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Parental Involvement and its Influence on Students' Career Choices

Introduction

As students turn 18 years old and graduate high school, they would expect to now enjoy the freedoms of adulthood and the power of choice, but unfortunately, that is often not the case. Studies have shown that nearly 2 in 5 American college graduates regret their choice of major when pursuing higher education (Dam, 2022). While there are a variety of aspects that determine why college graduates regret their significant choices, parental involvement often plays a major role in why college students find their major unsatisfactory. To varying degrees, parents offer their insight and judgment to what they believe is a good college or university of choice and what major to go for. While helpful, sometimes this advice is unwarranted and can go to the extent of pushing a student towards a particular major that they may not want to take on. By exploring and analyzing the scope of parental involvement, this study aims to examine the extent to which the choice of major for undergraduate students at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) is the result of parental influence.

Research Questions

This study aims to understand:

1. Does parental involvement have a large impact on career and major choices for students attending UC Davis?

2. What variety of factors influence the degree of parental involvement for students attending UC Davis?

Literature Review

Prior research done on this topic has concluded that one of the major factors that influence parental involvement is student characteristics. (Ma, 2009; Leppel et al., 2001) Likewise, certain students are more susceptible to parental involvement as a result of their characteristics. Race, gender, parental occupations, financial status, immigration status, and community are all different characteristics that heavily influence the degree and extent of parental involvement and the willingness a student has to accept and even promote involvement from their guardian (Ma, 2011). This is supported by research that discusses how students who receive a high school diploma are likely to further their education, and race is a main factor as to why students choose to pursue higher education as well as the extent of support students receive from their parents because of it (Ross, 2016) who. Prior studies also discuss the psychological factors and how autonomy and parent-student relationships play a role in parental involvement (Sax, 2010; Cullaty, 2011) They discuss various degrees or instances where parental involvement can happen, depending on the development of the student and how this impacts their choice of major and career.

Methods

This study aims to answer the research questions through a survey that effectively breaks down and represents students on all undergraduate levels, but mainly focuses on incoming freshman and transfer students. To avoid selection bias, the survey was administered virtually through social media like Discord, in servers where students of all year levels and fields can participate. A total of 21 students participated. Ethical considerations taken into account included

confidentiality, objectivity, bias, and the aim to represent different communities or students.

Students from the UWP class were also invited to participate in the study. The survey allowed

students to remain anonymous and since it is virtual, external influences like peer pressure and

face-to-face communication on responses were less likely to occur. Some characteristics of

respondents included that 52.4% of respondents were freshmen at UC Davis, 33.3% were

Sophomores, and Juniors and Seniors each made up 9.5% of respondent demographics *(See*

Figure 1). See *Figure 2* for a complete list of demographic information about the participants.

*(**Figure 1***: Academic year of undergraduate students at UC Davis)*

1. What year are you in at UCD?
21 responses

- Freshman (Year 1)
- Sophomore (Year 2)
- Junior (Year 3)
- Senior (Year 4)
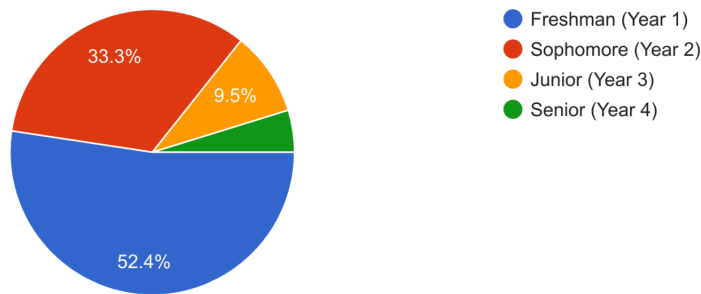
*(**Figure 2***: Participant demographics)*

Gender	Year	College	Race
Male: 42.0%	1st year: 52.4%	Engineering: 14.3%	White/Middle Eastern: 38.1%
Female: 52.4%	2nd year: 33.3%	Letters and Science: 28.6%	Asian: 38.1%
Nonbinary: 4.8%	3rd year: 9.5%	Agriculture and Environmental Sciences: 19.0%	Hispanic/Latino: 14.3%
-	4th year: 9.5%	Biological Sciences: 38.1%	Multi-racial: 9.5%

