

WORK-LIFE EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	9
College Students.....	9
Stress and the Mental Health Crisis.....	11
Seeking Help and Receiving Support.....	15
Work-Life Research.....	18
Work-Life and Young Professionals.....	28
Anticipatory Socialization.....	33
Memorable Messages.....	34
Uncertainty Management Theory.....	36
Chapter 3: Methods.....	39
Interpretive Paradigm.....	39
Recruitment.....	41
Participants.....	42
Procedures.....	44
Analysis.....	45
Chapter 4: Results.....	48
Shaping of Their Ideas.....	48
Parents and Family.....	49
Other People in Their Network.....	55
Cultural Messages.....	58
Personal Experience.....	60
Balance as Vital but Challenging.....	62
School/work/life Conflicts.....	69
Strategies to Prevent or Cope with Unbalance.....	74
Expectations about College and Uncertainty for the Future.....	79
Prevalence of Behavioral and Mental Health Concerns.....	85
Being in a Time of Transition into the Real World.....	88

A Normal College Experience, Although Aware of Differences	95
Summary	99
Chapter 5: Discussion	102
Uncertainty and Memorable Messages in Anticipatory Socialization.....	102
Cultural Discourse Permeating the College Experience.....	109
Tension of College Life	113
Theoretical Implications	115
Organizational Implications.....	117
Limitations	122
Future Research	123
References.....	125
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter	134
Appendix B: Consent Form: Survey.....	135
Appendix C: Demographic Survey.....	137
Appendix D: Consent Form: Interview.....	140
Appendix E: Interview Protocol	142
Appendix F: Resources for Participants	144
Appendix G: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement	147
Appendix H: Transcriptionist Participant Demographics.....	148
Appendix I: Interview Data Information	149

Introduction and Rationale

Work-life research has been prevalent across academic disciplines since the era of two working-parent households (Barnett, 1999). However, this research largely fails to break away from this context, although non-parents and singles (and all employees for that matter), possess both work and non-work obligations (for exceptions, see Dixon, 2015; Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). Besides ignoring diverse characteristics of employees, work-life research also does not focus on younger populations who have not yet entered the workforce, even though doing so could shed light on the expectations and organizational socialization that young professionals have experienced throughout their life before being professionally employed (Kramer, 2010). In addition, the definition of “work” is evolving in the contemporary labor force (Clair, 1996; O’Connor & Raile, 2015), so continuing to explore the meanings, rules, and norms that surround the idea of work is important. Messages that college students receive within their interpersonal relationships, organizational participation, and the larger cultural context all influence their ideas of “work” and how to manage work and non-work obligations (Nazione, Laplante, Sandi, Cornacchione, Russell, & Stohl, 2011). College students also likely have experience in managing multiple roles such as the role of student, friend, family member, athlete, employee, and organizational member suggesting they are developing an understanding of work-life concerns now (National Survey of Student Engagement Institute, 2015).

The overwhelming presence of stress, anxiety, and depression in the population of college students (American College Health Association, 2016) could indicate that students are struggling with managing their multiple roles and obligations (Filak & Reinardy, 2011). In order to help solve this problem, we must first research how college students are discussing and understanding these work-life related demands. Moreover, because “work” and “life” are socially constructed ideals (Clair, 1996), the meanings that college students ascribe to both are

important to explore. Understanding the meanings of “work” and “life” from a college student experience reveals assumptions that are made about each and whether this challenges previous conceptions. These experiences throughout the anticipatory socialization phase could set the scene for how students think of work-life demands as future employees and as relational partners (Kramer, 2010). As many of these messages come from larger cultural discourses and are reified in actual talk (Baxter, 2011), we need to attend to these discursive frames. In common work-life discussions, students are likely hearing messages tied to the discourses of the role of family (Wang, 2012), the importance of academic success (Wang, 2014), the campus drinking culture (Russel & Arthur, 2015), and other general advice to succeed during the collegiate years (Nazione et al., 2011). Ignoring the cultural norms that could be promoting destructive and unhealthy behaviors is dangerous, and approaching possible understanding of the mental health crisis from an alternative angle is beneficial for students.

Studying how students understand managing multiple roles through the co-created meanings of the work-life construct will provide researchers with this information. By operating under the interpretive paradigm, I am able to explore these constructed meanings and rules through communication (Tracy, 2013). Subscribers of this paradigm recognize that we exist in a larger cultural web, and the experiences of individuals within the cultural context will reveal these constructed meanings and rules (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

The purpose of this research is to explore how college students perceive work-life issues and uncover examples of the interpersonal, organizational, and cultural messages that they receive regarding this topic. To do this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with current college students and then analyzed these interviews using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) steps of thematic analysis in order to solicit first-person accounts of the “college experience.” First I turn

to literature on the college student population, including the struggles they currently face with stress and mental health. In addition, I set the foundation by discussing the importance of seeking help and receiving social support and give an overview of work-life research, specifically highlighting work-life research on young professionals. Finally, I explore research in the areas of anticipatory socialization, memorable messages, and uncertainty management theory, before presenting the methodology, results, and a discussion of this study.

Literature Review

College Students

Deciding to attend a college or university is a major transition in a student's life. Not only does college aim to advance a student academically, the decision has the potential to impact the individual's existing family life, friendships, employment, and overall lifestyle. Chickering argued that college students are still developing emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). During this developmental period, a student is undergoing a formation of identity, which is a predictor of an individual's ideology, moral compass, tendency for risk behaviors, and her or his mental health (Hardy, Francis, Zamboanga, Kim, Anderson, & Forthun, 2013). As students are solidifying expectations and norms and undergoing significant cognitive growth, what happens to them during this time is likely to impact the rest of their lives (Chickering, 1993). Therefore, we should be increasingly attentive to the way students understand and reify frames of expectations about the world, especially as the population of college students grows.

The number of individuals deciding to attend college and beginning this period of development is increasing, which further makes research focusing on this population necessary. By the fall of 2017, approximately 21 million students will be currently enrolled in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Not only is the collegiate population growing, the group is becoming more diverse. According to the most recent census data, there has been an increase in students who are 25 years or older (approximately 8 million students) and an increase in percentages of students who identified as Black, Asian, or Hispanic (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The ideas of a "traditional" college student are changing, not only in demographic characteristics but other identifiers.

There is a growth in the numbers of students who have increased responsibilities. Forty-seven percent of college undergraduates fall under the category of “independent,” meaning they are either 24 years or older, married, orphans, veterans, or responsible for legal dependents other than a spouse (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2011). Almost five million undergraduate students are raising children, 43% of which are single mothers and 11% are single fathers (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014). In addition, 40% of full-time students and 76% of part-time students are employed while taking classes (NCES, 2014). Employment is likely necessary to be able to offset the exorbitant cost of attending college, which has increased over the past few decades at a faster rate than even health care (Patton, 2015). For four years of tuition and fees for a student at an in-state university, the average cost is \$39,508; \$97,690 is the cost for an out-of-state student; and \$135,010 for a student attending a private university (Patton, 2015). These statistics illustrate that a substantial number of students are experiencing increased responsibility. Whether it is taking care of another individual or working a job, the work-life balance construct is increasingly important to explore in the academic setting.

