research.

Our research questions sought to elicit conversations addressing several topics: communication frequency, content, and quality between students and parents, political and religious values held by parents and students, and factors that influence these varied realms of life. The interviews consisted of two short demographic questions and twenty open-ended questions. These questions consisted of the following categories: communication between parents and students, family dynamics, changes in dynamics, family values, the effects of values on students, and student values and changes in values. Our interviews began with questions about student-parent communication and then moved on to ask about values and familial influence. This organizational strategy allowed

the interviewee to become comfortable talking to the researcher about their family before moving into topics that may be a bit more personal. This intentional order of questions may have primed interviewees to look at the connection between communication with their parents, or lack thereof, and the way they perceive the foundation of their own values. Despite minor flaws in our research methodology, our research effectively allowed us to gather information about varied students and to find wide variance in their responses.

Theory

Regardless of the responses that our interviewees gave us about the values that they did or did not share with their parents, it was evident that all students felt a deep tie to their family. This deep seated connection is brought to light through the sociological lens of social constructionism, which looks at the ways in which people ascribe meaning to things, people, and events. Social constructionism acknowledges that the meaning we attribute to specific things is not inherent or natural, but rather the result of arbitrary associations that our society emphasizes. To say that these associations are arbitrary, though, is not to say that they are not deeply significant or meaningful to members of a society. Our society puts a great deal of emphasis on the concept of family. We tend to value families, especially traditional families (nuclear, biological, heterosexual) as the building blocks of our society, essential for our existence. This emphasis functions to draw deep connections between the identity of individuals and the families from which they come. Thus, even people who are not close to their family feel a certain degree of connectedness with the family unit from which they come.

All behavior is learned. As children, we learn a specific set of values and beliefs from our parents. From the perspective of the cultural transmission and differential associations theory, the age at which values are learned results in the continuance of said values. The intensity of the relationship between the learner and teacher also has a great effect on the strength of the values. The theory predicts, however, that the frequency of contact with the learner also impacts their future beliefs. In college, students are withdrawn from their parents, the most significant influence on their values thus far, and instead are surrounded by a multitude of individuals with a wide range of varied values. By strengthening relationships with individuals who have values outside of their learned ones, college students have a greater likelihood of deviating from the values of their parents.

Subcultural theory explains that a person may be a member of a subculture with a certain set of beliefs that seem normal but from a larger perspective, their beliefs could be considered deviant. By viewing a family as its own subculture, a student who goes to college becomes part of a larger community and has a greater chance to view their previous culture as deviant. At the same time, the college that a student attends can also be viewed as a subculture of society. This theory argues that in a smaller community in which everyone has similar established beliefs, a new member of the subculture has a great chance of conforming to these beliefs and viewing them as normal while the previous subculture becomes irrelevant. Subcultural theory illuminates a potential reason for why many college students report having conflicting values to those of their parents. These conflicting values can cause strain on students as they seek to navigate multiple roles that often call for a diverse skill set.

Another useful theoretical lens for making sense of the data we collected, especially in terms of the content of the conversations that students have with their parents, is the concept of discourse, as presented by Foucault. This form of analysis, which looks critically at the way in which language impacts understanding and conversation impacts the power dynamics within relationships, is explicitly useful in understanding the different ways in which students approach conversation with their parents. Because students are at a time of transition between dependency and independency, the power dynamics of conversations with parents can be widely variant and difficult to navigate. For this reason, some students follow rather stringent scripts in their conversations with their parents, addressing topics that are non-confrontational. This script is one type of discourse established between students and parents in an effort to avoid conflict. Other students report radically different discourses in which conflict is frequent and sharing of personal information rampant. This form of discourse, when pushed by the student, can be seen as an effort to rearrange the traditional power dynamics that existed between the student and parents in times past. This discourse, when pushed by the parent, may be seen as an attempt to maintain the already established power dynamics that often exist between students and parents. Whatever the method, our research makes it evident that students and their parents are engaged in some form of power dynamics that directly affects their communication patterns.

