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"College is Mandatory in Our Family": A Study of Homeschooler Anticipatory Memorable Messages about College

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“COLLEGE IS MANDATORY IN OUR FAMILY”: A STUDY OF HOMESCHOOLER
ANTICIPATORY MEMORABLE MESSAGES ABOUT COLLEGE

by

Gina S. Reynolds

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
School of Communication
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Thesis Committee:

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“COLLEGE IS MANDATORY IN OUR FAMILY”: A STUDY OF HOMESCHOOLER ANTICIPATORY MEMORABLE MESSAGES ABOUT COLLEGE

Gina S. Reynolds, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2020

Homeschooling in the United States provides many children with a unique educational background that may present different perspectives when considering college attendance. This thesis examines the memorable messages homeschool students received regarding college, where these messages came from, and the perceived impact they have on the student. Memorable messages are easily recalled words that participants receive from others, which they believe has an impact on their attitudes and decisions (Cranmer & Myers, 2017). This study also looks at the messages homeschool students received from the media and the effect these have on their college choices. A qualitative study gathered reports of the nature, meanings, and effects of memorable messages and analyzed the content through the lens of control theory and sense-making. A purposive and snowball sample of graduated homeschool student participants were recruited online via homeschool Facebook groups. The results of this study inform homeschool parents, college admission offices, along with current and future homeschool students about how homeschoolers make college-choice decisions. Results of this study also further the body of research on memorable messages and help to further the research on the need for the proposed theory of memorable messages.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential part of every child's development. In the United States, while most children go to a school, some families chose to provide an education at home for their children. This homeschool education has some differences from the way the majority of children receive education in the United States. This study will look at this unique demographic and analyze the memorable messages these former homeschool students received before making their college decision. The study will ask participants to recall a memorable message given to them and answer questions regarding these messages. Memorable messages are messages people receive and store in their long-term memory (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). These messages are often used to help the individuals form attitudes, ideas, and chose actions.

Literature Review

The demographics of homeschoolers can be challenging to determine. Some researchers suggest that the community can be hard to define (Ray, 2017). Homeschoolers could have been in public, or private schools for some of their schooling, and at other times at home for schooling. Some students could be homeschooled their whole life. Many homeschoolers are also taking advantage of opportunities to blend with public schools (Thomas, 2019), which further blurs the line between a homeschool student, and a traditionally schooled student.

Though it is difficult to determine the exact number of homeschooled students it is clear that the numbers are on the rise (Watson, 2018). These students come from a variety of religious, ethnic, political and economic groups (Ray 2010; 2014; 2015).

Some of the things often attributed to homeschoolers are that they are academically superior; however, may lack socialization skills. Research shows that though they are at least equally successful as their peers, they may not be superior (Sutton & Gallway, 2000). Regarding their socialization homeschool students seem to do as well as or better than their non-homeschool counterparts (McCulloch, Savage & Schmal, 2013; Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012).

It seems clear that most homeschoolers, however, are well prepared for college, and successful at college (Cogan, 2010; Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Payton & Scott, 2013; Ray, 2016; Synder, 2013; Yu et al., 2016). Because homeschoolers do well at college, they have received attention from some colleges (Kelly, 2015). These are students that some colleges desire to have as part of their student body.

Because homeschool students have different exposures to academics, the messages they receive about college may be different from other messages other students receive. Memorable messages are a way to understand what information the students are receiving regarding the college decision and what impact it may have on them. Memorable messages can be used by students to make sense of their situations.

Sense-making allows the students to take messages they received and make connections to their observations and beliefs, allowing them to assign reasons to their actions (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012). This sense-making, along with the framework of memorable messages, is a tool that participants used to have an impact on their choices regarding college.

Other studies involving college students have used memorable messages to understand how family socialization occurs and examine how students make decisions (Cramer & Myers, 2017; Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012; Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris & Shepherd,

2006). Parents often use their words to impact and direct their children. Students recalled parent messages of expectations, warnings, advice and support.

Another source for messages is the media. Some studies have found that some of the messages participants report are from the media rather than personal messages (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Though media may not be the primary channel for memorable messages it remains a source for some students. These media messages may contribute to their sense-making about college.

Many studies use memorable message as a stand along framework to examine received messages, but others incorporate other frameworks to aid in the understanding. The concept of sense-making (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012; Barge & Schlueter, 2004) is used with memorable messages to gain insight into how the students process and act in response to their messages. Some other studies have incorporated control theory as a way to understand how participants act on their messages (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Smith & Ellis, 2001). Still, others have proposed a new theory of memorable messages (Cooke-Jackson & Rubinsky, 2018).

Research Questions

These findings in literature lead to the proposal of the research question asking what messages to homeschool students receive about attending college? Further, who do these messages come from? What actions do college students report enacting as a result of recalling these messages? Moreover, what messages from media do homeschool students receive about attending college?

Methods

In order to investigate the research question, homeschool graduates were found by using snowball and purposive methods through online support groups. Participants were directed to an

online survey instrument to answer open-ended and scaled questions regarding the recollection of a memorable message about college. Demographic information was also gathered from participants.

Once data collection was complete, answers were analyzed, and open-ended questions were sorted and coded by thematic analysis. Coding revealed themes for both memorable messages and media memorable messages.

Participants were all homeschool graduates ranging in age from 19-37. Most of the participants had been homeschooled their whole life (median 10.69 years). Most of the participants were in college or had attended at some point (88%).

Results

Results show that homeschool graduates had received a variety of messages regarding college before making their college decision. The themes discovered as salient were Expectations, Success in Life, Financial Concerns, the College Experience and Support. Media messages found Quality of the Message, Atmosphere of College, Necessity of Going, and Costs and Funding as salient themes. Most students believed that their memorable messages impacted their choice regarding college (88%). Students also believed that their media message had an impact (51%) though not quite as strong as with the personal message they received. The majority of the students also reported their messages to be positive.

Discussions

This study adds to the body of research on memorable messages and homeschoolers. Themes discovered were similar to other studies about memorable messages and college students. Because all participants in this study were homeschool graduates, it is challenging to

know what differences there may be from a message received by the non-homeschool peers of these participants.

It is clear that the messages these students received made an impact on their choices, and it would seem from the high percentage of students who had either gone to college or were in college now that the impact may have been to attend, though not all of the messages received encouraged college attendance. Many students felt that the messages they received were positive and helpful to them in making their choices.

More research is needed to gain a better understanding of who the homeschooler is and what differences they may have from traditional students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Each fall, families across the United States send their children back to school. However, some families choose not to send their children to school but instead instruct them at home. These families want to educate their children at home for many different reasons. Homeschool students are taught primarily by their parents, who may or may not have college experience themselves. Many homeschool students go on to college and adjust to the academic and social challenges that this change brings.

The purpose of this study is to examine the messages homeschool students received before deciding to go to college and use the results to inform parents and institutions of higher learning. This study will add to the scholarship on homeschool students and further our understanding of the significant impact that anticipatory messages have on homeschool students. Much of the research on the homeschooling population to date has contained more quantitative information. While this quantitative research is helpful in understanding part of who homeschoolers are and some of their qualities, the picture is not complete. This qualitative research will give more in-depth insight into some of these homeschool graduates and the choices they make regarding the college decision. The research on homeschool students' anticipatory college messages will add to the body of research on memorable messages, sense-making, control theory in tandem with memorable messages, and homeschoolers. It will be meaningful for parents and educators to gain insight into the way homeschoolers navigate the college choice.

In the first section, I will describe the homeschool student and what characterizes them by citing the limited current literature surrounding this movement. Next, I will look at the body of research on sense-making, memorable messages, and theories to discuss their uses and usefulness to my study. In the third section, I will pose the research questions I answer with this study. Finally, I will discuss how participants were recruited, and how data was collected and analyzed.

Homeschool

One problem with studying the homeschool community is defining that community. Ray (2017) pointed out that more study needs to be conducted while carefully asking each participant how much homeschooling they have completed in order to get a better picture of who the homeschooler is. Much of the research on homeschoolers is dated as the homeschooling movement changes rapidly. In 2010, Ray, for instance, defined the homeschoolers as one whose schooling has been 51% parent-led. Is there a difference between homeschoolers for life or homeschoolers for one year? Is there a difference between the homeschool student who has been 100% parent taught as opposed to only 51%? Most research to this point only classifies families as homeschoolers if they educate at home, but few have asked for how long or how. Acknowledging the changing landscape of homeschooling, Thomas (2019) pointed out that homeschoolers are taking advantage of many opportunities to blend with public schools and the distinctions and the classification of “homeschooler” is getting harder to define. What does seem to be clear is that the choice to homeschool is becoming more popular.

Number of Homeschoolers

According to Watson (2018), it is difficult to determine just how many homeschoolers there are. Each state has its regulations, and it is difficult to say if homeschoolers are complying

with reporting requirements, even in states where it is a requirement. Compliance issues are primarily due to the extended adversarial relationship homeschool families have had with government-run schools (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Another consideration is the fluidity of homeschooling for some families. Isenberg (2007) indicated that although 3% of the K-12 population are homeschooled at any one time, somewhere between 6-12% have at some time in their K-12 experience have been homeschooled. It is not uncommon for students to spend some years in a public or private school and some school years as homeschoolers. What is also not clear is what numbers may have changed in the 13 years since this study.

Despite the potential problems with data in the homeschool segment of the US population, researchers concluded that homeschooling as a choice continues to be on the rise (Watson, 2018). Watson found this after examining the data from McQuiggan, Megra, and Grady (2017), who reported that homeschooling was in a recession. Part of the inconsistency has to do with some of the problems mentioned above in calculating homeschooling numbers. Watson (2018) went state by state and showed growth in most states, although still leaving open the possibility that homeschooling experienced less growth than it had in previous years. In the past, Ray stated homeschooling is arguably the fastest growing educational form of education (Ray, 2004). Estimates are that 3.4% of all school-aged children received their education at home (Redford, 2012). In 2010 it was estimated that there were over 2,000,000 homeschool students (Ray, 2011).

Homeschoolers represent people from a variety of backgrounds. Many times, the perception of homeschoolers is that they are religious, conservative, white, and academically superior (Paulson Special, 2010). Although some of these stereotypes may be true for some homeschoolers, reality shows a different picture. Ray (2010; 2014; 2015) pointed out that

homeschoolers came from many political, economic, racial, and religious groups. Minority populations choose to homeschool at an increasing rate (Ray, 2015). Redford, Battle, and Bieliek (2017) also reported this trend citing the Department of Education statistics showing 32% of homeschoolers as non-white. Homeschoolers come from diverse religious backgrounds, including Mormon, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Pagan, and atheist (Ray 2010; 2014).