The evidence that students deal with various life demands is important to consider when studying college student populations. It is not sufficient to think of college students' lives as consisting of only academic demands. Just like employees in the workforce, students are negotiating their roles as family members, friends, significant others, parents, workers, and club members. In order to gain a more comprehensive view of what is going on in college students' lives, it is important to solicit information from a sample that is representative of the actual population, meaning gaining insight from students who are also caretakers and employees. Because many students are not only completing their academic obligations while in school, but have commitments to jobs, children, family, and friends, it is not surprising that stress is a

common part of college life (Sax, 1997). Moreover, stress along with mental and physical health issues are positively correlated in the academic setting, specifically that symptoms of depression and physical illness increase as academic stress also increases (MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005). Each of these roles should be examined when studying the college student experience and how stress factors in to the college lifestyle.

Stress and the Mental Health Crisis Pertaining to College

Though the root cause of widespread stress in this population is likely due to the increased expectations and pressure on students, the tendency to not seek help and in some cases the lack of available support can further complicate a solution (New, 2016; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). This mental health crisis extends beyond the scope of just the college student population (Merali & Anisman, 2016), but indeed has significant impacts on this group. Merali and Anisman (2016) broke down the intertwined factors contributing to the crisis, noting that the lack of resources (both research funding and service for patients) and the stigma to seek treatment are especially detrimental. This same pattern is reflected in the mental health-related statistics on college campuses (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012). Before making a case for increased funding and resources for students, it is valuable to first understand how students discuss their high levels of stress and multiple responsibilities, and then why college students may not be inclined to discuss these concerns with a health professional.

There is a great deal of quantitative data that corroborates this stark contrast between the number of students experiencing a health-related issue compared to the number students who seek help. The American College Health Association's *National College Health Assessment of Undergraduate Students* (2016), a survey of over 16,000 undergraduate students, showed that 42.6% of students reported experiencing a "more than average" overall level of stress, while

36.7% reported an “average” overall level of stress. Students also reported experiencing the following feelings within the last 12 months: *hopeless* (49.6%), *overwhelmed* by all they had to do (85.7%), *exhausted* not from physical activity (82%), *lonely* (59.5%), *very sad* (64.7%), so *depressed* it was difficult to function (36.1%), *overwhelming anxiety* (58.6%), *overwhelming anger* (40.3%), and *seriously considered suicide* (10.3%). Even more concerning, for most students, they are not getting full treatment for their worries. According to the ACHA (2016), a marginal number of students reported being diagnosed or treated by a professional in the past 12 months (17.7% for anxiety, 14.9% for depression, 9.1% for panic attacks, 4.9% for insomnia, and 2.7% for other sleep disorders).

The resources available to students who struggle with a recurring or episodic mental health-related issue have not always been widely available, and even today campuses are working to obtain the resources to staff health centers that address a wide variety of student needs. In order to build a stronger support system on campuses, the American College Health Association’s Mental Health Section has worked for over 50 years to advocate for counseling services, and the issues they report facing today include centers that are under-budgeted and understaffed, balancing treating students in crisis with students who have an ongoing illness, and an increase in providing care to single-parents, older students, gay and lesbian students, and veterans with PTSD (Kraft, 2011). School counseling service centers have noticed an increase in demands for their services by students, but many lack the funds for additional resources (New, 2016). Even with available resources, young adults are the least likely to seek professional help for mental health concerns, although students do report seeking help from their social network of family and friends (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). Even among the sample of adolescents who reported moderate to severe symptoms of mental illness, the symptom severity was not a

predictor of seeking professional help (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). Although informal support systems can improve mental health, the students who experience more severe or ongoing symptoms and do not seek out the proper professional help are at a great risk. A struggle to negotiate multiple demands, one of the likely origins of overwhelming stress, and how students individually navigate those demands are imperative in understanding this problem.

Behaviors that college students enact are likely to be a root of the problem for many health concerns. Unfortunately, social and behavioral factors that could negatively affect health outcomes are often overlooked in the clinical setting (Adler & Stead, 2015), except for smoking and alcohol use. Behaviors that are largely ignored by clinicians which lead to higher risk of illness include social isolation, financial strain, lack of exercise, poor diet, and stress (Adler & Stead, 2015) – all of which tend to be characteristic of the college student population. Health professionals who are beginning to view this issue from a biopsychosocial lens urge that addressing the social environment and individual behaviors, rather than solely clinical causes of disease, is necessary (Matthews, Adler, Forrest, & Stead, 2016). For example, college students who report overwhelming stress or depression are not necessarily clinically depressed, rather they are having a natural stressful reaction to the difficult reality they are situated in (Sax, 1997). Perhaps they are also engaged in poor health behaviors such as lacking exercise and sleep. In order to be effective though, behavioral health interventions are needed at multiple levels, such as interpersonal, organizational, and societal, to prevent illnesses (Smedley & Syme, 2015). It is difficult to attempt to change habits on an individual level yet ignore the social forces at work that are influencing this behavior. To encourage interventions for students that are likely to prevent illness, first we must explore the context college students live in and how this environment influences their behaviors.

Previous studies on college students related to mental health find that there are certain predictors of mental health and key at-risk groups. Fink (2014) found that having socially supportive environments in college is a predictor of mental health outcomes. Specifically, an ease of social transitions to college, a socially supportive residence hall climate, and a sense of belonging predicted higher scores of mental well-being. On the contrary, top precursors to student stress and burnout include work-life issues such as: assignment overload, outside influences (“influences relating to work, personal relationships, financial difficulties, and time management”), and mental and physical health (Cushman & West, 2006, p. 26). Each of these precursors are similar to the issues of conflicting work and life demands. Students who find themselves overwhelmed and dealing with illness or outside-school concerns are more likely to be stressed and burnt out (Cushman & West, 2006), an indicator that negotiating these demands is difficult or complicated for these individuals. There are also particular groups of highly involved students who are prone to stress and emotional exhaustion, for example student newspaper editors (Filak & Reinardy, 2011). This finding may also generalize to other highly involved groups of students, such as athletes, Greek life members, honors organizations, and student government representatives. Perhaps some students who take on fast-paced and demanding positions are experiencing the work-life construct differently, and asking these students about their strategies for navigating these role demands could inform our understanding of work-life in this context.

The factors contributing to college students’ mental well-being, and how mental health affects their academic performance, are also important to explore while describing college students. The ACHA (2016) found that in the past 12 months, 45.4% of students reported “academics” and 36.9% reported “finances” as being very traumatic or difficult to handle. In

addition to grades and money, students also reported career-related issues, death of a family member or friend, family problems, intimate relationships, other social relationships, health problems of family or partner, personal appearance, personal health issue, and sleep difficulties as being very traumatic or difficult to handle. Fifty-percent of the respondents reported being troubled by 3 or more issues from the list. It is important to realize that students are often juggling multiple commitments and in addition, multiple issues are compounding stress and causing additional worries.