Another theory that can be useful for understanding the data collected by our research is dramaturgy. Analyzing social interaction in terms of a performance metaphor, dramaturgy looks at each individual as an actor and each setting as a unique stage with other onlookers functioning as the audience. This theory is useful in understanding much

of the tension between students and parents that our research uncovered. Through this lens, it is easy to see students as actors who perform primarily on their college campus, but who are also required to perform for their parents when they are in conversation with them. Recognizing that these two venues can often be radically different, students may be called to act in widely variant parts in these two realms. This disconnect can have the effect of causing tension between these two realms or could potentially cause students to avoid having to step out of their main stage, campus, with any degree of frequency.

Finally, Bowen's theory of differentiation of self is especially useful in understanding why some parents have a strong impact on the values of their student while others have a much lesser impact. This theory looks at two variables: the pressure that a particular group asserts, and the susceptibility of an individual to be influenced by group thinking. The more differentiated a person's sense of self is, the less likely they are to be influenced by the pressures of a group. This theory is particularly useful because the family unit is arguably the most fundamental type of groups that an individual experiences. Our data clearly shows that some family groups assert significantly stronger pressure to conform to agreed-upon family values than other families exert. Our data also shows that students are at various stages in regards to forming a differentiated sense of self apart from their family. These variances lead to students who have a range of self-confidence levels.

Findings and Analysis

The responses that our interviewees provided us with varied significantly from person to person. However, upon careful analysis, the data began to show certain trends. The trends and exceptions that were especially notable are detailed below.

After several initial questions that sought only demographic and shorter answers, the interview questions moved to more meaningful questions. For example, we asked the respondents to consider the following question, “What do you think influences the amount you communicate with your parents?” Their answers indicated that most students initiate conversations with their parents for several reasons. These reasons include limitations on time that existed because of students’ busy schedules, pressure from their parents to communicate, and instances of seeking out assistance from their parents. One female senior reported feeling pressure from her mother to communicate when she said, “She [the student’s mother] is lonely and loves me and wants to call me to check in and update her. It’s a reassuring mother goose sort of impulse that she has to be in touch with her chicks every week.” In contrast, a different senior female bases the amount she communicates with her parents on the degree to which she likes her parents. She reported feeling validated as an individual by her parents and appreciating their feedback. Overall, the interviewees gave varied reasons for level of communication that they maintain with their parents.

Despite these diverse responses, almost all of the students reported initiating communication with their parents. Using Foucault’s concept of discourse, we are able to see the ways in which power dynamics change in student-parent relationships when students are the ones initiating communication. Power is shifted to some degree from the parent to the student, challenging the traditional power dynamic the parents and students had previously maintained. We suspect that this shift may contribute to some tension experienced in communication between students and their parents. As students grow older it makes sense for them to desire more power within their relationships.

The next question led students to reflect on the ways in which moving away from home affected their relationships with their parents. Several students indicated that the more indirect forms of communication that they used in college, such as texting and emailing, enabled them to feel more independent and confident when relating to their parents. Students who reported this experience also indicated that they experienced more pushy and controlling aspects of their parental relationships while they were living at home in high school. A senior art major expressed how her relationship has morphed through the change in communication caused by going to college, she said “My relationship with my parents has changed significantly since coming to college. I sort of forced my individuality and independence in high school. Now I have much more appreciation for them. I value them more as people separate from their parenthood. I still wouldn’t change a thing about how they raised me.” The distance that college provided this student allowed her relationship with her parents to grow to a more mature form.

Further into the interviews we delved into the subject of religious beliefs and practices. This subject was breached by asking the student participants how they would describe their parents’ religious beliefs/practices and in a separate question, their own personal religious beliefs/practices. Many of our interviewees maintained some of the beliefs that their parents had taught them, but also experienced changes in belief or changes in the importance they placed on these beliefs. These changes manifested themselves in differing religious practices between parents and students. In general, students reported being less religiously inclined than their parents. For example, one senior male respondent who has an ordained pastor for a father says the following words regarding his own religious practices: "they are pretty non-existent. I don't know if I

believe. I don't think about it much. I let my life take the way as it does. I don't think it impacts me either way." This general trend in irreligiosity among students may be indicative of the reality that generationally our age group is significantly less religious than older generations. Another student explained how religious beliefs are much less extreme than her parents' beliefs. Her parents were previously members of the Mormon Church who believe in predestination. She remarked, "They think this interview we're doing right now was planned before I was born. We had this discussion during a game of Yahtzee and I just don't agree that the Yahtzee I rolled had been set up for 22 years. Their Calvinist thing -- the layout of our lives being fulfilled -- I disagree."