Socialization

One of the biggest misnomers about homeschool students is that they lack socialization or social skills. In a study of four-year university institutions, 78% of admission officers thought of homeschoolers as academically bright and expected them to do well academically. Only 44% of admission officers expected former homeschool students to cope well socially (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Similarly, Sorey and Duggan (2008) surveyed community college admissions officers, who expected that 90% of homeschool students would be well prepared academically while expecting only 50% of homeschool students to be socially prepared. Both of these studies deal with expectations of social skills. Fewer studies have touched on the real social success of homeschoolers. New research is needed to see if the perceptions of admission officers have changed in the subsequent years since this data was collected.

One study that compared the experience of public, private, and homeschool students found little difference between the groups (Sutton & Gallway, 2000). Researchers measured undergraduate's student success in the areas of achievement, leadership, professional aptitude, social behavior, and physical activity (Sutton & Gallway, 2000). They found few differences except in the field of leadership. Homeschool students scored significantly higher in the leadership component. They concluded that homeschool students are adequately prepared for college and are comparable to their public and private school peers.

Lattibeaudiere (2000) found that the longer students had homeschooled, the better they adapted. This study attributed this positive outcome to more time spent in tailored individual instruction, more experience learning at their own pace, time in a loving and hands-on environment, and development of curiosity and love for learning. The way that homeschoolers learned and socialized was different from traditionally schooled counterparts. This study mentioned that some homeschoolers had a brief initial adaptation period to traditional classroom learning style. Using comparisons with normative data (Baker & Siryk, 1989) from the Social Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), homeschool students were found to be adapted as well or better than their public-school counterparts. Lattibeaudiere noted that homeschool students who attended religious institutions scored higher in social adaptation components compared to the homeschool students who attended public institutions. The conclusion for this small qualitative study was that compared to the SACQ norms for most other incoming students, the 25 students' experiences were typical.

Although there are relatively few studies regarding the social success of homeschool students in college, a few offer some insight (McCulloch, Savage & Schmal, 2013). Saunders (2009) looked at the social adjustment of first-year college students. Findings from an entire class of freshmen at a private college showed that former homeschool students scored higher in social integration variables of communal potential, institutional integrity, and institutional commitment when compared to their non-homeschool peers. Drenovosky and Cohen (2012) found that homeschool students scored similarly in self-esteem to their traditional schooled counterparts and had less depression. Several other studies looked at younger homeschool students and observed positive social aspects (Shivers, 1992; Thompson & Jang, 2016), but more and current research in this area of social adaptation needs to be undertaken in the young adult or

college-aged former homeschooler. What has received perhaps the most study regarding homeschoolers is in the area of academic achievement.

Academic Achievement

Homeschoolers scored 15-30% higher on standardized tests than their public-school counterparts (Ray, 2019). Findings indicated that Black homeschool students scored 23-42 percentile points above their public counterparts (Ray, 2015). Cohan (2010) found first-year college and fourth-year college GPA's to be higher among former homeschool students. However, Yu, Saket, and Krunkel (2016) found no difference in homeschool or traditional students' first year GPA's in their study when matching homeschool students to traditional students in terms of socioeconomic status. The study also showed that homeschoolers' GPAs were not as likely to predict college success as their traditionally schooled counterparts. Their study did confirm that based on the total findings of traditionally schooled students, homeschoolers score higher on the ACT. However, when matched with a similar socioeconomic sample, the scores were not significantly different from traditionally schooled students. In terms of ACT math scores, Qaqish (2007) found that homeschool students scored slightly higher than other students. Whereas many studies would seem to indicate homeschoolers have academic achievement strengths, other considerations like outside activities, character traits, or social-economic status may need examination along with the numbers.

While some studies have suggested higher academic performance among homeschoolers, a recent study shows that may not be the case. Bennet, Edwards, and Nagai (2019) conducted a study at a private college that has a high number of former homeschool students. For this study, Patrick Henry College was selected because of a high percentage of homeschool students. Patrick Henry may not be representative of a typical student body since it is extremely small, a

religious institution, and costs significantly more than many other public and private colleges (Facts about PHC, n.d.). It could be argued that it caters to an elite student, whether homeschooled or not. The study found that homeschool students at Patrick Henry do not score academically any different than traditionally schooled students. Their study also looked at other factors in homeschool students' lives, such as parental education level, student work commitments, time spent on sleep, and extracurricular activities. They found that all of these have an impact on student success. The fact that students were or were not homeschooled before college cannot be considered in isolation from other factors contributing to their success. In a systematic review, Ray stated:

Confounding variables such as length of treatment, parental involvement, and demographics are often difficult, if not impossible, to control in studies comparing homeschoolers to others. Although researchers would like to establish causal relationships by randomly assigning students to homeschool, public schooling, and private institutional schooling, this is not feasible. (2017)

What the Bennet study did conclude, however, is that although homeschoolers may or may not be academically superior, they are at least as successful as the traditionally schooled students. This success agrees with the body of research that compared to the traditional general population homeschoolers seem to score higher on most academic scales. When other considerations match them to similar traditionally schooled students, they score at least the same. More current research should be done to determine if there is academic superiority and under what conditions.

Homeschoolers and College

Homeschoolers are well prepared for and successful at college (Cogan, 2010; Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Payton & Scott, 2013; Ray, 2016; Snyder, 2013; Yu et al., 2016). Most homeschool families choose to homeschool and plan to use it as preparation for a college program (Kelly, 2015). Not only are most homeschool families preparing their children for college, but their efforts are succeeding (Ray, 2017). Homeschool students scored on average 10% higher in GPA than their traditionally-schooled counterparts and maintained a 50% higher college completion rate than other students (Cogan, 2010; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Kelly (2015) pointed out that homeschool students have received attention from colleges due to their success, and many of the misconception's admissions officers may have about homeschoolers are being laid aside. Researchers have considered academics, social issues, religious involvement and success level differences between homeschool graduates and public or private school graduates.

In a qualitative study, Thomas (2018) focused his dissertation on the perceptions that homeschoolers have of their success in college. He noted that homeschoolers experienced challenges related to never having been in a classroom. Some of these were anxiety, lack of experience with a scantron, and not being accustomed to having someone to ask for help or direction. The last-mentioned challenge relates to the self-directed capacity that many homeschoolers are known for and is thought to be an asset in many studies on student success (Kelly, 2015; Ray 2017), however, in this case, it could become a challenge.

College success is essential for all students, whether homeschooled or not. Many of students' ideas about college come from conversations with those influential in their lives. Because homeschoolers have limited exposure to educators besides their parents, the information

or messages, they do receive about college become significant. If homeschoolers do receive information about college from sources other than their parents, how do these messages inform their choices? It would be wise for parents and educators to learn about how their words impact their students in the anticipatory stages of college.

Thomas (2018) made recommendations, including more research in the area of how homeschoolers make college choices and directives for college admissions departments to further their understanding of the needs of homeschool students. He likened the homeschool student to an international student. Schools have staff and orientations catered to international students to help meet unique challenges, and could do the same for the homeschool demographic.

Memorable Messages Framework

Sense-making

This recalling of messages can be a way that students are trying to make sense of current situations and events. Memorable messages may serve as a sense-making device for the classroom and may contribute to the students learning in school (Krasntuber, Carr and Hosek, 2012). Knapp, Stohl, and Reardon (1981) described this sense-making as verbal messages that are considered influential that can be recalled, or “pulled forward” by an individual to help make sense of or interpret a particular situation. After a survey of sense-making literature Schildt, Mantere, and Cornelissen (2019) conclude that sense-making is created by, “... the ongoing creation of coherence by connecting salient observations, beliefs, and actions as reasons for one another.” Kranstuber, Carr, and Hosek (2012) found that students’ satisfaction depends on the positive sense-making in which they engage. This sense-making based on the socialization or sense-making they learned from their families and messages of sense-making may be recalled by

the student. Therefore, the students' perception of messages may mainly come from the way their family created sense-making.

The students' perception of the memorable message may then be an indicator of college success. When students report high satisfaction with their parent from which the socialization about sense-making, and the message came from, the more positive their memorable message perception will be, and their motivation for success will be higher. Further, they found it was not the message itself, but the relationship with the parent that had implications on student success even if the message was somewhat negative, because of the positive relationship the students interpreted and made sense of the message in a positive way (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012).

Sense-making has long been a helpful tool to give guidelines for action and interpretation in a new organization or event (Schildt, Mantere, & Cornelissen, 2019; Stohl, 1986). College is a unique organization for students where norms, rules, and scripts are all changed from what they knew as dependent children. Often students are living on their own, establishing their own rules, handling new responsibilities, and making new relationships. Students may face insecurity and uncertainty about their new life and circumstances. Louis (1980) pointed out that newcomers' experiences change, contrast, and surprise, which creates a need for sense-making. This need makes these individuals highly susceptible to memorable messages. Most individuals will recall a message received at a previous, less stressful time to help them make sense of the new situation.

Using these recalled messages in the sense-making process can lead to actions. Not only do people use these messages to understand and make sense of a situation but they also use the received words to guide their actions (Miczo, Flood & Fitzgerald, 2018). In this case, the researchers found the recalling and rehearsing of a message is likely to prepare individuals for a

confrontation with the relational offender. While action can sometimes be the result of a memorable message this is not always the case as messages in Crook and Daily's (2017) study about drug misuse found. In their study about messages given regarding the misuse of prescription drugs, messages did not have an impact on the action. They suggest this may be because the ideas about drug use are more fluid (Crook & Daily, 2017).

Communicated Sense-making Model

Though sense-making in research is often referred to as a generalized way of interpreting a situation, a model of sense-making has also been identified. Horstman, Holman, and McBride (2019) use the communicated sense-making model (CSM) to explain how men constructed meaning from their wives' miscarriage using metaphors. This CSM uses five devices (accounts, attributions, communicated perspective-taking, memorable messages, and narratives), to provide structure and organization to their interpretations (Horstman, Holman & McBride, 2019; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015). In Weick's seminal work on sense-making in organizations (1995) he points out that sense-making is a way individuals deal with the information they receive. Weick attributes several characteristics to sense-making. including that it is grounded in identity construction, it is retrospective, ongoing, and continuous.

Sense-making is used with other frameworks or theories, such as narratives. In Flood-Grady, and Koenig Kellas (2019), sense-making is used with storytelling to explore stigmas with mental illness. Stories were used to share negative experiences and warnings as a way of sense-making. Thurlow, and Helms Mills (2015) use CSM with narratives to find meaning in the organizational structure of a community college. Sense-making is a broad tool that can be used in a variety of contexts and with other frameworks, including our application with memorable messages.

Definition and Criteria for Memorable Messages

Memorable messages are verbal messages people receive that they find influential and significant in some way (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). For homeschool students, these could be messages that are pivotal messages they received about the big decision of college recalled from an earlier time. These messages might become critical guiding thoughts for their life. For instance, Nazione, LaPlante and Smith (2011) found participants used the memorable messages to act in regard to their behaviors and attitudes. Students reported going to class more, studying harder, and thinking more positively about themselves as a result of recalling and acting on their memorable message.