These worries, which can extend to becoming a range of mental-health issues such as anxiety and depression (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2016), can affect academic performance. The same survey from ACHA (2016) found that within the last 12 months, students reported that the following affected their individual academic performance: stress (32.2%), anxiety (25.1%), sleep difficulties (21.7%), depression (15.4%), illness (14.6%), work (13.8%), concern for a troubled friend or family member (10.6%), and relationship difficulties (9.1%). Carton and Goodboy (2015) argued that depression and stress were related negatively with students' responsiveness and attentiveness in the classroom. Moreover, anxiety was related negatively with students' attentiveness in class, which could impact their academic standing and success (Carton & Goodboy, 2015). If college students are struggling with their academic lives, other commitments, and mental well-being, it is important to understand their experience of managing work-life concerns and how they discuss work-life issues. In addition, because of the stigma and negative consequences attached to mental health issues, we turn next to understand how students reach out for help.

Seeking Help and Receiving Support

There is evidence that students may withdraw from seeking help when dealing with mental health issues or fail to disclose their mental health issues to others. Most likely to seek help from informal networks are adolescent women who feel that they have a close confiding relationship or know someone who sought help with mental illness (Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). The top five reasons students do not disclose information about a mental health condition include: fear about how others (students, faculty, and staff) will perceive them, not having an opportunity to disclose, the condition does not impact academic performance, the student does not know that disclosing could help them secure accommodations, or they do not trust that their information will remain confidential (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012). Kadison (2004) explained the destructive lack of self-disclosure from college students from his perspective as a clinician, “They haven’t learned yet that sharing stress invites others to share their own stresses, solidifies connections, and provides opportunities for new perspectives and solutions” (p. 214). Kadison highlighted an important point here that communication regarding mental health on college campuses has the potential to alleviate stress and improve wellbeing.

In general, there is a positive association between self-disclosures and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994). Collins and Miller (1994) explained the three main disclosure-liking effects: people like those who self-disclose, people are more inclined to self-disclose to people they trust and like, and people like a person after disclosing to them. However, there are some complexities in this relationship, such as the content of the disclosure mediating this effect. Disclosures that are highly personal may result in negative reactions from receivers (Collins & Miller, 1994). When dealing with stigmatized issues such as mental illness, it is likely that college students who do not disclose are fearful of these repercussions, and therefore do not gain the benefit of stronger interpersonal relationships and support because they fail to disclose.

However, having a strong social support network has benefits. Being satisfied with one's social support network can reduce uncertainty during periods of stressful events and provide solutions to problems (Ford, Babrow, & Stohl, 1996). MacGeorge et al. (2005) found that both emotional and informational supportive communication have the potential to mediate the effects of academic stress on mental and physical health. If students are not disclosing this information, they are likely missing out on stronger interpersonal relationships, a social support system, and information that could lessen their levels of stress or improve their state of anxiety or depression (MacGeorge et al., 2005; Petronio, 2002; Wittenberg-Lyles & Villagran, 2006). Issues related to mental health will continue to be stigmatized, students will continue to fail to disclose, and the larger systemic issues regarding students and work-life demands will fail to be questioned. Obtaining students' perspectives on managing their commitments, messages they receive related to work-life balance, and how they discuss this topic is the first step in addressing this dilemma.

Because college is normalized to be a generally stressful environment, students may not take their mental health and wellbeing seriously, instead accepting that these emotional effects are a normal part of the college experience. What is problematic is how college students may be dealing with that stress. Russel and Arthur (2015) noted that students "spoke of stress as an expected part of college and alcohol as a natural remedy for reducing such stress. Rather than questioning the root causes of their stress, students instead accepted it as an inherent condition of college life" (p. 922). As students observe friends and classmates manage multiple obligations and deal with stress, they may not question this experience or ever think critically about what is expected of them during their collegiate years. In addition to the wide acceptance of stress as a part of everyday life, what is even more troubling are the ways that some college students remedy it, such as the acceptance of drinking as a stress reliever (Russel & Arthur, 2015).

Although some students did note that this was problematic, there was still an idea that the best way to learn about drinking behaviors was through personal (often negative) experiences (Russel & Arthur, 2015). That finding could indicate that students recognize larger cultural norms regarding being a college student, sometimes form bad behaviors through these ideas, and are only able to change that behavior after the damage is already done, which all could impact the ideas and behaviors that are formed related to work-life balance strategies.

One reason why students may not be challenging this social norm is that they may be told by others that stress is a good thing. In fact, a certain amount of stress can be healthy, because good stress is positively correlated with life satisfaction (O'Sullivan, 2011). However, students who suffer overwhelming stress and do not seek help are at risk of also experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2016). For this reason, it is important that students challenge a social norm of being perpetually stressed, discover their individual causes of stress, and find proper treatment which may or may not involve a medical professional. Soliciting narratives and examples from current students is vital to gaining a better understanding of balancing multiple obligations in this context. Doing this will build a fuller understanding of why many college students feel overwhelmed, the strategies they utilize to handle those emotions, and what messages they are receiving interpersonally, organizationally, and from shared cultural norms. As a foundation, I explore the notion of "balancing multiple roles" through the construct of "work-life" and how work-life has been previously studied in similar populations.

Work-Life Research

Issues of work and life have been prevalent topics of discussion among both popular and scholarly conversations. Ever since the growth of two working-parent households, the role of paid employment and the competing demands of family life has been a ripe area of research that

spans across disciplines (Barnett, 1999; Johnson, 2001). In the United States especially, the notion of work as a central aspect of one's identity is pervasive (Brief, Konovsky, Goodwin, & Link, 1995; Pederson, 2013). Because of this ideal worker norm, the notion that good employees make work their central commitment, individuals have a choice between either feeling inadequate in their professional lives or letting their other roles and obligations often fall to the wayside (LaRossa, 1988). In addition, the historical rising cost of living and drop in minimum wage makes paid work even more essential to an individual's survival (Drago, 2007). However, non-work demands are still central to our identity and well-being (Caltabiano, 1995). Studying the negotiation of these roles helps us understand how we think about the relationship between "work" and "life," problems in the current conceptualizations, and potential solutions moving forward.

Defining what is "work" and what is "life" is a complex but necessary first step in discussing the work-life construct. Work is predominantly defined by researchers as paid full-time employment (Kirton, 2013). Typically, research includes the experiences of the common middle-class white-collar workforce, usually in the professional or education industries (i.e. management positions, sales people, higher education faculty, elementary and secondary school teachers), probably due to sampling convenience (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010). However, a smaller number of studies focused on blue-collar workers, such as jobs in construction, maintenance, and grounds keeping, and alternative forms of work, such as contemporary dancers, have contributed related but unique experiences of work-life to add to the literature (Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Cowan & Bochantin, 2011; Njaradi, 2014). In addition, the idea and expectations of work is changing in our culture. The preferences of many workers for family-friendly policies at work (Kirby & Krone, 2002) and the flexibility that technology and virtual occupations has given

workers (Edley, 2001; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001) have challenged the existing notions of employment (Golden, 2013). It is important for scholars to continue to adapt to the changing definition of work and include the experiences of employees outside traditional job roles.