Two respondents deviated from this major trend by reporting being more religious than their parents. One, a senior male, describes the ways in which he attempted to gain approval from his mother by becoming "the poster child of the Lutheran Church". He described his relationship with religion by saying, "my mom is all JESUS JESUS JESUS but she never acts like Jesus. So, I try to actually live my faith in my daily life but not talk about it too much." The other student, a junior female, became religious when she came to college but describes her mother as non-practicing.

One potential explanation for this trend could come from the ways in which higher education, especially liberal arts education, affects religious beliefs. Studies show that the more education one receives the less religiously zealous they tend to be (Hill, 2011). A senior male interviewee reported on the way in which his time at St. Olaf and abroad affected his beliefs. He said, "I gained more tolerance, exposure, and education throughout interreligious dialogue." This behavior can be described best by cultural transmission and differential associations theory. As students develop close bonds with

people outside of their family, they have a greater chance of becoming involved with individuals who hold different religious beliefs. Because relationships are significant and meaningful, they often cause people to expand their worldview. The strength of these new relationships have the potential to change, or at least expand, the students' held religious convictions.

In addition to addressing religious values, we also sought to understand the political values of parents and students. We approached this topic by asking questions about the political inclinations and involvements of both parents and students. Several interviewees reported having similar political values to their parents during high school but found that through the college experience, their politics became more liberal. In fact, the majority of students did report having the same political views in high school as their parents but experienced changes in their political beliefs, especially in regards to social issues, during their time in college. These changes primarily were a move from conservatism to liberalism. Regardless of these changes, most students acknowledged that their parents' political beliefs continue to have some influence on their own political beliefs. One female senior student exemplifies this parental influence. Her experiences shows that, for her, her parents have more influence on her political ideology than the college culture had. Because of her parents' influence, she actually became more conservative when after attending college. This unique experience came about because her mother, who she described as liberal, worked at her high school. The student felt that because of her close proximity to her mother, she too identified as a liberal. Similarly, her father works here at St. Olaf and she describes him as a conservative. The student said she sees her father relatively often and because of that, defines herself as a conservative.

A notable exception to the norm of parental influence on political beliefs comes in the form of a male student who claims to have reacted against his parents' conservative ways. He said, "I'm independent. I affiliate with the green party. Jill Stein for president 2016. Socially liberal, fiscally liberal. I did not vote for Obama because he was too conservative. Environment, gun control, education, less military, health care for all. I like socialism, capitalism is bad now. Government should be giving more money to animal shelters. I don't actually care about abortion." The subject of the politics surrounding abortion came up in another interview when a female senior said, "My mom thinks abortion should be illegal, I disagree. I think she believes that mostly because she can't have babies anymore and I think she's sad about that."

The changes towards liberalism were most frequently experienced by students who came from more conservative family backgrounds. These students expressed the ways in which they felt a lack of exposure to liberal ideals before attending college. As they became more informed, they became more liberal. The liberal culture at St. Olaf does not go completely unchecked, though. Two respondents reported becoming more weary of the often ill-informed liberal culture that prevails on campus. One senior male student discussed this discontent by saying, "College has made me more jaded. I had more faith that people were making their own decisions rather than just hearing it and believing it. Liberal because this is a liberal campus. It drives me nuts. Use your brain. Acknowledge the reason and talk about it."