Wang (2014) pointed out four characteristics of memorable messages. First, they are perceived as personal and legitimate and usually deal with an important issue (Stohl, 1986). They are often specific things told to the student at a particular past time (Smith, Ellis & Yoo, 2001). These are not general conversations. Secondly, these messages are stored in long-term memory. These are messages from a previous time that get recalled. The third characteristic is that they are internalized and taken to heart (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). These internalizations can lead to guiding principles which will be explored further in the theory section. Finally, they have a lasting and continuing influence (Stohl, 1986). The fact that they are remembered and recalled from some point in the past shows that the person continues to be influenced by them.

Memorable messages can have positive, or negative contents and interpretations. Often negative memorable messages surfaced in the context of drug misuse (Crook & Daily, 2017), gender identity (Rubinsky, V., & Cooke-Jackson, 2017), or weight loss (Anderson, Bresnahan, & Deangelis, 2014). Even when messages were intended by the giver to be positive the receiver sometimes interpreted the message in a negative way. In another study regarding memorable

messages and sexuality, negative messages were coded as “challenging” messages because they undermined the participants and challenged their identities (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackosn, 2017). Negative memorable messages can have a lasting impact, and in the case of body size messages, can negatively impact self-esteem (Rudiger & Winstead, 2013; Willis & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Sheldon, 2010). However, positive messages on body size positively correlate with higher self-esteem (Rubinsky, Hosek, & Hudak, 2018).

Miczo, Flood, and Fitzgerald (2018), while studying memorable messages involving relational transgressions, identified another type of message they titled a remembered message. In coding their responses, they found that over half of the responses were difficult to place into the existing coding scheme. Though these messages fit the general criteria of a memorable message, they lacked one or more elements common to memorable messages. For instance, the message came from someone older but not necessarily from someone who had the best interests in mind, or the message was tied to a specific context rather than general in nature. The researchers posed the question, “when does a negative message become something else?” (Miczo, Flood & Fitzgerald, 2018) and cited the need for further study.

Generally, messages about college have tended to be more positive. Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek (2012) in their study on memorable messages from parents as indicators of student success, used six themes with only one being considered negative. Similarly, Nazione, LaPlante and Smith (2011), in their study on memorable messages for navigating college life, used ten codes with only one of them being titled simply, “negative”.

The context in which memorable messages occur also shape the content of memorable messages (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keeley, 2004). These messages can come from anyone but are often from a family member. Previous research showed memorable messages about college for

most students came from their parents (Nazione, LaPlante, Smith, Cornacchione, Russell, & Stohl, 2011). Researchers found the most significant number of messages (34.4%) were from a family member, 29.5% were from other people in academia, 15% from friends and 5% from media with the remaining percentage from other various sources. The messages that students received were important for predicting college success, but it was not the content of the message itself, rather the students' interpretation of that message, that predicted a positive outcome (Kranstuber, Carr, Hosek, 2012).

The timing and place in which the memorable message is given are significant (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keely 2004). Many individuals recall receiving messages and remembering messages at a stressful time (Miller & Ray, 1984). Times of considerable uncertainty often facilitate giving of and reminding of memorable messages (Ford & Ellis, 1998). Where, how, and from whom the messages are received are all important factors with memorable messages.

In the context of education, the source for memorable messages is not only most often family but also most often a person who is higher in status and older than the student (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981; Stohl, 1986). The perception here is that the person is older and wiser (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). The person who gives the message is viewed as benevolent with altruistic motives (Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994). These messages came from people who are in the students' social network and have frequent contact with the individual (Stohl, 1986). Heizer and Ellis (2008) also found the status and age criteria to be true while studying memorable messages involving motherhood. They found messages came from family members, friends, media, religious figures, and medical sources. These sources are similar to the five sources of socialization listed by Jablin (1987) as sources of socialization in anticipatory

situations. Jablin's (1987) five sources are educational institutions, family, friends and peers, media and part-time jobs.

Support for the importance of family and higher-status message sources is found in the context of homeschool students in a pilot study I conducted in the spring of 2019. Interviews with two homeschool college students and a focus group with three homeschool college students were done and qualitatively analyzed for salient themes. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length and contained open-ended and probing questions. The focus group was completed in an hour and also used open-ended and probing questions. Both interview respondents cited parents as their primary source for messages about college. These participants also attributed, "always knowing that they would go to college" to a parental message. Besides parents, interviewees in the pilot study cited conversations and messages they received from college personnel at prospective institutions as influential in making their college choice. These were people who held positions at institutions where the students were considering attending.

Memorable Messages and College.

Memorable messages have been used by researchers to study other anticipatory situations. Cramer and Myers (2017) used memorable messages to explore the anticipatory experiences of Division I student-athletes. They were particularly interested in exploring how these student athletes adjust to college life. Looking at memorable messages allowed them to see how messages impacted students' anticipatory socialization. Memorable messages served as a framework for understanding how the athletes adjust. These memorable messages allowed researchers to see how communication played a role in their anticipatory socialization.

Socialization is an essential concept for all college students. The parents and family play a critical role in socialization (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012). Family helps to create a social

identity and creates socialization of the student (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). Researchers have studied how parents use messages in the socialization of their children (e.g. Ellis & Smith, 2004; Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). One of the primary ways parents do this is through communication. Memorable messages are a way that parents communicate with their children (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012). “When messages are remembered, they become a supportive and socializing force that influences the course of message recipients’ lives” (Wang, 2014). As students go to college, the messages parents and family give can help them navigate their new surroundings.

In 2011 memorable messages were used to study how college students navigate college life (Nazione, et al., 2011). College can be a disruption in life often requiring relocation, establishing new relationships, stresses, and changing family ties. Memorable messages served as a tool for researchers to explore how communication can influence people for a positive change. They mainly looked at when the memorable messages were recalled and how students used that as a heuristic device to facilitate a reminder to change their behavior or used it to encourage themselves to continue a behavior. Using the idea of a negative feedback loop and control theory in this study, researchers found memorable messages used by students as a way to have a positive outcome (Nazione, et al., 2011).

Parents and families will want to be aware of the power of their words and the impact it can have on their children. This awareness can help inform current homeschool families who are preparing their students for college and possibly even help parents make an intentional choice on what messages to give. Intentionally giving messages to their children may help parents prepare their children for college life.

Colleges will want to be aware of the messages students are receiving so they can be better prepared to help incoming students navigate their adjustment to their new surroundings. Admissions officers may also take note of the messages students have received so they can be proactive to reassure or redirect any misguided or misinformed messages students could be receiving. Even the messages homeschool students received, which may discourage college attendance may inform and direct parents and educators. For higher education to facilitate success for homeschool students, they must strive to understand how homeschoolers experience and encounter college (Bolle, Wessel & Molvihill, 2007).

Media Memorable Messages

Most research to date focuses on personal memorable messages, that is, a message delivered from another person. However, several studies have hinted at the fact that media messages compose a portion of the memorable messages for participants. For instance, Rubinsky and Cooke-Jackson (2017) cite 17% of the memorable messages on sex and sexuality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) women came from media. In a study involving memorable messages and breast cancer Smith, Nazione, et al., (2009) reported that media was the most reported source for memorable messages. Their study did not distinguish between print (newspapers and magazines) and media (online, or CMC sources), so it is not possible to know what percentage of those messages were from a media communication.

In their study on memorable messages and newcomer socialization, Barge and Schlueter (2004) contends that most memorable messages come from a face-to-face context even in an organizational setting where technology is becoming more the norm for communication. Using the framework of media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1996; Lenel & Daft, 1988) along with sense-making theory (Weick, 1979;1995), they contend that communication that creates memorable

messages required richer and more extended forms of practice. FTF allows for a more synchronous, more vibrant exchange, and therefore creates more lasting messages. This explained to them why only 1.7% of participants noted email as a source for memorable messages when emails in the organizational context had become increasingly individualized.

Though media messages may not be the first memorable message received by most homeschool students about college, it is a source that may contribute to their sense-making about college. Many studies on memorable messages acknowledge that memorable messages may come from multiple sources.

Theories Used with Memorable Messages

Memorable messages typically are considered an atheoretical framework (Cook-Jackson & Rubinsky, 2018). However, some studies making use of the memorable message framework use the general idea of “sense-making” (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Barge & Schlueter, 2004). According to Cooke-Jackson and Rubinsky (2018), control theory is the most commonly used framework researchers have employed along with memorable messages in the body of literature over the past thirty years. Some examples of researchers using control theory with memorable messages would include; “Memorable Messages for Navigating College Life” (Nazione et al., 2001), “Memorable Messages and the N1H1 Flu virus” (Miczo, Danhour, Lester, & Bryant, 2013) and “Memorable messages as Guides to Self-assessment of Behavior: A Replication and Extension Diary Study”(Ellis & Smith, 2004). Cook-Jackson and Rubinsky (2018) go on to mention several other theories such as communicated narrative sense-making (Koenig-Kellas & Kranstuber, Horstman, 2015), narratology (Kauffman et al., 2013) and relational dialectic theory (Wang, 2012) as theories that researchers have also used to explore memorable messages, though with less frequency.

Control Theory

Russel and Smith (2017) note that the features of memorable messages parallel those of the values found in control theory. Control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Smith & Ellis, 2001) seeks to explain why individuals engage in certain behaviors and explore the process they go about in assessing their behavior. One of the limits of control theory is that it does not detail the process of formation of these values. According to Smith and Ellis (2001), this is where the memorable message framework makes its contribution. Memorable messages give us the initiation of the idea, or value formation.

A key concept with control theory is that of the negative feedback loop. This is perceived as the gap between the perception of the present and the desired state or situation (Klein, 1989). This concept has “reference” values which are internal guiding principles that are organized in value levels so that a behavior is assessed at each level and progressing on to the next highest reference value level. Several of the levels seem to mirror the generalized steps individuals might take in sense-making. The highest level of control theory, the system concept, might be thought of as the idealized self-image. The principle level gives a “guiding principle”, or what could be called a message about how to behave. The “program level” establishes a sequence of behavior that should be followed to satisfy the ideals of the principle. With our anticipatory college students, the gap may be where they would like to see themselves as young adults compared to the situations they are in now. These memorable messages they receive may become the catalyst for the principles and sequences of behaviors that will get them to their idealized self-image (Klein, 1986).

Proposed Theory of Memorable Messages

Though control theory explains many of the steps in sense-making, with memorable messages, there is a call for the framework to stand alone as theory. Cooke-Jackson and Rubinsky (2018) make a strong case for the creation of the theory of memorable messages (ToMM). They cite the 30 years of research that has laid the groundwork for this theory and the consistent method of application as some of the reasons for a new theory. More research is needed before the theory emerges fully. This research intends to add to the body of research in this area, exploring both control theory and increasing the body of literature for use in the exploration of memorable messages to add to the existing framework.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To extend the body of research and answer the call for more research regarding homeschoolers and college (Thomas, 2018), as well as the research on memorable messages, I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What memorable messages do homeschool students receive about attending college?