From an organizational perspective, “personal life” is typically defined as family obligations, and more specifically referencing the children of a heteronormative adult couple (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, this definition excludes elements of leisure, health, personal development, and social needs which are a vital part of an individual’s non-work life. Also, in privileging romantic relationships we see a subordination of any other interpersonal relationships that an individual possesses, such as close friends, ailing parents, dependent siblings, and romantic but unmarried partners (Dixon, 2015; Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). The current construct of work-life is not complex enough to capture all of the competing demands an individual faces.

However, it does reveal the weight we place on the “work” aspect of life, and encourages a psychological separation of work from every other aspect that could fit into the “life” category, which are often ignored unless referring to child-rearing as a maternal caregiver. This gender bias is evident in the push against paternity leave, even when it’s offered, by organizations and employees (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2014). Because research has focused so heavily on the definition of life as maternal caregiving, the experiences of young professionals who often are unmarried with no children, have especially been excluded (with the exception of Schultz, Hoffman, Fredman, & Bainbridge, 2012). This lack of research suggests that adult workers, once they become married parents, are for the first time experiencing conflicts between work and non-work obligations. Although parents of course have their own unique challenges when faced with raising children while working, assuming that new parents have no prior

knowledge or even personal experience with competing work-life demands is misleading. This body of research would benefit from expanding the definition of “life” to match how a diverse population of individuals typically conceive of their non-work demands (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). In sum, to get a holistic understanding of the multiple domains in which our lives lie and how we manage needs in these domains, scholars must not cling on to definitions of “work” and “life” that are outdated, exclusive, unrealistic, and insignificant.

Interpersonal and organizational communication research add to our understanding of work-life at the micro and meso levels, though a macro-level analysis of cultural patterns and beliefs also enlightens this concept. First, I will address the micro-level interpersonal work-life communication and work-life communication in the context of families. Interpersonal and family communication research regarding work-life mostly focuses on the discussions that occur in the context of heterosexual married couples (Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Golden, 2001; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010). Over time these parents communicatively adjust their role identities by making trade-offs related to their career, parenting, hobbies, as well as social and physical activities (Golden, 2001). How couples discuss work and life at home also reflects managerial discourse, suggesting that the corporate ideals so emphasized in the realm of employment are finding their way into our personal lives (Denker & Dougherty, 2013). Other examples of how work-related ideologies are consuming non-work discourses, and how early in our lives these ideologies appear in conversation, would be interesting to note. For example, how are college students beginning to receive messages that emphasize corporate discourses of control, positivity, and rational choice? Do these messages influence students to make decisions regarding school, extracurricular involvement, relationships, and other non-work elements with a corporate frame of mind? Additional interpersonal messages are offered to us from members of our social

networks. Messages in the form of questions from social networks regarding women's decisions to be "commuter wives" (women who live apart from their husbands, usually for work reasons) revealed (gendered) expectations about work and life (Bergen, 2010; Bergen, Kirby, & McBride, 2007). These messages often made women feel as if they had to justify their decisions regarding work and life demands (Bergen, 2010), revealing the importance of examining the dialogue between individuals emphasizing work-life negotiation strategies. Expectations and assumptions regarding the place of work and non-work demands are likely being shared between individuals and members of their social networks far before being in the workforce. These messages are likely to be shared during collegiate years, when students are anticipating a new career path. This period of anticipatory socialization, before an individual enters an organization, forms an individual's expectations for her/his future career (Myers et al., 2011). Discussions students have with friends, parents, siblings, and other members of their social networks are likely to shape their ideas about work and life.

Another frequently used term when addressing work/life is "balance." Most popular literature asserts the importance of an individual to balance work and life, to avoid the feelings of exhaustion and maintain mental and physical health (Uscher, 2013). As Drago (2007) stated, "Balance involves a mixture of paid employment, unpaid commitments to family and community, and leisure time" (p. 2). We "juggle" these areas of life, implying that we can't do any of them at one time. Wieland (2011) noticed the problematic implication for emphasizing balance in our lives:

...balance is not necessarily an appropriate way to conceive of a solution to the problem of navigating work and life. Instead, a multifaceted and ambiguous term like harmony... might be more useful in that it legitimizes what is a healthy struggle. (p. 180)

Guest (2002) agreed that using the metaphorical term “balance” can be dangerous, and revealed some of the ways that this metaphor can be interpreted. As a noun, or if we conceptualize balance as a state of being, there is a “need to recognize that balance can have both an objective and subjective meaning and measurement, that it will vary according to circumstances and that it will also vary across individuals” (p. 261). As a verb, being able to “balance” implies that individuals are able to take carefully planned steps to incorporate both their work and non-work roles to some sort of equilibrium (Guest, 2002). However, it may be dangerous to suggest that balance is attainable and straightforward for everyone. Individuals, such as college students who have to manage their roles at school, work, and the rest of their life are likely facing difficulties in achieving a state of balance, depending on the way a person conceptualizes this idea.

The organizational communication research on work-life concerns typically centers around three areas: how individuals make work-life demands, the role of the organization in work-life matters, and how cultural contextual factors shape organizational members’ experiences (Wieland, 2011). First, researchers explored the discursive strategies that individuals employ while making work-life demands to their employer. Hoffman and Cowan (2010) argued that when making requests to employers regarding work-life accommodations, there are several distinct rules and resources that guide employees’ requests. Next, the role of the organization in promoting or suppressing employees’ processes of communication related to this topic, especially due to implicit culture or explicit policies, can be seen in research by Kirby and Krone (2002). Suppressing communication about work-life among coworkers is problematic, as the informal relationships between coworkers have the potential to illuminate and challenge existing conditions (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). A culture or policy that does not promote these discussions is not beneficial to individuals who experience issues with current conditions, yet

have no opportunity to create change with their peers (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Lastly, cultural contextual factors, such as gender, race, and class shape these communication processes (Ashcraft, 2004; Denker, 2013; Johnson, 2001). Women have experienced gendered inequalities in work-life issues when it comes to household responsibilities (Williams, 2000) and their expected role as caretakers in addition to paid employees (Johnson, 2001). This makes organizational participation even more difficult to balance on top of household demands for women, illustrated by the “opt-out phenomenon” of a portion of educated mothers who chose to exit the workforce rather than battle its unaccommodating environment (Moe & Shandy, 2009). Though interpersonal and organizational communication applied to the work-life construct illustrate a base understanding, the emergence of research on cultural contextual factors sheds light on how and why the specific strategies and organization’s tactics function the way they do.