The liberalization of students at St. Olaf can be explained by the subcultural theory previously mentioned. By being removed from a politically conservative family and transferring to a larger community such as St. Olaf, in which political beliefs are

varied but primarily liberal, a student has a greater chance of deviating from the political values held by their parents. Consequently, the student is likely to view the values their family holds as deviant and is likely to conform to the values held by the culture of their college. Ultimately, like the theory states, most of our respondents reported seeing the values of their parents as less relevant than before. Furthermore, the change in values students experience when going to college explains the difficulty students face as they seek to navigate the different roles among their diverse environments.

After finding that many students experienced a change in values upon attending college, we wondered how influential the college environment was in particular to this change. A senior chemistry major explained how his trip on the Global Semester greatly influenced his values, mainly religious. “Studying Buddhism, it really became a way of life. I became more tolerant and investigated other religions. Studying science also changed what I believe to be more realistic. Now, I’m more Buddhist than Christian, but mostly agnostic.” St. Olaf helped one female senior to think complexly, “College really helped me to step back and view religion critically. Now I’m less apt to submit to just one belief.” It is unclear if these experiences are unique to St. Olaf or if they are typical among undergraduates of a variety of institutions.

Students with different values from their parents’ tend not to communicate these differences. The majority of our interviewees refrained from discussing topics that may cause a strain in their relationship with their parents. A female senior describes how the difference in the definition of success has changed her relationship with her parents. “They want me to live in corporate America and get a high-paying job and wear a suit and tie every day. They want me to make a lot of money and also be happy. And I want

to live in Costa Rica in a small hut. I don't need a high-paying job to consider myself successful, I just want to do what I love." This student initially distanced herself from her parents because of their difference in values but has since come to a place of stable but restrained communication with them. Similarly, a senior male described how his differing values now affect his relationship with his parents when he said, "There are a lot of topics I can't talk about with them. I have to hide my passions which really limits conversation. I also can't talk about my friends because my friendships bug my mom." An example of communicational divide stemming from perceived religious differences comes from another female senior student who identifies as religious but not as religious as her parents would like her to be. She says, "My mother questions if I'm a Christian, saying things like, 'Are you completely Godless?' She really wants to talk to me about her spiritual life, to testify to me and missionize me. I feel pressured. It is certainly a divide. I want to be there for her, but I don't have an ability to respond the way she wants me to. We're definitely less close because of it."

While several of our interviewees experienced a decrease in direct communication due to conflicting values, a greater trend showed that the majority of interviewees experienced some minor difference in values but did not regularly communicate these values. We see two possible reasons for the occurrence of this trend: relative distance leaves less inclination to discuss hard-hitting issues, or, alternatively, students understand fundamental differences in the values of themselves and their parents and choose to put them aside for the good of their relationship.

Attachment theory is a useful tool for understanding why students are willing to avoid self assertion for the benefit of the student-parent relationship. According to this

theory, the bond between a child and their caregiver, which is established out of a need for security and provision as a child, continues to be experienced as a necessary and important factor in an adult progeny's life. Because the bond is highly valued, students are willing to go out of their way to preserve it. This desire to preserve the student-parent relationship is exemplified by the interviewees who expressed that they had put aside value difference when conversing with their parents.

Parents and students experience a plethora of different dynamics during the college years. Our interviewees reported significantly varied experiences in regards to their family dynamics and personal values. Factors such as shared or not shared values and levels of communication affect the ways in which parents and students relate to each other while the student is at school. These relationships during college continue to be influential post graduation from college. To examine the ways in which students predict that their relationship with their parents will continue into the future, we asked each interviewee the ways in which they imagined their parents will influence their plans after graduation.

While several students did not report feeling much pressure from their parents in terms of future plans, many of them do desire to live close to their parents in the future. Other students did report feeling pressure from their parents on their future plans and talked about their desire to make their parents proud. Interviewees said, "I mean, I want them to be proud of me. Who wouldn't want that?" And, "I really want to make my mom proud of me. But, she will be proud of anything I do." Further, many student interviewees reported that their parents are willing to support them after college. Interestingly, though, these students were generally appreciative of this support, they also

expressed a desire to gain independence after college. A few students plan on refusing to let their parents have an influence on their post-graduate plans. One particularly strong respondent answered "God help me, they will not", when asked how his parents' will influence his future plans.