RQ2: Whom do these messages come from?

RQ3: What actions do college students report enacting, if any, as a result of recalling memorable messages?

RQ4: What memorable messages from media do homeschool students receive about attending college?

Methods

An interpretive qualitative method was used in order to analyze the participants recalled messages and study their interpretation of those memorable messages. This qualitative study makes use of a phronetic approach; which means that the, "...data can be systematically gathered, organized, interpreted, analyzed, and communicated..." (Tracy, 2012, p.4) Many studies of memorable messages use qualitative analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of their participants perspectives (e.g., Wang 2014; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017; Ford & Ellis, 1998). Using an iterative approach (Tracy, 2012) to consider possible connections to existing theory and research while at the same time focusing on the content of the data allowed for a meaningful understanding of the messages received and suggested impacts these messages

had on the receiver. Online surveys approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) collected data from forty-eight homeschool graduates. Purposive and snowball methods were used to find potential participants to complete the online survey. Homeschool online support groups were used to extend the invitation to participate in the study. Responses to open-ended questions were coded into themes.

In answer to the first research question, "what messages do homeschool students receive about attending college?" participants were asked to give a message and respond to several additional questions regarding the message they had given. Participants were also asked if the messages they received were positive, negative or mixed.

Participants

Participants were homeschool students who graduated from homeschool. These participants were recruited using purpose and snowball methods from online homeschool support groups and Facebook pages. The participants were asked how many years they were homeschooled. The mean was 10.69 years, with a median of 12 and a mode of 13. After removing ineligible participants, 45 participants remained ranging in age from 19 to 37, with the mean age being 24 (mode 20 and median 22), remained with SD of 5.965. Eighty-Two point two percent ($n = 37$) of the participants were White, 6.7% ($n = 7$) were African American, 2.2% ($n = 2$) were Asian and 8.9% ($n = 4$) listed other as their ethnicity. Thirty-one point one percent of participants ($n = 14$) were male, 66.7% ($n = 30$) were female with 2.2% ($n = 1$) listed other as their sex. The majority of the participants were from the Midwest with Michigan having the highest percentage at 42.2% ($n = 19$) and Indiana at 22.2% ($n = 10$). Six other states were represented including California (6.7%, $n = 6$), Texas (8.9%, $n = 4$) and North Carolina (8.9%, $n = 4$). Eighty-eight point nine percent of participants were either in college now or had attended

college in the past ($n = 40$), 11.1% ($n = 5$) had not attended college. Of the 11% who had not attended college 67% ($n = 4$) either definitely or probably plan to in the future, 33% of the participants who had not attended college said they probably did not or definitely planned not to attend in the future ($n = 2$).

Procedures

Homeschool Facebook groups were contacted and asked to share the survey information. Once potential participants clicked the link given to direct them to the instrument, they were taken to an online Qualtrics survey. Participants were asked to read the consent form and by clicking next participants consented, they were asked to answer a series of open-ended and quantitative Likert scaled questions. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding what messages they received about college before attending college. These questions were focused on memorable messages, who gave those messages, how they impacted the student, and what actions, if any, were taken based on these messages. Participants were given a definition of memorable messages. Surveys took approximately 20 minutes to complete and contained open-ended, closed-ended, and scaled responses. Appendix A includes a draft of the instrument.

Data Analysis

Participants completed a web-based survey questionnaire. Responses to open-ended questions about messages were organized and examined using primary coding, and constant comparative method looking for salient themes. Each memorable message was first assigned a primary code using constant comparative methods. This involves comparing the data to each code and modifying codes or definitions of codes as necessary as the data is analyzed. (Tracy, 2012, p.190) This iterative process allows data to be lumped together or fractured as necessary as it is interpreted and understood. In this thematic analysis, message sources were also analyzed

and coded into their categories. Messages were also coded by the type of speech act. Categories for messages were built, named and described, and then used to make connections between categories creating themes that span several categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Codebooks were used to aid in creating the themes. First primary codes were recorded in codebooks using a Word table to organize the codes, their definitions, and examples of each code. Following primary coding, codes were collapsed and collected into secondary thematic codes. Thematic analysis was used to create themes following Owen's (1984) guidelines of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. To be considered a theme, there must be more than one message which would contain the same type of information, and it would be repeated. Though not all data contained forcefulness, several messages did by using all caps to emphasize words like "NOT", using exclamation points, strong words like "sucks" or "futility overcomes", or adding emphasis words like "very". For some messages, answers to follow up questions were used to help determine the intent of the recalled memorable message and place into the appropriate theme.

At the beginning of the survey, a definition of a memorable message was provided. Memorable messages were defined as, '... verbal statements that have been told to you which you may remember for a long period or has stuck with you in some way. These statements may also have influenced your life in some way' (Crook & Daily, 2017). Each participant was asked to recall a memorable message, and then later in the survey asked to recall another memorable message. This resulted in a total of 87 recalled memorable personal messages. Three messages given did not fit the description of memorable messages and several messages given were coded into more than one category as they contained two separate ideas where one could not be viewed as primary over the other. Answers to other open-ended questions where participants offered more insight about their messages were used to help determine the meaning if it was not clear

from the wording of the message itself. The three messages that did not fit were things like a question about how they felt or a statement of joy about an acceptance letter. These were not messages given to them from someone or not even messages at all, but rather their thoughts, statements, or questions. Participants were also asked to recall a memorable media message, which results in 38 recalled media memorable messages. For the memorable media messages, nine messages given did not fit the description of memorable messages, and four said they did not have one.

Other open-ended questions and scaled questions asked participants to name the source of their message, when the message was received and how they felt about the message on a six-point Likert scale from extremely negative to extremely positive. Participants were also asked on a four-point Likert scale what impact their message had on their college decision from no influence to strongly affected. They were also asked demographic information and a final open-ended question about any other message they would have for homeschoolers about college.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Participants varied when asked when they received their message. The most-reported time was during high school (54.4%, $n = 49$) with the second highest since childhood or most of my life (16.7 %, $n = 15$). Other answers were during college 7.8% ($n = 7$), some named a time but it could not be determined when it occurred 7.8% ($n = 7$), during junior and senior high 6.7% ($n = 6$), and no answer given was also 6.7% ($n = 6$). These numbers account for all 45 participant messages (each participant was allowed to give two messages, so 90 total responses.) See Table 1.

Table 1
When Message was Given

Time	percent	number	example
High School	54.4	49	“Senior year of high school” “15 years old”
Childhood	16.7	6	“All the time” “Since early childhood”
College	7.8	7	“First or second year of college” “After attending some community college classes but prior to starting at a university.”
Undeterminable	7.8	7	“A couple of weeks ago” “Basically as soon as I realized college existed”
Jr./Sr. high	6.7	6	“From Jr. high on”
No Answer	6.7	6	

When stating when the message was given to them, only one participant named a particular time, their graduation. Most of the messages give a range of times and indicate that it was a message given multiple times. This occurrence might be in contrast to the definition that states it was a specific message given at a particular time (Smith, Ellis & Yoo, 2001). Though Smith, Ellis and Yoo (2001) qualify this definition with messages “often” are specific. It would seem that other messages involving college are more general. For instance, Wang (2014) lists some of the messages First-Generation college students received as very specific. However, others seem similar to the messages in this study with sometimes more generic messages which

possibly are often given rather than just one specific time. Terminology like, "...message would be pretty much....", or, "my mom always told me", indicate that the messages could be paraphrases or compilations of more than one message (Wang, 2014).

Source of Messages

In answer to the second research question, "Whom do these messages come from?" It was as expected from previous literature ((Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981; Stohl, 1986) that family would play a significant role. For the personal memorable messages, when asked who gave them the message the most reported person was the Mom with 47% in the initial message and 33% in the second message. The next highest was "other" at 29% for both initial and second messages. Many listed "other" as a mix of Mom and Dad, another family, or society in general as their answer. All other options like, a friend, pastor, or sibling, were less than 5%. The choice of a guidance counselor and college personal each received 7% on the second message but only in the second message recalled.

Message Valence

In response to the message valence 40% of participants reported that the messages they received were "extremely" positive on a six-point Likert scale with one being extremely negative, two moderately negative, three neither positive nor negative, four mixed positive and negative, five moderately positive and six extremely positive. This was true of the initial memorable message, and the second most memorable message. Initial messages also were thought to be moderately positive 22% of the time and the second most memorable was moderately positive 16% of the time. Participants rated both the initial and second memorable message as extremely negative less than 5% of the time.

Thematic Codes

The 87 personal memorable messages were first coded into primary categories. The primary codes were then collapsed into five secondary thematic codes. The codes were memorable messages about: a) Expectations, b) College Experience, c) Success in Life, d) Financial Concerns, and e) Support. Each theme will be discussed in the order of their salience.

Message About Expectations

Many of the messages contained information about what was expected of the participant regarding college. This theme was the most frequent with 26.6% ($n = 25$) of the memorable messages fitting this category. The most common response had to do with the idea of the expectation that they would go to college, sometimes not even voiced. This was interesting because part of the definition given for memorable messages contain the qualifier of “verbal” message. However, some participants still chose these possibly “unspoken” messages as their recalled memorable message. Comments in response to if they would go to college or not noted, “I felt it was expected of me to attend college”, “College is mandatory in our family”, and “I don’t really remember any messages like that. It was never really a decision I had to make; it was more an unspoken understanding in my family.” A 20-year-old man from Indiana responded:

My father has worked in universities ever since I was very young so for me it was always just understood that I would go especially since I have always loved learning. Just as may have been predicted I attended and graduated university and had an amazing time. For this reason, I can say that not attending was never even a consideration. It was just an-unspoken desire that I have always had and an unspoken expectation from my parents.

A few others received messages of expected behaviors regarding if they would go. A 20-year-old woman from Michigan received this message from an unnamed source, “Women don't need to go to college because their husbands will support them.” She went on to share how this message impacted her:

This idea that women are purely 'home-makers' is incredibly toxic to the success of females. Beyond that, it seems wrong to just assume you don't have to participate effectively in society because you would prefer for someone to take care of you. It seems unfair to put that type of responsibility on someone else purely because they are male. This message enforces the idea that women don't need to seek their own careers, which essentially holds them back (and the society as a whole).

Some others received the message that they didn't have to go to college. A 21-year-old Hispanic man from California said, “the most memorable thing I remember hearing about college was that I didn't have to go; I could teach myself a vast majority of what I needed to know and pay a far smaller amount for professional tutoring.” He found this, “... moderately positive due to the fact that it meant one would not have to necessarily take out loans for it and could study all while working a full-time job and having hobbies, too.” He went on to say that he feels, “somewhat empowered and responsible, I can now take my education into my own grasp and do with it what I wish.”