The social and cultural context in which work-life discourse occurs should not be ignored, because it plays a major role in shaping our discourse of work-life. Baxter (2011) suggested that messages that occur within the context of interpersonal relationships, *proximal discourse*, influence our meaning-making processes, along with the larger cultural norms referred to as *distal discourse*. Both distal *already-spoken*, the established cultural norms, and distal *not-yet-spoken*, anticipated responses from a larger cultural audience, are important in constructing a cultural meaning (Baxter, 2011). Examining the co-construction of meaning from a lens of relational dialectic theory allows researchers to incorporate both proximal (dialogue occurring within the dyad) and distal discourses into an individual’s meaning-making process (Abetz, 2016). Relational dialectics theory has been especially useful in studying meaning-making during times of relational change or transition. For example, Wenzel and Poynter (2014) observed competing and central discourses in the way older parents understand and discuss

relationships with their adult children, particularly within the dialectics of independence/dependence and openness/closedness. Cultural ideas of independence and of family obligation were both validated and discursively navigated by parents in this time of relational change (Wenzel & Poynter, 2014), ideas that are also at work as college students are in a time of relational transition. In addition, Norwood (2013) argued when individuals experience confusion over dominant discourses, such as gender transitioning, there are strategies utilized in discussing meanings of particular concepts to overcome disconnect and make sense of concepts. In their time of transition, perhaps college students reject or discursively navigate the cultural ideas surrounding work and the rest of their life in their proximal interactions.

In order to understand the perceptions that U.S. college students hold about work-life, it is important to realize that their perceptions exist in a larger web of American neoliberal cultural and societal beliefs (Baxter, 2011; Knight & Wiedmaier, 2016). Neoliberalism, characterized “by the exponential increase of labor uncertainty, economic instability, market competition, corporate risk-taking behavior, and organizational flexibilization and decentralization” (Cabanas & Illouz, 2017, p. 25) has marked a rise in competition and individualism in corporate culture (Harvey, 2005). Drago (2007) argued that three overarching cultural norms which are detrimental to work-life issues include the motherhood norm, the ideal worker norm, and the individualism norm. The motherhood norm helps explain why women are primarily expected to be mothers or seek lower-paid professions in nurturing care-giver positions, driving a wedge between how genders experience work-life issues (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Drago, 2007). Differences in how male and female college students discuss and understand work-life issues should be explored in order to understand if this motherhood norm is influential at this early stage in life. The ideal worker, or expectations that employees can and should fully commit to

their paid employment over all else, certainly subordinates non-work aspects of life (Williams, 2000). This norm grows out of the masculine ideal of the male as breadwinner (Bernard, 1992). Though it is less overtly gendered, its masculine roots are reflected in the work environment which privileges logical reasoning and reduced displayed emotions (Denker, 2015). Neither the ideal worker or male as breadwinner norm accurately describe the contemporary workforce (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, 2006).

Traces of the ideal worker norm are already prevalent in academic research. The interconnectedness of the realms of a student's collegiate life and the idea of a "real job" appears in Lair and Wieland's (2012) study of the "what are you going to do with that major?" colloquial question. Here, students revealed that their identity is closely tied to their major, similar to how occupational roles are tied to our identity after graduation. The cultural emphasis that ties occupation to identity can be seen as early as a student enters college and is asked to pick a major. From here, students seem to be socialized into putting their occupational goals above all other commitments. Similarly, expectations of work first can be seen in students' relationship habits. The casual sexual experiences among emerging adults, such as hookups and friends with benefits relationships, highlights the lack of commitment that many students are making in relationships (Knight & Wiedmaier, 2016). As Knight and Wiedmaier (2016) argued, this casual involvement has detrimental effects such as health risks and a lack of preparation for these emerging adults to experience a committed romantic relationship. Because students are more focused on their self-development and career goals while in college, they are likely missing out on learning skills in their personal lives, such as maintaining a supportive and committed relationship, which are equally as valuable.

Finally, the norm of individualism discourages people from expecting or asking for any help at the organizational or societal level, and even if there are policies in place people oftentimes feel that they cannot utilize them without being frowned upon (Kirby & Krone, 2002). A product of neoliberalism is that we place such value on our individual freedom to choose that we have created a “possessive individualism” that focuses too heavily on individual choices while the role of corporations and government in our lives are largely ignored (Harvey, 2005). We have a tendency of highlighting individuals dealing with personal problems rather than navigating larger social issues (Peck, 1995). In doing so, we have created a self-help culture that focuses on internal flaws and falsely tells us we can overcome any barriers solely through morality and hard work (Cloud, 1998; McAdams, 2013). The issue here is that we are likely to fail to overcome societal barriers as individuals, as solutions to social issues require taking action on much larger levels.

Stemming from the culturally-shared norm of individualism, it is no surprise that solving work-life issues is widely viewed as an individual responsibility (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). When an individual feels a struggle between their work life and life outside of work, she or he is perceived as ultimately responsible and encouraged to be her or his own advocate (Denker, 2015). Most individuals and organizations believe that it is the responsibility of the individual to manage the relationship between paid work and the rest of life, though organizations may help by offering programs and services in order to ensure their employees are more effective at work resulting in organizational success (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). However, the mere fact that the United States has no federal policy requiring organizations to offer paid paternal leave to their employees (Livingston, 2016) and the lack of paid maternity leave in several U.S. organizations (Gault, Hartmann, Hegewisch, Milli, & Reichlin, 2014) both exists because of norms and

reinforces the cultural belief that it is not the organization's duty to facilitate family matters. It is important to recognize that individuals do and should play an active role in the communication process to achieve their own personally desired level of balance (Botero, 2012), however, placing all responsibility at the micro-level and none at the organizational and societal levels is uninformed and unhelpful (Denker, 2015; Peck, 1995). In addition, emphasizing only solutions at the individual level removes awareness of structural issues and the ways that organizations entrap us into an unwavering commitment to work, rather than to other demands equally as important to our identities.

American students observe these three norms play out in the cultural context they live in, and likely have a conscious or subconscious knowledge of their existence, which impacts their co-constructed meaning of work-life issues. If we continue to focus on work-life issues primarily as an individual responsibility, there are important questions moving forward: How are we learning to take an active role in navigating these demands? What messages do our higher education institutions give about work-life concerns? Certainly these ideas, expectations, preferences, and strategies that professionals hold were formed somewhere, possibly before entering the workplace. Perhaps young professionals' ideas about work and life post-graduation are indicative of their experiences while still in college. To find the answer, we can look to a variety of areas, including anticipatory socialization research and the role of memorable messages from friends and family, popular press, and the cultural norms they are situated in.