This reluctance to continue to rely on parents may stem from a desire to change power dynamics. As Foucault described power dynamics surrounding discourse and relationships, it is not difficult to see the ways in which parental support gives parents a feeling of significant power over their child. According to the theory, reliance allows for subordination. Therefore, many students feel as though they must become independent from the aid of their parents in order to establish a more balanced power dynamic in the relationship.

Summary and Conclusion

Data can be tricky and correlation does not necessarily equal causation. While we attempted to structure our research in a non-leading way, it is fairly evident that our desire to find an interesting story affected our early research. We originally sought to identify the ways in which parental communication affects the values of current college students and imagined that student-parent duos that communicate often would have common values. This assumption is complicated by the complex reality in which relationships function. For example, it would be difficult to determine if students have similar values to those of their parents' because they communicate often with their parents or if students communicate often with their parents because they share similar values. Even then, the relationship is further complicated by other non-value related factors that are also discussed and lived out in the relationship. We cannot assume that all,

or even most, conversations between students and parents address values. In fact, our data suggests the opposite.

While this finding was not what we were expecting, it does illuminate an interesting trend in the relationships between parents and college-aged offspring. The vast majority of our interviewees gave answers to questions that indicated that they do not frequently discuss values, and especially conflicting values, with their parents. In fact, the majority of interviewees who held conflicting values to the values of their parents did not indicate much communication or desire for communication surrounding these differences. It seems that an avoidance of conversation about potentially controversial subjects is used as a means of maintaining the health of student-parent relationships.

The willingness to forgo an assertion of personal values on their parents in order to maintain a peaceful relationship could arise for a variety of reasons. It seems to indicate a valuing of non-confrontational and more surface level relationships with parents over a more genuine but potentially conflict-ridden one. Based on our observations of students' willingness to meet the needs of their parents in terms of communication medium and style, we can also anticipate that students make this compromise in self proclamation because they perceive their parents' needs to favor this mode of relating to each other. It is possible that students think that their parents would prefer to not know about their differing values for the sake of peace.

While this lack of meaningful conversation surrounding values enables student-parent relationships to exist, often with little tension, it does have an affect on the quality of the relationship. It is tempting to think that students value their relationship with their parents over their other values, but the data indicates only a valuing of peace in the

relationships, not necessarily the relationship itself. Even if conflicting values do not take a toll on the levels of communication in the relationship, it would seem that they do cause a degradation to the relationship on a different level. Because it seems unlikely for a relationship to be of a meaningful quality without any expression of personal values, it seems as if conflicting values, and the reduction of self-presenting discourse that they create, negatively affect the majority of student-parent relationships.

This finding also suggests that parents are not the primary influence on college students' values. While our student interviewees perceived themselves as aware of their parents' values, as compared to parents' awareness of the student's values, this awareness does not seem to cause the student to also identify with the values of their parents. For the most part, the students we interviewed were more likely to identify with the political and religious environment of St. Olaf over the environment of their home values. One might conclude, then, that there are a variety of factors that influence the values that college students identify with and hold closely.

Ultimately, we found that St. Olaf college students have a range of experiences when it comes to relating with their parents. Students' stories of parental relationships help to illuminate a variety of the pressures and influences that students experience beyond the classroom. This research can be employed as a useful tool to help college faculty and staff recognize and understand students on a more multidimensional level. With this understanding, faculty and staff could help students navigate student-parent relationships, potentially changing values, and the new ideas that students are constantly encountering.

Further research could develop our work in a variety of directions. In seeking to understand the dynamics of familial influence on values, it would be useful to interview parents, in addition to students, about the communication of values that occurs between these two groups. Or, in looking at the way in which liberal arts institutions affect values, it would be useful to note the type of schooling that parents have and to observe whether parents who have a certain educational background tend to have more similar or more different values than their child who is currently enrolled at St. Olaf College. Research that addresses the ways in which communication and values change over the four years spent at school and the ways in which different majors influence values would also be interesting to investigate. With our research in mind, students and parents can strive to establish relationships that enable them to experience the fullness of human flourishing.

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