Along with the expectation to go or not go to college came admonitions of expected behaviors and results once at college. One respondent recalled the message given by her Dad of expected high achievement, “That it didn't really matter what degree I got, just as long as I

completed it and got straight A's." This 27-year-old-woman from Michigan reflected on how this message impacted her:

In some ways it devalued a degree, 'It doesn't really matter what you get as long as you get it' but then that message was always accompanied with some version of 'get that 4.0!', so it also told me that the work I did while there should be something I should be proud of.

Expectations also included other life events. A message given by one parent stated, "you can't get married until you graduate with a four-year degree." This encouraged this participant to form a plan to guide her children, "We plan to have the same rules for our children--they must go to college, and they must focus on school first while in college." She saw this as a positive message in her life as evidenced by her continuation with her children. Continuing with her children also shows how these messages are used as socialization within the family (Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012).

Messages About College Experience

The second most salient messages receiving 22.3% ($n = 21$) were those about the College Experience. The messages in this theme talk about what life will be like at college and advice for the time there. Here some of the advice was in the form of warnings about the negative impacts that college life could have. One 20-year-old woman from Michigan said:

In my community, it was very common for mothers to look down on college students. They constantly said, "really good kids go to college, and come out the other end immoral." Keeping in mind my homeschool community was very religious (mainly Christian and Baptist), this became a sort of mantra. College, unless a private institution, was where people went to party,

nothing more.

Others echoed some of these sentiments giving messages of, “Christians need to be well-grounded in their faith before and during the college years. The classroom, and social environment of secular (and many Christian) universities can destroy young people's faith.” This message was attributed to parents, speakers and pastor by the 35-year-old-woman who received this message.

There were also predictions about the workload and the participants being able to handle it. One message given said, “homeschoolers have an easier time in college and are more prepared than most.” There were basic instructions like, “study hard”, and “get good grades” as well as specific messages like, “...professors would be much more stringent on grading, especially when it came to papers”, or “It will be a lot more challenging than high school.”

Some participants received messages that spoke of the relationships made at college. “College can lead you to some of your lifelong friends” was a message a lifelong homeschool student from Wisconsin received. And a 23-year-old received the message, “You will create friendships and relationships that will last a lifetime” from various sources. Others received a message that spoke of the givers’ experience in building relationships when they attended college.

There were some general messages likes, “everyone changes their major at least once” or “seek out knowledge in college, not just a 4.0.” Furthermore, there were also conflicting messages about the reception homeschoolers might receive. One message said, “I was told by several professors at more than one university that they were relieved and excited I was homeschooled because I could teach myself.” However, another message simply said, “That it is

hard for homeschoolers to get into college.” This message was given by, “a fellow homeschooler who was trying to discourage being homeschooled through high school.”

Memorable Messages About Success in Life

The theme Success in Life received 21.3% ($n = 20$) of the responses. Success in Life encapsulated the messages which talked about what college would do for the receivers of the message in terms of life fulfillment, success, and financial security. The ideas here centered around rewarding careers and income potential. Many of the message givers saw more income as a desired outcome of college. “College graduates earn more money, and you need a degree to be hired by a company.” A 35-year-old woman from California reflected on the message of earning more money by saying, “I thought it was (a) positive (message) because I liked the idea of being rich.”

The success of the receiver’s future would be more certain with a college education. “...Choosing to go to college would help me have a more promising, secure future”, was a message received by a 20-year-old woman from Indiana. The idea of, “opening doors” was also mentioned in several messages, “that college will open many doors in my future and attending a post-secondary school of some form will help me later on.”

Though a 23-year-old man from North Carolina who was homeschooled his whole life saw his message of, “attending college will put you one step ahead of the other guy” as a mixed message, he said, “It gave me determination, direction, and motivation to succeed.” This message, which he received from “almost everyone I know”, felt like it was a mixed message because while it was positive for those who attended college, it looked down on those who did not attend college.

Messages About Financial Concerns

Messages with Financial Concerns were heard by 14.9 % ($n = 14$) of the participants. Many of these messages revolved around the high financial cost of college with the ideas of, “it’s expensive”, and “still paying off student loans”, as common themes. Some of the messages contained the idea that college is expensive but also gave an evaluation of the cost-benefit for that expense. “Your education is the best investment you can ever make. No one can ever take it away from you”, or conversely, “college will burden you with debt with no payoff.”

The strategy of taking loans, to cover the financial costs of college was also mentioned in many messages, most times in a negative light. One message a 20-year-old man from Texas received from an unnamed source warned, “don’t take out huge loans.” Another given to a 22-year-old woman from Michigan quipped, “still paying off student loans”, which seemed to be an admonition from the giver’s personal experience. One 20-year-old woman from Michigan felt the expensive of college greatly affected her life, “well, I go to a college I hate because it's cheap so it's debt-free.”

A 20-year-old man from Michigan saw these “don’t take loans” messages as a mixed message, “...because it was like a go to college, but you're gonna have to work really hard to earn money to get through without loans.” Others saw this type of message as extremely negative as 19-year-old man from Wisconsin voiced, it’s extremely negative “...because its’ sole purpose was to discourage me was even attempting to further my education”. When asked when he recalls this message, he went on to add, “...after I come home from a dead-end job and think about how I'm going nowhere... I really wish I had gone to college and given myself the opportunity to better my life or further my career of choice.” He said that this has strongly affected his life.

Messages About Support

The last theme of Support was reported by 7.4% ($n = 7$) of participants. These messages contained encouragement or support for the respondent. Much of the support was for the person in general, like from one set of parents, “If that’s something you want to do, we’ll support you.” However, some of the messages were directed at college, “consider your options, and we will support you wherever you go.” These were direct messages of support but other interpretations of messages that reflected support as well.

For instance, “I simply felt like my family believed in me” was how one participant explained their message, “...you are capable of going to and thriving at college.” Another participant explained the effect their message, which contained the expectation to go to college, had on them like this, “This non-verbal message has been demonstrated and loved out to me all of my life and from both parents and grandparents alike.” Even when the expressed memorable message was not clearly love and support, many participants used words in their feelings about the messages they received to indicate they felt supported by family.

Differences in the Initial and Second Messages

Because participants were asked first to provide a long-remembered message, and then after a series of questions asked if they could recall another memorable message the differences in salient themes between the initial and second message were of note. For instance, in the initial message, Success and Expectations were the two highest, respectively followed by Finances. In the other recalled message, College Experience ranked the highest followed by Expectations but with a much wider margin with Finances also being the third most salient but receiving a smaller percentage than the in the initial message. (Table 2)

Table 2
Memorable Message Themes

Theme	Frequency	Total Percent	Initial Message Percent	Second Message Percent	Example
Expectations	25	26.6	29.8	23.4	“College is mandatory in our family” “That I should find something I was passionate about and give college a try.”
College Experience	21	22.3	12.8	31.9	“The classroom and social environment of secular (and many Christian) universities can destroy you people’s faith.” “College will allow you to grow personally, professionally, and academically.”
Success in Life	20	21.3	31.9	10.6	“You are likely to earn more with a degree” “The difference between a job and a career is a college degree”
Financial Concerns	14	14.9	17.0	12.8	“Don’t take out huge loans”, “That I’ll be in debt till I die”
Support	7	7.4	4.3	10.6	“If that’s something you want to do, we’ll support you.” “I was capable of going to and thriving at college.”
Missing/Other	7	7.4	4.3	10.6	“I don’t think I have any.”

Speech Acts

Messages were also coded as to what speech act they represented. Searle (1976) classified the main types of speech acts as representatives (or assertives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Austin (1962) asserts that speech is uttered to incite actions and expounds on this in his speech act theory. Many scholars have used these initial categories to create and classify the messages in their studies based on the types of speech acts performed, giving the acts their own titles representative of the messages they are analyzing (Reynolds, 2006; Smith, Atkin, Skubisz, et al. 2009; Altikriti, 2016). For the homeschool messages, I classified the speech acts into six categories; advice, prophecy, sayings, commands, statements, and encouragement. (Table 3)

The most frequent speech act was a statement (27.4%, $n = 23$). These would often just be statements of assumed facts or experience. Things like, “college is expensive” or “homeschoolers have an easier time in college.” The next highest category was a command (19%, $n = 16$) followed closely by a prophecy (17.9%, $n = 15$). Commands were things like, “don’t take student loans” or simply “go to college.” These commands often dovetailed with the main memorable message code of expectation. The prophecy statements were predictions of things that would or wouldn’t happen. For instance, “You will create friendships that will last a lifetime” or “College will allow you to grow personally, professionally, and academically.”

The least reported category was the saying. These were messages that were more like uncredited quotes, or clichés. Some examples of this category are; “The difference between a job and a career is college”, “make your passion your paycheck” or “learning is never wasted.”

Table 3
Speech Act Frequency

Name	Frequency	Percentage	Example
Statements	23	27.4	“College is a place to make friends.” “Those who work while in college generally learn more than those who don’t work.”
Commands	16	19	“Go to college” “Work hard”
Prophecy	15	17.9	“...you need a degree to be hired by a company.” “...(you are) fully capable of being a competitive applicant.”
Advice	6	7.1	“...go to college so that I would always have something to fall back on.” “...there is no shame in pursuing a career in the trades...”
Encouragement	7	8.3	“Good for you!” “Consider your options and we’ll support you wherever you go”
Quotes	4	4.8	“Learning is never wasted” “Make your passion your paycheck.”

Actions Taken

In answer to the third research question, many participants felt that the memorable message they received impacted their decision to go to college or not. Forty-six point seven percent ($n = 21$) said that the message strongly affected their choice, 33.3% ($n = 15$) moderate, 11.1 % ($n = 5$) slightly, and 8.9% ($n = 4$) said no influence at all. Putting these together, 88% of participants felt that their memorable message had an impact on their college decision. While the question did not ask if it affected them positively or negatively to go to college, the fact that

88.9% ($n = 40$) of participants indicated they were in or had been in college would seem to indicate that many of the messages to go to college were favorable. Of the 11.1% that were not in college or had not yet gone, four of the six indicated that they had plans to go in the future.

As a follow up to this, participants were asked what impact the message has on their life today. Many of the participants indicated in some way that it does not affect them now. The rest of them wrote that it did affect their decision about college, but has no impact now, or gave statements indicating that it affected their thinking. For instance, “my view of success is no longer defined by college”, or , “I realized that education is the foundation but our kindness, diligence, and passion make you most effective in your career.”

Only one message related to any type of direct action. That message was ,”we are planning and saving for our kids to go to college.” This was from a 37-year respondent who was at the upper end of the age range for participants. Perhaps the age could explain the reason more respondents did not have a future action or saw little impact on their life today.