Work-Life and Young Professionals

A very limited amount of work-life research includes the experiences of individuals who are young professionals, unmarried, or do not have children. Of the research that does, the findings suggest that there are generational differences in the way individuals view work-life

concerns (Favero & Heath, 2012; Martin & Tulgan, 2006; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Smola & Sutton, 2002) and desire to manage the demands of these two domains (Schultz et al., 2012). Roughly two-thirds of the young professionals in “white-collar” occupations, including management, business and finance, the sciences, engineering, social service, law, education, entertainment and media, and healthcare, have earned at least a bachelor’s degree or higher before becoming employed (Department for Professional Employees, 2014). This past research suggests the experience that the majority of this group shared while attending college could be indicative of their future perceptions of work and life. The limited research on young professionals is the closest related academic work to this current study’s population and provides a basis for linking important discussions about demands of multiple life domains to college students.

The introduction of younger workers into the job force has tasked researchers with exploring how generational preferences, attitudes, and skill sets influence existing organizations. Moreover, missing from our understanding is how individuals develop these preferences and attitudes. Myers and Sadaghiana (2010) discussed research regarding millennials, individuals they define as being born between 1979 and 1994,¹ and their views towards work-life, suggesting that this group stresses balance by desiring flexible working conditions and hours to accommodate their priority of personal relationships over career. However, millennials are not the first generation to highlight the importance of personal life in addition to work, as the shift has its roots in Generation X, defined as being born approximately between 1965 and 1977, which also views work as just one part of life, desires balance even at the beginning of their

¹ The definition of millennial is contentious as some argue that millennials’ years of birth range from 1980 to 2000 (Tanyel, Stuart, & Griffin, 2013). Millennials have also been recognized by some as the same as Generation Y (Favero & Heath, 2012).

career, and began to communicate that desire to employers (Martin & Tulgan, 2006). There are few reasons given to explain this shift in priorities from earlier generations, and it is important to note that the shift is not due to an arbitrary age category or naivety, but rather generational experiences. Smola and Sutton (2002) argued that the changing values through generations towards work and personal lives may come from a shift in organizational commitment towards employees. As organizations treat employees as disposable, especially in tough economic times, and there is less long-term job security, it is logical that 87% of millennials value personal development and growth outside of the confines of their job titles (Adkins & Rigoni, 2016).

Researchers have investigated the transition for college students into their adult lives to explore the transition to “adulthood” in a time of economic turbulence, outlining the struggles that young working-class individuals now face (Silva, 2013). Silva (2013) noticed that traditional markers of becoming an adult, such as finding a secure job, owning a home, getting married, and having children, are unrealistic for many young workers she interviewed, delaying their “adult” status. Silva’s interviewees discussed feeling betrayal after their degrees proved somewhat useless, finding that the costs of college outweighed its benefits, and being stuck in unpromising positions. The struggles that young working adults now face illuminate why attitudes towards “work” and “life” are changing. Arum and Roksa (2014) illustrated even more stories of emerging adults struggling with their transition after college. Several students in Arum and Roksa’s (2014) research discussed feeling skeptical of the value of their undergraduate education, and report struggles in finding a job, finding financial security, maintaining romantic relationships, and becoming active members of their community. According to this research, there seems to be a delay for this generation of emerging adults to settle into “adulthood” after graduating college, which likely alters their perceptions of their roles inside and outside of work.

In addition, how generational groups experience the struggles of the previous group can impact their attitudes. Favero and Heath (2012) found that women reacted to the work-life issues of prior generations, with younger generations now challenge the demanding work schedules of “Boomer women,” born between 1946 and 1964, who came before them by questioning long work hours and asking for workplace accommodations. One of the reasons Favero and Heath (2012) suggested regarding why next generations are challenging existing structures and desiring new conceptualizations of work-life relationships is because they possibly grew up as “latchkey” children in households with two working parents. Because this generation experienced the negative side-effects of having absent working parents, they are more inclined to desire a more prominent and present role in their children’s lives (Favero & Heath, 2012).

Similar feelings that Gen X possesses towards work-life appear in the attitudes held by Gen Y, a label often used interchangeably with “millennials,” and who make up the current population of young professionals (Martin & Tulgan, 2006; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Schultz et al., 2012). Important findings from Schultz and colleagues’ (2012) study included how young single professionals rationalize and strategize work-life balance, which mirrors the preferences of their Gen X predecessors. Young professionals discussed being healthy both physically and mentally, emphasizing the need for reduced levels of stress, as the primary reason for striving for work-life balance. In addition, young professionals emphasized the importance of avoiding feelings of guilt when enjoying their personal life (Schultz et al., 2012). This generation is categorized by high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in the work environment where they are expected to be highly efficient and productive (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). To deal with this, organizations should promote work-life balance among other solutions to ensure organizations can sustain high levels of performance (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). In order to

achieve balance, young professionals utilized strategies of separating work and life domains such as having a distinct psychological separation of the two realms, managing the time they dedicate to each, and looking to a social support network outside of the workplace (Schultz et al., 2012).

Why are the changing generational attitudes and preferences regarding work and life balance important in understanding college students' experience? First, the lack of research on the work/life construct on populations outside of the workforce suggests that individuals enter the workplace with no prior expectations about these issues. It is likely that students gain information about the professional setting while still in college through internships (Fonner, 2009) and experiential learning projects (Roloff, 2014). In addition, the 40% of full-time students who are also employed and the 76% of working students who are enrolled in class part-time (NCES, 2014) already have experience managing their work roles with personal and academic life. Similarly, students who have extended family demands, like the 26% who are raising children, (Gault et al., 2014) have prior experience as well. Asking how college students understand issues of work-life demands before they are immersed into the workplace could give us insight into their expectations for their future role. The collective experience of students while in college and their outsider observations of the workforce can shape how they view issues of work and personal life.

Observing parents or older siblings, likely who range from the Boomers to Gen Y, could form expectations. Clair (1996) discussed how definitions of "work" are communicatively constructed and reified. College students at that time typically accepted the dominant idea of a "real job" as being categorized by money and organizational affiliation (Clair, 1996). Participants noted parents, friends, supervisors, coworkers, and even society as delivering these ideas, also explaining that they too are sources of that message to others (Clair, 1996). In

addition, the culture of stress and multiple obligations that most students make during their collegiate years could give them some firsthand experience about competing demands in these domains. Because what college students do and participate in while in college can affect their values and behaviors later in life (Sax, 2004), what individuals discuss and reify during these years can influence their post-college norms.

Lastly, the research stops with generational attitudes held by current young professionals. As these workers are aging and the individuals in the latest end of this particular group (Gen Y/millennials) are moving into their young professional lives, it is important to turn to the next up and coming population who are still in their collegiate years. Instead of waiting for this next wave of workers to enter the professional setting, it is useful to explore their expectations and attitudes pre-career.