As seen, the survey consisted of demographic questions like year level, gender, race, and major, as well as open-ended questions that reveal more information about what students think about parental involvement. The Likert scale was also utilized to effectively show how the participants feel about parental involvement and their satisfaction with their choice of major and college. The survey also compared Likert scale results with demographic information like gender compared to choice of major and whether or not this relates to trends in parental involvement. The Likert scale questions asked in the survey are seen below, in the *Results* section. Open-ended questions include "How have you noticed parental involvement in regards to higher education?" and "What aspects of parental involvement are more noticeable than others?". There were a total of 8 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. These questions aimed at identifying important aspects of parental involvement in order to analyze when it occurs, why it occurs, and the extent to which it occurs. It utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gather information to create a well-rounded argument. Quantitative results are depicted through graphs like pie charts and bar graphs while qualitative results will be showcased through direct responses from participants as well as the pattern of ranking seen in the Likert scale questions.

Most survey questions were demographic, and that is because they were to be looked at from a thematic and analytical perspective and lens to deduce patterns and correlations. Prior research on this topic has concluded that demographic characteristics tend to have certain trends (Sax, 2011). This study aimed at understanding and finding similar trends while at the same time, understanding how students felt about parental involvement or if they noticed it. The Likert scale questions aimed at analyzing if students were happy with their major, the degree of parental involvement or persuasion a student feels may have been present, and if they believed their choice of major was their own. These help my argument because they indicate if a student is

likely to change their major as a result of parental involvement. The open-ended questions inquired how parents have involved themselves in affairs related to college and if students found parental involvement beneficial or not. This aids my research by highlighting multiple perspectives and valuable student feedback.

Positionality Statement

I, Aliya Rehman, am currently an incoming freshman at UC Davis's College of Biological Sciences, majoring in Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior. I was born and raised in Sacramento, California, and attended Al-Arqam Islamic School, and graduated in 2023. I am racially from Yemen and Pakistan. At my high school, all students were of the same religion and racially came from a similar background, and this proved to influence my major of study. During my high school years, I focused on a variety of leadership and extracurricular opportunities. I was the president of her high school's student council, president of a creative writing club, and a high school intern at Kaiser Permanente. Ultimately, I found passion in the medical field and aimed towards helping my community in a variety of ways as a result. This was through organizing a school-wide blood drive, and hosting school-wide fundraisers for medical aid overseas as a result of major flooding and hardships faced in particular countries.

However, I have noticed that largely, parents are the reason why many students choose a certain field to study and major when applying to colleges. While I have a passion for the medical field, I want to understand just how much is my own passion and how much of that passion is actually just my parents'. I realized that this may be an issue and lead to other students participating in community service and efforts that while helpful, may cause a student to be unhappy or unsatisfied. I believe students should find happiness in what they do, like I do, and want to help others understand this. Thus, I desire to research just how many students are pushed

by their parents and if their major of study is something they truly desire and enjoy. This is especially since I noticed the same pressures from my own parents and parents of my fellow high school graduates.

Results

The findings of the study suggested that to an extent, a student's choice of major is the result of parental involvement or influence. The findings have showcased varying themes on how students view parental involvement in college. In the Likert scale questions where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, the first Likert scale showcased that 23.80% of respondents strongly disagreed and 23.60% disagreed with the statement that their major choice is a result of parental involvement, while 23.80% agreed that their major was the result of parental involvement *(See Likert Scale 1)*. These results suggest that the participants' choices of major were mostly not a result of parental influence. When compared to passion in the second Likert scale question, 47.60% of participants are very passionate about their career choice while 42.90% are passionate *(See Likert Scale 2)*. The third Likert scale question indicated that 33.3% of participants' parents strongly pushed for their major/career path and 28.60% remained neutral about the statement *(See Likert Scale 3)*.

From the open-ended questions, 61.11% of the participants agreed to the theme that parental involvement reflected in their career choice and major. Thus 38.90% of the respondents did not agree that their choice of career was a result of parental influence. First-year students agreed more towards the notion that parental involvement reflected their choice of major while second-year students tended to disagree with this idea *(See Table 1)*. The theme of the second open-ended question asked if parental influence on college was beneficial or not. 55.80% of participants agreed that parental influence is beneficial in regard to college and career choices,

while 44.20% remained neutral and said that it depended on the situation of the student. Second

and third-year students agreed with this idea while most first-year students were neutral about the

topic *(See Table 2)*. This indicates that parental involvement and its benefits are seen as a

subjective topic that depends on the context and the unique circumstances and case of every

student or participant.