Media Message Results

Media messages were defined as messages from media or mass communication sources. Some examples of possible sources were given, such as television, news programming, advertising campaigns, internet memes, mailings, print, or billboard materials. Participants were given options for choosing where their media messages came from or writing in other options. Participants were asked, “regarding college, what memorable messages have you received from media sources that have influenced you in some way regarding college?” From the choices given, “other” was chosen 48.9% of the time. Those who listed other wrote in, “all of the above,” “social media from family and friends,” “newspaper,” “radio,” “TV portrayals,”“ college packets,” “websites,” and “YouTube.” Of the other choices, online news sources got 15.6%, TV

13.3%, social media ads 11.1%, and email 4.4%, with 7% of participants not responding to this question. (Table 4)

Table 4
Media Sources

Source	Frequency	Percent
Other-all of the above Social media, newspaper, radio, TV portrayals, college packets, Websites, and YouTube.	22	48.9
Online News sources	7	15.6
TV	6	13.3
Social Media Ads	5	11.1
No response	3	6.7
Email	2	4.4

For the media messages, 45% ($n = 19$) said that the message had no effect on their decision to go to college or not. The second highest percentage was moderately affected with 24% ($n = 11$) followed by slightly 16% ($n = 7$) and strongly affected at 11% ($n = 5$). So overall, at least half of the participants believed media message had at least some effect on their choice to attend college. The media messages themselves, like the memorable messages already discussed, were coded for salient themes first in primary descriptive codes and then collapsed into thematic analytic codes.

The media messages were coded into for thematic codes of a) Necessity of Going, b) Atmosphere of College, c) Costs and Funding and d) Quality of the Message. Each theme will be discussed in turn. There was a much higher no response rate (34%) than the no response or “I don’t know,” type responses from the memorable messages (7.4%). (Table 5)

Table 5
Media Message Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percent	Example
Necessity of going	16	34.0	"...that it is NOT necessary." "A 4 year (or more) degree is the only degree."
No response/I don't know	16	34.0	"Not sure I have one"
Costs and Funding	7	14.9	"College is worth the investment" "College debt can ruin your life"
Atmosphere of College	5	10.6	"College is a great place for learning..." "College is about wild, crazy parties."
Quality of the Message	3	6.4	"Generally colleges lie in their ads"

Media Themes

Necessity of Going to College

The Necessity of Going to College was the most salient theme with 34% ($n = 16$) of the participants indicating their message spoke of the need to go or not to go to college. More of the messages urged participants to attend college, but a few portrayed a valid choice of not to go. "...College attendance was an expectation and next step following high school graduation if you wanted to be "successful", said a 26-year-old from Michigan referring to a message received from a college brochure. Another message received by a 20-year-old white woman from Indiana from an online news source stated, "You have to go to college to get a job and have a nice career." One said, "It (the media message) made me feel that college would be the only way that I would be able to 'succeed' in life."

Many brought up trade schools as a viable alternative they heard about through media messages. A 33-year-old white woman from Indiana reported:

I don't agree with the message growing up that college is NECESSARY. It

is definitely necessary for some career paths - my husband is a CPA, or if wanting to be a lawyer or a doctor. But one can gain a lot of knowledge by apprenticeship or by trade school as well, and sometimes one may be self-taught.

This message was attributed to social media. online news and videos.

Costs and Funding

Like the memorable messages, the financial considerations of college surfaced as a salient theme (14.9%, $n = 7$). “Media was perhaps the only medium of information exchange in which I felt slightly discouraged to attend college. I remember hearing a lot about student loan debt and how so many degrees are worthless in the modern era,” said a 20-year-old white man from Michigan. Another recalled the message from media in general stating, “That it has to be expensive and complicated.”

It seems as some sources are trying to get the message out that they understand the high costs and are doing something about it. One message reported by an Arizona resident from a website was, “...we keep costs down to help our student’s graduate debt-free.” As with the memorable messages, the messages about “crippling” debt being a bad thing was brought up. This time the crippling debt message was attributed to media in general.

Atmosphere of College

This code gave messages about what life at college would be like (10.6%, $n = 5$). Most messages in this theme presented a view of college as a “party” atmosphere. This bi-racial 27-year-old student from Michigan had this comment:

I think the media messages we receive about college distort the real reason people should spending thousands of dollars in college. Like is the point to get drunk, party, and do just enough to pass the class because "C's get degrees?"

Others echoed the same theme with, "I knew it (the media message) was an exaggeration. I wasn't interested in partying so it wouldn't have persuaded me to go", "college is about wild, crazy parties", or "college is one long frat/sorority party, punctuated by stressful midterms and finals", which was a message attributed to TV.

One message was neutral, "Staying on campus is an experience like no other." And one message gave the positive comment, "College is a great place for learning while in a positive mindset."

Quality of the Message

Quality of the Message deals with what the message actually said, if it was believable and how the message was portrayed. The credibility of the message became the memorable message for the receiver. These participants were unable or unwilling to take in the message, or at least consider it as a valuable piece of information because of their source. Of the messages given, 6.4% ($n = 3$) expressed some negative views of the messages received from media. These messages were received with a bit of skepticism. As one lifelong homeschooler from Michigan tried to think of a media message she responded, "I can't think of any positive ones. Generally, colleges lie in their ads and such so of I check the facts and find the ad is basically lying it gives a negative impression of the college." This fact-checking reiterates the fact that the message is the credibility of sources. The "fact" checking confirms for this participant that the skepticism was well-founded, and these messages should be disregarded. Similarly, a 22-year-old man from

Indiana said, “Advertisements for college come off to me as hokey.” Alternatively, “It's just funny advertising” (from a 21-year-old Michigan resident.)

These attitudes in the message lead one participant to sum it up like this, “I have never trusted the mainstream media, and thus this information had little to no impact on my life choices regarding higher education.” Nevertheless, with that said, another participant realized the potential power in the media and noted, “I figure the glossy pictures of happy, confident, fulfilled-looking young people are just another ad - probably with more impact on me than I realize because otherwise why would they be paying to put those images up all over the place?”

While the received media messages and memorable messages were similar, there were some crucial differences. Even some of the themes were very similar; for example, in the memorable message, the Financial Concerns had similarities to the Costs and Funding theme of the media messages. The media theme of Quality of the Message considers the source of the message in contrast to the memorable messages where any criticism of the source is absent. Necessity of Going from media messages, and Success in Life were similar. The responses to College Experience in the memorable messages were more varied and broader though still with similarities to the Atmosphere of College messages in media themes.

Besides their differences in content, the frequency of each type was different. Overall in the memorable messages, the Expectations theme was the most prominent but was not an overall theme for the media messages. This idea of expectations was not present in the media messages. More of the consistent tone of the media was that college was necessary. This may have to do with the source. The majority of memorable messages came from family members who would naturally have expectations for their family. The sources for media however had no

“relationship” with the receiver of the message and therefore no “expectation” is placed upon the received.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS

This study makes an essential contribution to the research on homeschoolers and it adds to the body of research on memorable messages by describing which messages are most salient to homeschool graduates before making their college decision. Mainly this study gives a picture of who these homeschoolers are, what messages they are receiving regarding college, where those messages are coming from, and how it impacts them. These results can increase the understanding of how homeschool students navigate the college decision and can help parents of homeschooling and college personnel working with homeschool students better understand the messages they might be received and how these messages may impact them.

These findings, in possible contrast to Thomas (2018), find that for this group of homeschool graduates most are long-term homeschoolers. The majority of participants indicated that they had been homeschooled over 12 years (64%), with only 6% saying they had been homeschooled less than five years. The findings do not support the idea that homeschoolers are making use of multiple school choices and moving between them often (Isenberg, 2007). Thomas (2018) suggests that homeschoolers are blending more with other educational options but the homeschoolers in this study did not seem to represent that trend. It could be possible that the age demographic plays a role in this occurrence and the demographics of this study, homeschool graduates, do not yet reflect this direction if it is only in younger homeschool students.

This research supports previous research with evidence that homeschoolers are prepared and do succeed in college (Cogan, 2010; Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Payton &

Scott, 2013; Ray, 2016; Snyder, 2013; Yu et al., 2016). Many responses indicated they had graduated, were proud of their degrees, and felt they were successful in life. For example, a 35-year-old man from Washington said, “They (memorable messages) contributed to my getting a college degree which I am happy that I have, and which has probably opened doors for me.” Similarly, a 27-year-old woman from Michigan commented, “...I never thought I would end up going as far as I did and I'm the first person in my family to get an M.A. “ My research also supports Kelly (2015) with the idea that most homeschool students are going to college. A vast majority (85%, $n = 40$) of the participants were either in college, had already gone to college, or have plans to go in the future. This high percentage of students going to college may be different from the non-homeschooled student. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) in 2016 69.7% of all college graduates went to college. Because this was a non-randomized sample it is not clear if this represents all homeschoolers, however, it would appear the participants in this study chose college at a higher rate than the population as a whole.

There were some similarities to several of the other memorable message studies having to do with college students. For instance, Wang's (2014) study on memorable messages for first-generation college students had similar themes of support and expectations. Both Wang (2014), and the present study showed students using messages to navigate college and choices about college. In Kranstuber, Carr and Hosek (2012), researchers looked at memorable messages as indicators of student success. Their codes of support and Necessity of Going were similar to the themes in this study. Kranstuber, Carr and Hosek (2012) suggested that the participants' “interpretation” of their message had more to do with success than the message itself. This would fit with many of the messages in this study.

Homeschoolers were asked how they felt about the message, and often, this revealed more about their interpretation of the message they received. These additional added information from their feelings were especially true for some of the media messages where the perceived distrust for the message became the message. This could also to be applied to many of the expectation messages where family seemingly gave this message as a positive or neutral message, yet some homeschool students felt this was very negative, creating pressure for them. Their interpretation changed the intent of the message. Nazione et al. (2011) looked at memorable messages that college students used to navigate college. This study looked at memorable message's students used in response to the challenges they saw at college. Some of the messages loosely were echoed in the current data, though for this study, it was more random messages rather than whole categories. Some of the individual messages about working hard or being supported were similar. Though this study also used control theory as a framework for explaining the messages, and the actions these students took. In Nazione et al. (2011) study the focus was on overcoming the challenges and control theory was better adapted with the focus more on the action from the received message.

Homeschoolers reflected a struggle with college costs that is perhaps not unique to the homeschool student. Many of the messages echoed concerns over the high costs of college and the distaste for large amounts of student loans while at the same time seeing the value in education towards future success in life. Our society today seems to echo these sentiments with headlines of "Price of College Increasing 8 Times faster than Wages (Forbes, 2018)," or "Please Stop Asking Whether College is worth it". The answer Newton gives to "is it worth it" is, "overwhelming data shows that people with college degrees earn significantly more than those without." Yes, it is worth the cost and debt.

I also saw that many of the homeschool graduates struggled with expectations given to them by family. This too may be a struggle that many young adults wrestle with. According to the U.S. Fed News Service (Lippman, et al., 2008), nine out ten families expect their children to go on to some formal schooling after high school. Some of the participants cited an “expectation” or an unstated “knowing” that they were expected to go to college. This message often contained a dual message of college is expensive but essential for success. This message created sad feelings or anxiety for some who got the message that it was important but also clearly got the message that they should not take out loans, so they were understandably conflicted and felt like it was a mixed message. More plausible solutions are needed to help homeschool graduates navigate these two seemingly conflicting messages.