Anticipatory Socialization

Vocational anticipatory socialization, the first stage in the organizational socialization process, is learning about a job or career before being introduced to an organization (Myers, Jahn, Gailliard, & Stoltzfus, 2011). Because many college students have not yet committed to an organization, but are spending their college years in preparation for future professional and academic careers, they are at this stage. The ideas formed in the anticipatory socialization stage are shaped by family, educational institutions, part-time jobs, peers and friends, and the media (Jablin, 1987). Hoffner, Levine, and Toohey (2008) also observed that both parents and television influenced young adults in the anticipatory socialization stage, forming their attitudes to work before their entrance into the workforce. Socialization processes start in an individual's childhood and later impact work experience as an adult (Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002). Clair (1996) noted that work done prior to holding a formal occupation, in the anticipatory

socialization phase, is positioned as just preparation, implying that it is not “real work.” The work-life construct is perhaps more complex for college students during this stage because they are forming both an understanding about how to negotiate both work and non-work demands in the present while also developing expectations about future work-life issues. In addition, because the way “work” is socially constructed to exclude a major component of students’ current lives, the academic demands, the messages they are receiving may be more future-oriented and do little to provide practical knowledge while in college.

Memorable Messages

Memorable messages are “verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives” (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981, p. 27). Receivers are most receptive to these messages when they provide a way of solving a problem and facilitate understanding (Knapp et al., 1981). Memorable messages can also come in the form of ambient messages, which an individual gathers from personal experience or personal observation (Dallimore, 2003). Dallimore (2003) argued that these types of memorable messages are extremely relevant in organizational socialization, which adds to the original limited conceptualization of memorable messages. Stohl (1986) originally explained that what makes a message memorable is the “retrospective judgement by the individual that the message was/is significant and can be precisely recalled” (p. 234). Memorable messages pertaining to this study include messages that college students have received giving them insight about the college experience in general, how to balance academic demands with the rest of life, and what to expect in the future regarding work-life balance.

The sources and topics of these memorable messages have been previously studied. Family members such as parents, school-related sources (teachers, advisors and coaches),

friends, the media, and doctors are all sources of memorable messages regarding navigating college life (Nazione et al., 2011). Topics of memorable messages center on how college students should succeed in the school realm and also the role of family. Messages from parents that focus on the family include messages about remembering the family and using them as support while in college, but also not worrying about family problems while away, and setting a good example for younger siblings (Wang, 2014). Academic mentors provide students with memorable messages about the academic setting, such as pursuing academic success (including how to balance educational and social activities), valuing school, increasing future potential, making good academic decisions, and providing support and encouragement (Wang, 2012). Mentors on-campus also provided memorable messages especially pertaining to the family, such as recognizing the importance of family and counting on family for support and advice (Wang, 2012). Beyond messages regarding managing school life and family relationships, students also frequently receive memorable messages such as: believe in yourself, work hard, enjoy life, learn from the past, be yourself/independent, perform well in school, communicate with others, make the most of opportunities, and use time effectively (Nazione et al., 2011).

Memorable messages have also been studied in the context of organizational socialization. Barge and Schlueter (2004) revealed that memorable messages operated in the process of socialization for newcomers, who reported receiving messages that informed participants of appropriate workplace behavior, formal and informal expectations, and about the value of a strong work ethic. Overall, Barge and Schlueter (2004) argued that the way that these memorable messages influence newcomers privileges organizational needs over individual needs, thus giving the organization control in the socialization process. The impact of memorable messages are significant, as students have reported the messages influenced their attitude to

change to become more positive about school or to have more confidence in themselves (Nazione et al., 2011). Interestingly, 5% of the students reported the messages persuaded them to accept the way that things were and to stop complaining (Nazione et al., 2011). We know that college students do receive memorable messages regarding the college experience from a variety of sources and these messages have the potential to impact attitudes. It is now beneficial to explore further the messages specifically pertaining to balancing academic demands, balancing work-life demands in the future, and how those messages impact students' behaviors and attitudes in the present. Memorable messages are likely to shape college students' conceptualizations of "work-life balance," forming expectations that will influence their lives as young professionals.

Uncertainty Management Theory

Uncertainty occurs "when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general" (Brashers, 2001, p. 478). For individuals to feel in control of situations and interactions, we seek to reduce uncertainty to a certain extent (Goldsmith, 2001). Berger (2011) outlined eight "axioms" which explain the relationship between uncertainty and other variables: 1) an increase in verbal communication leads to a decrease in uncertainty, which then leads to more verbal communication 2) an increase in expressive nonverbal communication leads to a decrease in uncertainty, 3) information seeking behaviors are a result of high levels of uncertainty, 4) high levels of uncertainty can reduce intimacy, which in turn reduces self-disclosure, 5) high levels of uncertainty can produce high rates of reciprocity, 6) as individuals uncover similarities between them, uncertainty decreases, 7) liking decreases as uncertainty increases, and 8) shared communication networks

reduce uncertainty. Although uncertainty reduction theory was developed in the context of initial interactions between strangers, the theory has been used beyond this context, such as in health communication (Brashers, 2001) and organizational communication (Kramer, 2004).

Operating inside the context health communication, Brashers (2001) developed the uncertainty reduction theory and noted situations in which individuals, patients faced with a life-threatening illness, sought to remain uncertain, thus positing the theory of uncertainty management rather than focusing solely on uncertainty reduction. Instead of focusing on uncertainty as a negative concept, Brashers (2001) noted the possibility for uncertainty to be a source of hope for patients. Kramer (2004) similarly expanded upon uncertainty reduction theory in the context of organizational communication, offering certain motives of new organizational members to pass up reducing uncertainty in order to manage their impressions. Uncertainty exists throughout the process of organizational socialization as employees seek to understand their new roles and organization, and as this uncertainty is decreased, generally satisfaction, commitment, and organizational identification increases (Scott & Myers, 2010). Jablin (2001) identified five sources of reducing uncertainty during vocational anticipatory socialization: family, educational institutions, part-time employment, peers and friends, and media. Each of these sources are likely influencing today's college students and their ideas of organizations. However, few studies have examined the role of uncertainty in college students' transition from high school to college (i.e. Hanson, Hallmark, Mallard, & Griego, 2014; Littlefield & Larson-Casselton, 2004) and the transition from college into the corporate organizational realm (i.e. Candy & Crebert, 1991; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

College students are in a vital transitional period where they learn and reinforce attitudes and behaviors regarding work and organizational life. These meanings and ideas are shaped both

by larger cultural norms and conversations within social networks. Experiences college students have with work-life issues through their collegiate years also form expectations for negotiating these roles as young professionals. Results of studying college student experiences with work-life issues are informative to organizations who seek to hire these workers, but also to current career professionals who work with college students and have the potential to address these expectations. It would be beneficial to explore how experiences in college may impact the way students think about and strategize work-life demands later on as young workers. Based on this previous research, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What do college students discuss when talking about issues of work-life?

Methods

This study examined college students' experiences of negotiating multiple roles such as school, work, personal life, and other obligations. In order to answer the below research question, I conducted semi-structured interviews and then analyzed that data utilizing thematic analysis, which operates under the interpretive paradigm. In the following section, I will first explain the interpretive paradigm, then outline my recruitment process, describe the participants of this study, and finally clarify the interview procedures and data analysis stages. The question which guided this study was:

What do college students discuss when talking about issues of work-life?