Table 1: Parental involvement and career path

| Themes in Open-Ended Question 1	Percent (%) of Participant Responses That Agree With Theme	Mean of Academic Year
Parental involvement reflected the choice of major/career path	61.11%	1.5
Parental involvement did not reflect the choice of major/career path	38.90%	1.9

Table 2: Parental Involvement and if it is beneficial

| Themes in Open-Ended Question 1	Percent (%) of Participant Responses That Agree With Theme	Mean of Academic Year
Parental involvement is beneficial	55.80%	2.6
Parental involvement may not be beneficial in all circumstances (neutral response)	44.20%	1.8

Likert Scale 1: Participants' viewpoints and if they think their major is a result of parental influence. (1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree)
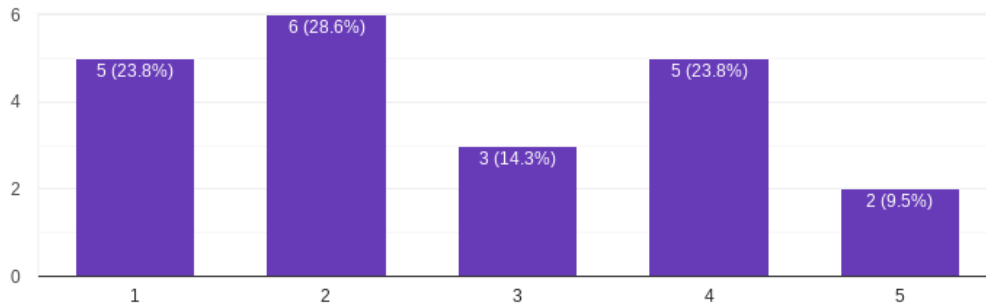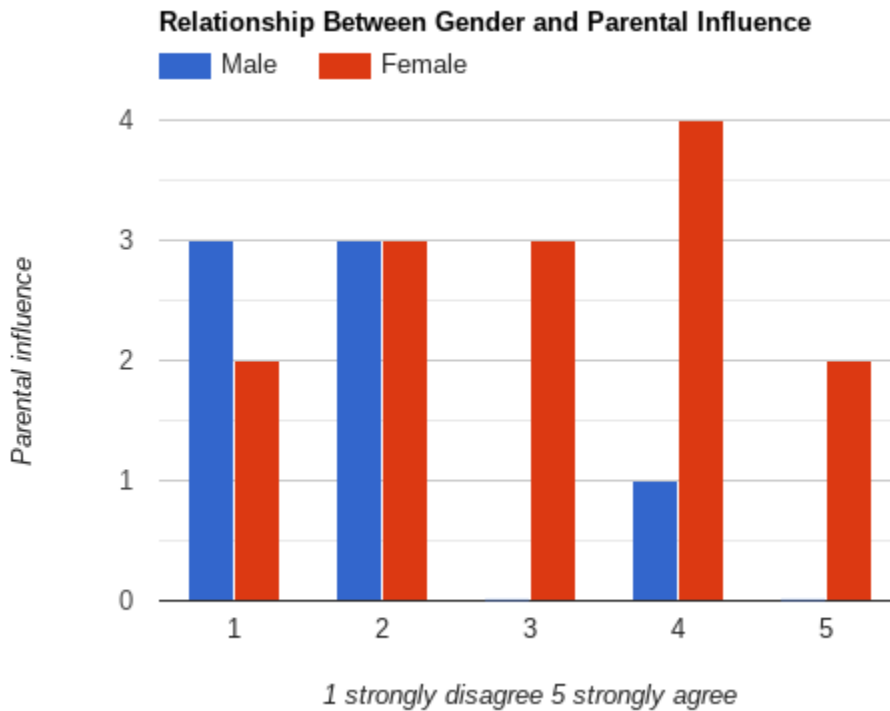