Even the idea of expectations being placed upon young people surfaces in other memorable message research. In Wang’s (2014) study on first-generation college students one of the themes centered around the idea of not letting others down and the expectation of success to empower others. Horstman, Holman & McBride’s (2019) study on using metaphors about miscarriage explores several self and societal expectations within the messages they received and how these expectations impacted the individual.

Memorable message research often cites the giver of the message as family (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981; Stohl, 1986). My research furthers the notion that family is a vital giver of memorable messages. Most often the homeschoolers were given messages by family, particularly Mom. Families would be wise to consider this as they choose what to say to their children regarding college. The message often, stays with the homeschool student well beyond college.

Implications

Practical Implications

This research extends the scope of memorable message research into the homeschool demographic. The remembered messages fit Stohl's (1986) definition of recalled and remembered messages. These messages were long term, made an impact on the participant and most were given as verbal messages. The few that were possibly not verbal were still communicated messages to the receiver and what the participant chose to recall as their memorable message. These were a few of the messages in the "expectation" theme. Though the participants could not recall the words that led to the "understanding" or "unspoken" nature of their message, it is likely that at some point this message was expressed to them in some way, though the expression of it was long forgotten. Like Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek (2012) found, our messages regarding college tended to be positive. In this study, parents also found memorable messages a supportive way to impart information and encouragement into their child's life.

Throughout the data, references were made regarding faith and religion. This supports some of the notions of homeschoolers being very religious (Paulson Special, 2010). Examples included statements like, "I have been influenced by Baptist schools", said an 18-year-old female from Texas or, "I wanted to grow spiritually while at school and not coast with the culture. I wanted to be involved in Christian campus ministry and fellowship and also with my family and home church", from a 35-year-old female. While not every participant reflected this, it may be that this religious or faith culture is prominent more with homeschoolers than with many other non-homeschool students.

Another area that may reflect some unique characteristics of the homeschool demographic is in their comments about messages they would give to other homeschoolers. Many of the comments reflected their uncertainty about their status as prospective college applicants due to their homeschool background. Speaking of college, a 27-year-old from Michigan said, “It’s an incredible experience and so much more rewarding (and less scary!) than I thought it would be.” From another, “it may be scary since homeschoolers don’t grow up in that type of environment, but it’s worth it and will help you grow as a person.”, from a 23-year-old man. Furthermore, still another from a 36-year-old woman, “A homeschooled student can be just as successful as a student who attended public or private school.”

Their situation as homeschoolers also came out as an advantage in the minds of several participants. The idea was that because they were homeschooled, they were trained to learn differently. One 19-year-old reflected, “I think sometimes that it’s easy to feel inferior as a homeschooler going into college, but the reality is that they don’t really need to be. Not that homeschoolers are all geniuses, but normally there is an advantage that pays off in college due to how we are able to study and figure things out on our own.” As a group it would be obvious to most that homeschoolers received their education in a different way, and at least these homeschoolers felt like that was an advantage.

It would be helpful for parents and colleges to understand some of the concerns expressed in order to help the potential college student navigate the transition to college. Knowing that some of the homeschool demographic may have religious or spiritual concerns as well as uncertainties might help colleges tailor interviews, tours and orientation information that would speak to those specific concerns. Parents can be encouraged to know that the homeschool graduates in this study offered advice saying that they were well prepared, and able to do well.

Theoretical Implications

Research indicates that memorable messages are used to take actions or in sense-making, especially in new situations (Schildt, Mantere, & Cornelissen, 2019; Stohl, 1986). These recalled messages play an essential part in the sense-making and can lead to actions (Miczo, Flood & Fitzgerald, 2018), as was the case with many of the homeschoolers. The majority of the participants participated in college and attributed their choice to go at least partially to the messages they received. The homeschoolers in the study thought that the memorable messages they received impacted their college choice. They believed however, that media messages were not as impactful as the memorable messages.

For the message to lead to action it must go through a process which is where the concept of control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Smith & Ellis, 2001) fits in. Control theory at work with the memorable message, could be an explanation of behavior. The idea is that the homeschool students hear the messages about being successful and act to attend college as a result of these messages, and a way to close the gap between where they are now and where they would like to be. This would begin the “negative feedback loop” (Klein, 1989). Klein (1989) suggests that the memorable message is the catalyst for starting the process of seeing the idealized self and formulating the sequence of behavior that it would take to achieve the ideals. Consistent with other studies, this research would also fit with those suggestions (Nazione, 2011; Miczo, Flood & Fitzgerald, 2018). While these messages had an impact, this research fails to show a complete pattern to follow the structure of control theory. Control theory has several levels, and the memorable message does supply the comparison idea, catalyst, or place where the participant may “fall short” of where they want to be (Smith & Ellis, 2001). More follow-up interviews or questions would be needed to establish the entire program level of control theory in

most cases. Control theory has more complexity in the process than the memorable messages in this study may contain. More studies on the action portion of the memorable message would be indicated to completely fit with the tenets of control theory. As a communication researcher, my purpose was to examine the communication, and the message itself with a look at the actions created, however keeping the communication aspects central to my research. Memorable messages on their own are a rich source of information.

With this in mind, this research extends the call for a TOMM (Cooke-Jackson & Rubinsky (2018). At this point, the application of an atheoretical approach using the idea of memorable messages to this study makes the most sense. If a TOMM model was a recognized theory, it would be very applicable in this study. Sense-making plays a part in the analysis but framing the messages in regard to the past body of research, which has primarily been atheoretical makes the most sense. The responses homeschoolers gave echo those of other studies on memorable messages and fit the definition of memorable messages (Wang, 2014). Applying this research with the sense-making model which has been referred to as a generalized way of interpreting a situation (Horstman, Holman & McBride, 2019), or as a way to deal with the information we receive (Weick, 1995) gives the structure needed to understand, explain and analyze the findings. Sense-making and memorable messages together allow the communication researcher to draw attention to the communicative process in which the participant in engages. The message itself is a communicated event that then is used in the sense-making process, which closely aligns with the fundamental communication process of active listening. The receiver hears and receives the message, pays attention to it, makes meaning or sense of the message, then acts or responds to the message and finally recalls the message later (Hamel, 2020). This

way of dealing with the message received is at the core of sense-making and basic communication principles.

Media Messages Implications

My research also contributes to the study of memorable media messages. This is an area of communication research that needs more study. Media messages have been a subject of study for quite some time; however, media messages as a memorable, or long remembered message are not as common. Much of the research on media has to do with its effects on individuals, or in other words, the effect of the message the media is trying to convey. The study of mass media effects is an entire field of study within communication (Riffe, Stephen, & Frederick, 2014).

The media messages considered in this study were ones that the participants recalled as memorable messages. Other research shows that individuals do consider and name a media message as their memorable message (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017; Nazione et al., 2009). When reminded of the definition of memorable messages some of the recalled messages in this study were also media messages. This study went on to ask specifically for a media message. Most participants were able to recall a memorable media message (66%). The fact that participants recalled a media message as a personal message may make the implication that media is a personal message for them. Participants may be thinking of the messages they received as personal rather than “mass” media messages. The idea that some of the participants also framed the message they received from media as not believable, or trustworthy is also of note. These individuals framed their responses in such a way that the mistrust was the primary message they received, perhaps not even remembering the message the media was intending as the memorable message. The fact that the message was thought to be untrustworthy may have helped this message stay in the memory of the individual. This research shows that there are

some similarities between the themes in the memorable messages and media messages, and that the source may be a significant part of the reason for some of those differences.

Limitations

This study led to some rich content on attitudes about college from both parents and students. Many of the themes could be used in support of other research regarding anticipatory college experiences. The memorable message content may also be useful for those marketing to potential homeschool students, and the media messages may contain important messages for those seeking to portray college in a positive light since many participants viewed these messages skeptically. Because no data with direct comparison to public school students was collected, this information is of limited use in understanding what might be unique to the homeschool student. Without the comparison, it is not possible to know what attitudes or actions may be the same or different.

Also of note, qualitative studies on the homeschool population are few, and few with larger sample sizes. Making use of surveys allowed this study to have a larger sample size than other studies done on this population before. This larger size allowed for a more diverse range of responses. However, using a survey to measure qualitative open-ended responses results in less participation with many incomplete surveys. Survey data collection methods also were by purposive and snowball methods, which may not be an accurate representation of the homeschool graduate population. Demographics for the sample may not be representative of the homeschool graduate population. A more diverse sample could include participants of more varied ethnicities, and from more states or countries.

Few studies have explored the memorable messages of media. This study lends its voice to the perceived impact the media has on our lives. These memorable media messages were

remembered as ones that were long remembered and had an impact on the individual. In comparison to the memorable messages, media messages had less of an impact on the individuals, but still 51% of participants believed the media message impacted them in some way. As these messages were self-reported, more research will need to be done to measure media's memorable messages in decision making. The comparison of the memorable messages and media message in this study leaves a clear impact difference as perceived by the receiver.

Messages in this study were prompted by a definition and general question. Future research could expand and give a more directed focus with questions asking for specific messages about some of the themes uncovered.

Future research could include more demographic information such as socioeconomic status. Some of the previous studies indicate some of the unique features of homeschool populations may be influenced by socioeconomic or other factors such as education level of parents, this could be explored in the future. Future research could also include a comparison sample so that inferences could be made between the general and homeschool messages received.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study revealed some of the messages homeschool students have about college before entering college and their thoughts about them. Information from these messages influenced most participants to go to college. Both memorable messages and media messages influenced the participants' college decision. These memorable messages homeschoolers received aided their sense-making process. The findings show how using sense-making and memorable messages together allowed participants to retain and use messages they received to impact their lives.

The themes of the memorable messages showed messages about the Expectations put on participants, the College Experience, Success in Life, Support and Financial Concerns. The Media messages showed themes of Quality of the Message, Atmosphere of College, Necessity of Going, and Costs and Funding. The majority of participants said that both message types had an impact on the participants' college decision. The memorable messages came primarily from family. The media messages came from a variety of sources, and sometimes were attributed to "media" in general.

More research will need to be done but this research lends a picture of the homeschool graduate and adds this demographic to the body of memorable message research. This research also shows a need for the creation of the theory of memorable messages (ToMM). Since most memorable message research to this point has been atheoretical, using only memorable messages as a frame, and now has a long history of data to support these interpretations, the creation of the ToMM may be a positive step in the field of memorable message research.

This study has limitations due to the sample size and methods of data collection. Further research could help support this data by including more homeschoolers and studying a similar public schooled demographic for comparison purposes. Though generalizations about this group of participants can be made they cannot determine what may or may not be unique about homeschool graduates. This study is an excellent first step into the areas of homeschool graduates, anticipatory college messages, and media memorable message, but more research will need to be done in these areas.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey

1. We can think of messages we remember as Memorable Messages. Memorable messages are verbal statements that have been told to you which you may remember for a long period of time or has stuck with you in some way. These statements may also have influenced your life in some way (Crook & Daily, 2017). Keeping this definition in mind please answer the following:
2. What is the MOST memorable message you remember receiving about the decision to attend college or not? (open response)
3. Thinking of the message you described in #2, do you consider it a positive, neutral, mixed or negative message? (scaled response)
4. Why? (open-ended, coded)
5. Who did this message come from? (Mom, Dad, other family member, friend, college personal, guidance counselor, sibling, pastor, other) (coded)
6. When was this message given to you? (open response)
7. How did you feel about the message? (open response)
8. What was the second most memorable message you received related to attending college? (If none, skip to 10) (open response)
9. Was the message (s) you described in #6 positive, neutral, mixed or negative? (scaled response)
10. Why?
11. Who did this message come from? (Mom, Dad, other family member, friend, college personnel, guidance counselor, sibling, pastor, other) (coded)
12. When was this message given to you? (open response)
13. How did you feel about the message? (open response)
14. To what extent did either mentioned above effect your choice to go to college or not? (scaled)
15. How do either of these memorable messages, if at all, impact your life now? (open response)
16. At what times do you recall these messages? (open response)
17. Thinking again about the definition of memorable message as statements that have been given to you in some way which you may remember for a long period of time or have stuck with you in some way. What memorable messages have you received from media sources that have influenced you in some way regarding college? (open response)
18. Where did this media message come from? (Social media ad, an email, an online blog, an online news source, TV, other)
19. To what extend did this mediated message effect your choice to go to college or not? (scaled)
20. How does this mediated message impact your life now, if at all? (open)
21. Are you currently or have you attended college? If yes, How do these memorable messages impact your college experiences? (If no, did you graduate? Ever go? Plan on returning?)
22. What message would you give a homeschooled student about college? Why?
23. How many years were you homeschooled? (1 or less, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, 10+)
24. Did you graduate from homeschool?
25. What is your age?
26. What is your sex?
27. What is your ethnicity?

APPENDIX B

Entire Messages Coded

Table 7
All memorable messages

Message	Theme	message valence
That college is a great way into a career but there is no shame in pursuing a career in the trades etc. which require a technical degree or no formal education at all.	expectations	Extremely positive
College is mandatory in our family.	expectations	Extremely positive
The most memorable thing I remember hearing about college was that I didn't have to go; I could teach myself a vast majority of what I needed to know, and pay a far smaller amount for professional tutoring.	expectations	Mixed
I felt it was expected of me to attend college.	expectations	Moderately positive
Go to college	expectations	Moderately positive
I don't really remember any messages like that. It was never really a decision I had to make, it was more an unspoken understanding in my family.	expectations	Extremely positive
I was encouraged to look thoroughly into college, trade schools and apprenticeships. I was provided with a wealth of information by my mom and received a ton of support in pursuing my options.	expectations	Extremely positive
My dad has always had a job he hates because he did not go to college. Because of this, my parents have always challenged me to find a career I would love. Mine happened to require a college education.	expectations	Extremely positive
My father has worked in universities ever since I was very young so for me it was always just understood that I would go especially since I have always loved learning. Just as may have been predicted I attended and graduated university and had an amazing time. For this reason I can say that not attending was never even a consideration. It was just an unspoken desire that I have always had and an unspoken expectation from my parents.	expectations	Extremely positive
Think ahead and try to be prepared for what may happen. Decide from there if attending college is best for you and your future family/endeavors.	expectations	Extremely positive

I don't think I ever received anything specific pushing towards or against college. I just always assumed I would, because that's what people do when they graduate high school.	expectations	Neither Moderately positive
Seeing people talk about going to college in tv shows	expectations	Mixed
You just have to get through it.	expectations	Extremely positive
You can't get married until you graduate with a four year degree	expectations	Moderately positive
That online classes, or taking a class at a time, was also a viable option for a second-level education.	expectations	Mixed
I needed to do well in college.	expectations	Moderately positive
Work hard	expectations	Extremely positive
Learning a trade is valuable	expectations	positive
That I should at least find something I was passionate about and give college a try.	expectations	Moderately positive
Perhaps from my friends who many of which shared me and my families perspective in university. The vast majority of my friends also just understood almost subconsciously that university was vital and this provided reinforcement to the non-verbal messages I was receiving at home.	expectations	Extremely positive
Women don't need to go to college because their husbands will support them.	expectations	Moderately negative
It was after finishing high school that I was told that right now would be the best time to go to college so that I would always have something to fall back on. I didn't really know what I wanted to do at the time but I remember it being important that I accomplish at least an Associate's degree because once I did it, "It could never be taken away from me" and I would always have it no matter what life brought. I never thought I would end up going as far as I did and I'm the first person in my family to get a M.A.	expectations*	Moderately positive
I had to work hard to get into college and was fully capable of being a competitive applicant.	expectations*	Extremely positive
You don't have to go to college if you don't want to.	expectations	Extremely positive

Learning is never wasted.	experience	Extremely positive
My father told me that college for the most fun part of his life.	experience	Moderately positive
I think the one I remember the most was that "homeschoolers have an easier time in college and are more prepared than most."	experience	Mixed
In my community, it was very common for mothers to look down on college students. They constantly said, "really good kids go to college, and come out the other end immoral". Keeping in mind my homeschool community was very religious (mainly Christian and Baptist), this became a sort of mantra. College, unless a private institution, was where people went to party, nothing more.	experience	Moderately negative
If and where to attend college, what you will major in, what job you take, who you marry - these are some of the most life-changing decisions coming up.	experience	Neither
That this is an investment for my future	experience	Moderately positive
Pick a school with small class sizes	experience	Extremely positive
Never go to a secular college, but if you do, you need to spend at least the first year at a Christian college.	experience	Moderately negative
Having to drop out	experience	Neither
It's a lot of work	experience	Moderately negative
Everything I do in high school will be seen by a college. Study hard. Make good grades.	experience	Mixed positive and negative
You will create friendships and relationships that will last a lifetime.	experience	Extremely positive
It's important to seek out knowledge in college and not just a 4.0	experience	Extremely positive
That college is a place to make friends.	experience	Moderately positive
College can lead you to some of your lifelong friends	experience	Extremely positive
College will allow you to grow personally, professionally, and academically.	experience	Extremely positive

Those who work while in college generally learn more than those who don't work.	experience	Extremely positive
That professors would be much more stringent on grading, especially when it came to papers.	experience	Extremely negative
Everyone changes their major at least once.	experience	Moderately positive
It will be a lot more challenging than high school.	experience	Moderately negative
Christians need to be well-grounded in their faith before and during the college years. The classroom and social environment of secular (and many Christian) universities can destroy young people's faith.	experience	Moderately negative
Don't take student loans if you go to college.	Finances	Mixed
It's a waste of money if you don't have a clear idea of what you want to do beforehand.	Finances	Mixed
That it's expensive	Finances	Moderately negative
Your education is the best investment you can ever make. No one can ever take it away from you.	Finances	Extremely positive
College will burden you with debt with no payoff	Finances	Extremely negative
still paying off student loans	Finances	Extremely negative
"Don't just go for the money."	Finances	Neither
If you're going to go to college have a game plan	Finances	Moderately positive
Make your passion your paycheck.	Finances	Extremely positive
"I'll kick down doors and beg for more money if you really want to come here."	Finances	Extremely positive
Don't take out huge loans	Finances	Moderately positive
Apply for as many scholarships as possible!	Finances	Neither
It was difficult and expensive and somewhat of a scam	Finances	Moderately negative
That I'll be in debt until I die	Finances	Extremely negative
College graduates earn more money, and you need a degree to be hired by a company.	Success	Mixed

Being accepted to my dream art school through an acceptance letter.	Success	Extremely positive
Nothing in particular really stands out. Maybe go to college so that you don't have to work at McDonald's? I think that was a general social message at the time, so I couldn't tell you where the message/influence came from.	Success	Neither
I had to work hard to get into college and was fully capable of being a competitive applicant.	Success*	Extremely positive
Attending college will put you one step ahead of the other guy.	Success	Mixed
College opens doors	Success	Extremely positive
That attending college would benefit my future. Most commercial messages attributed college attendance with success.	Success	Moderately positive
College isn't for everyone, but it can open job opportunities for you that going straight into the workforce may not provide.	Success	Extremely positive
It will get me a good job and better life.	Success	Extremely positive
Congratulations. Ministry that's so nice. We need more people in the ministry. All the way to Atlanta?! We're going to miss you!!	Success	Extremely positive
The bachelor's diploma is the new high school diploma.	Success	Moderately negative
That college will open many doors in my future and attending a post-secondary school of some form will help me later on.	Success	Moderately positive
That choosing to go to college would help me have a more promising, secure future.	Success	Moderately positive
It would improve your outlook and further the outcome of your career and that if I realized it was not something I wanted to do I could also always choose an alternative.	Success	Extremely positive
The difference between a job and a career is a college degree.	Success	Mixed
That it didn't really matter what degree I got, just as long as I completed it and got straight A's (for scholarships, etc.).	success	Mixed

Go to college so that you can make more money [than everyone else, presumably].	success	Moderately positive
You are likely to earn more with a degree	success	Extremely positive
don't you want to get a good job?	success	Moderately negative
That starting college earlier will further boost me into a great future.	success	Extremely positive
It was after finishing high school that I was told that right now would be the best time to go to college so that I would always have something to fall back on. I didn't really know what I wanted to do at the time but I remember it being important that I accomplish at least an Associate's degree because once I did it, "It could never be taken away from me" and I would always have it no matter what life brought. I never thought I would end up going as far as I did and I'm the first person in my family to get a M.A.	support*	Moderately positive
I was capable of going to and thriving at college.	support	Extremely positive
I was told by several professors at more than one university that they were relieved and excited I was homeschooled, because I could teach myself.	support	Extremely positive
We need more ministers. Good for you!	support	Extremely positive
Consider your options and we will support you wherever you go.	support	Extremely positive
"I'll kick down doors and beg for more money if you really want to come here."	support*	Extremely positive
"If that's something you want to do, we'll support you."	support	Mixed
How are you going to feel?		Extremely positive
That it is hard for homeschoolers to get into college		Moderately negative
I don't think I received many messages about this subject, so I'm not sure I can pinpoint any more than the one.		Neither
Am I going to go through college and am I not going to get homesick?		Extremely positive

*These messages were coded under two categories

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Institutional Review Board

FWA00007042

IRB00000254

Date: December 3, 2019

To: Autumn Edwards, Principal Investigator
Gina Reynolds, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-11-42

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Sense-Making Through Control Theory Framed by Memorable Messages About College in the Context of Homeschooling" has been **approved** under the **exempt** category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., *add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.*). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) December 2, 2020 and each year thereafter until closing of the study. The IRB will send a request.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at

<https://wmu.edu/research/irbms>.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.

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Approved by Board 12/3/19, Kalamazoo Hall