Likert scale 2: Participants' passion towards their major/career path. (1 is not passionate and 5 is very passionate)
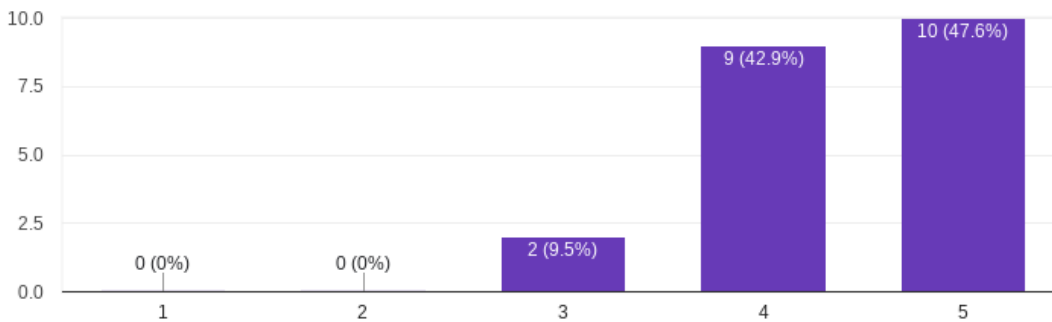
Likert scale 3: How strongly parents have pushed for career/field type: (1 is not strongly and 5 is very strongly)
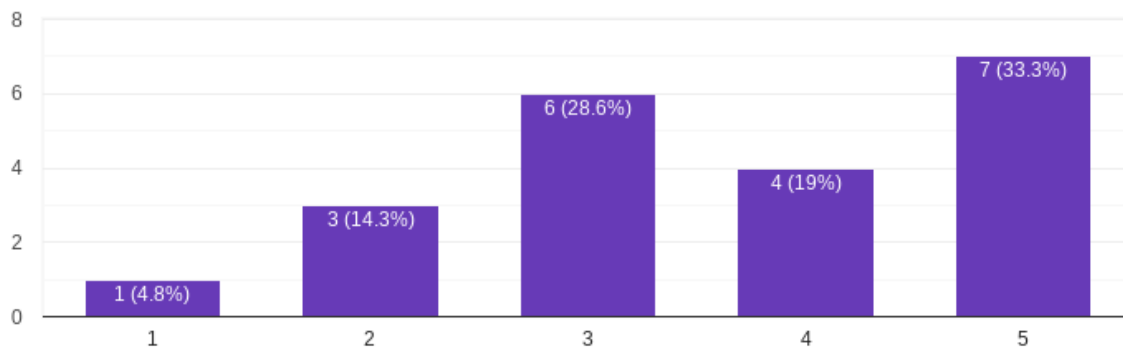
Graph 1: Relationship between Gender and Parental Influence

Discussion

This study has indicated that parental involvement can have varying effects and strengths for each participant and often parental involvement is seen in favor of passion for a career path or major. This study examines the scope of parental involvement and it is seen that the results support the fact that there are varying degrees of parental involvement. Some forms of parental involvement are found to positively correlate with the strength of that involvement, but other forms may not correlate with involvement strength. However, passion has been seen to correlate regardless of involvement, yet open-ended responses suggest that passion may be new-found as a result of changing or altering majors because of parental involvement. For the most part, parental involvement is present when a student chooses a major or career path, yet the strength and type of involvement varies per student or participant.

This is supported by prior studies of how race and societal factors play a supportive role in parental involvement (Ross, 2016). The results also indicate that there is a broad scope when

looking at why parental involvement occurs which is supported by prior research that showcases factors like autonomy and social capital (Sax, 2010; Cullaty, 2011). When compared, students who were female tended to respond that their major choice was a result of parental influence compared to male students (*See Graph 1)*. Note that a conclusion could not be reached when comparing race to parental involvement due to data discrepancies. The results thus support the notion that the demographic characteristics of participants have an impact on parental influence and major choice, which is supported by prior research (Leppel, 2001; Ma, 2009). These studies all indicate that when it does occur, parental involvement influences the choice of major for many students, and this study supports this claim by highlighting that there are varying degrees of involvement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the role of parental influence in the choice of major and career path for students. The results indicated a relatively even distribution of student opinions in regard to their own experiences or lack thereof in terms of parental involvement. Some students believed that they were strongly influenced by their parents while others believed that their parents did not play a significant role in their choice of major. The findings of this study imply that parental involvement is something that is seen to greatly impact the lives of students as the course of their lives is determined by their parents. College students can relate to this and this can spread awareness and result in support groups aimed at easing the severity of parental involvement. Based on demographic information, trends can be seen based on gender and how this impacted or may have influenced the responses of students. Future studies can be conducted that explore more demographic factors that lead to an increase or decrease in influence. This can be especially through exploring the socioeconomic status of parents and how

trends lead to varying degrees of parental involvement. There are some limitations with this study as the study cannot be used as a representative study for UCD students. This is because of the uneven distribution across student-controlled environments. The likelihood of external or influencing variables is likely and may have impacted the study. With more time and research, this study can be refined and expanded upon to truly understand the scope of parental involvement in higher education.

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