Interpretive Paradigm

Researchers who approach studies through the lens of the interpretive paradigm are working under the assumption that “both reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice” and their role as a researcher is to mediate, or interpret, this knowledge from reality (Tracy, 2013, p. 40). Human beings' purposive actions and subsequent ability to reflect on those actions set us apart from the rest of the natural world (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). As interpretive researchers, we can make sense of actions as embedded in a larger culture and system of meaning. This is why *meanings* that people assign to certain symbols they use and the *rules* that are shared among a group of people that restrict, allow, promote, or discourage behavior are important to interpretive researchers (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

In order to build an understanding of a population's reality, it is important to look to the firsthand accounts of individuals within the group. Interviewing allows researchers to gain an in-depth perspective from the source, which gives empathic insight into people's unique beliefs and

attitudes, as an interpretive researcher's goal is to come as close as possible to seeing the world through the eyes of participants (Tracy, 2013). The data that is collected and analyzed, rich and significant words from the mouths of the participants, is thought to be more evocative than empirical data (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). This data is then analyzed by researchers, who should not reject, but acknowledge and embrace their active role in interpreting meaning. "Human activity is not regarded as a tangible material reality to be discovered and measured; rather it is considered to be a 'text' that can be read, interpreted, deconstructed, and analyzed" (Tracy, 2013, p. 41). As a researcher operating under the interpretive paradigm, collecting rich, first-hand accounts through in-depth interviewing and then analyzing this data can provide knowledge about meanings that reflect our participants' socially constructed realities.

Wilson (1994) wrote that scholars "should acknowledge and justify their assumptions in order to defend the nature of their evidence" (p. 27). Before understanding general patterns of work-life negotiations for the majority of college students by conducting large-scale empirical research, it is important to explore compelling individual accounts. That is why in this current study, my goal was to collect subjective experiences by conducting in-depth interviews. I sought to understand the "college student experience" from the perspectives of current students rather than to predict relationships between variables, to generalize from a massive set of quantitative data, or to mold to a previously existing model, as there is not an existing model or framework of work-life negotiations. In general, qualitative research seeks to understand "how people perceive, feel, and react to their situations in their natural surroundings—that is, *in context*," while quantitative researchers test subjects in controlled conditions to seek generalizations for human behavior across contexts (Dues & Brown, 2004, p. 61). Therefore, the research question I pose in this study was better answered by utilizing qualitative methods. Subscribing to the principles

of the interpretive paradigm allowed me to focus in on the meanings that guide college students' communication about their work/life roles and the negotiation of those roles. The following section will discuss my methods, including how I recruited college students as participants in this research, conducted the interviews, and analyzed the data.

Recruitment

In order to recruit college students to participate in this study, I first distributed a recruitment letter through a large public Midwestern University's e-mail listserv after the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. A copy of the recruitment letter can be found in Appendix A. In addition, in hopes of increasing participation in the study and possibly diversity of experiences of the sample, I contacted college students from a small private Midwestern college through convenience sampling (Tracy, 2013). To do this, I sent e-mails to contacts in my social network, and also posted the recruitment letter on Facebook. In addition, I used snowball sampling by asking people to also share these messages with their contacts. Finally, in an attempt to increase diversity of the sample, I sent out targeted e-mails to student organizations on the Midwestern University's campus that were based on racial/cultural minorities and male groups, such as the Black Student Association, Interfraternity Council, and National Pan-Hellenic Council. These opportunistic sampling (Tracy, 2013) techniques were appropriate for this study because they specifically targeted members of the population whom I was interested in interviewing. I did this because it was challenging to find interested participants who were not females and Caucasian. In addition, I utilized the targeted snowball sampling method because it is more time efficient and less costly (Tracy, 2013). For this research study, I was working with a limited time frame and budget.

If students were interested in participating, they were directed to complete an online consent form (Appendix B) and then a short online demographic survey (Appendix C). At the end of the demographic survey, I asked participants to include an e-mail address where I could contact them to set up an interview. One potential disadvantage to this type of convenience sample is that students who do participate may be more inclined because of their interest in the topic, their hyper-awareness of current struggles they face, or their availability to be interviewed, and that is one limitation that could have potentially biased the information I received.

Participants

All participants for this study had to be enrolled in undergraduate college classes either part or full time. I decided to include part-time students because I believe they provided valuable insight on how they negotiate their obligations which differ from full-time students. I did not intentionally want to limit my study to participants of specific gender, race, age, socioeconomic level, parental status, and/or employment status, because I wanted the sample to reflect the increasing number of “nontraditional” students on campuses. To try to interview a diverse sample, I utilized the demographic survey responses and contacted those who fit the criteria of this research, and to try to maximize the diversity of the sample, to set up an interview time. This maximum variation sampling method is important to ensure the inclusion of a variety of types of students (Tracy, 2013).

I conducted interviews with twenty-one total participants. However, phenomenological saturation was reached at interview eight. Therefore, nineteen interviews were coded and analyzed (see Appendix H for a breakdown of demographic data). The two interviews who were excluded from analysis did not add to the diversity of the sample, nor added any new ideas to the analysis. Out of the nineteen participants in the sample, three participants were male and sixteen

were female. This is a higher proportion of females compared to the population, as female students made up 56% of total undergraduate enrollment in 2014 (NCES, 2014). Although the proportion of female students is expected to grow before 2025 (NCES, 2014), the sample in this study is overwhelmingly female. Fourteen (73%) participants identified as White/Caucasian, three (16%) as Biracial, one (5%) as Hispanic, and one (5%) as Black. This roughly compares with the percentages of undergraduate students who are mostly White/Caucasian (78%), Biracial (3%), Hispanic (4%), and Black (7%) on the college campus where this study was primarily conducted.

Eleven participants (58%) fell into the “traditional” college age, ranging from approximately 19 to 22 years old (born within 1995 and 1998). Three participants were 23 years old (Frannie, Heather, and Pat), two were 24 years old (Anthony and Vinny), one was 25 years old (Emma), one was 26 years old (Lillian), and one was 30 years old (Rachel). The academic majors of this sample were diverse, participants reported their major or double major to be among the following: visual and performing arts, photography, criminal justice, social sciences, physical sciences, communication, mathematics, education, business, history, computer and information sciences, biology/life sciences, and interior design. All but four participants participated in at least one extracurricular activity. One participant, Rachel, had two young children and worked full time off-campus. Twelve (63%) participants reported having a part-time or weekend job, eight of which worked off-campus and four on-campus. Two participants also had military commitments. Because of the increase in students who are beyond the “traditional” age (NCES, 2014), students who work while taking classes (NCES, 2014), and the presence of college students who are parents (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014), the participants in this sample who experience these commitments were crucial to interview.

Procedures

To explore the research question, “What do college students discuss when talking about issues of work/life?” I used semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions as probes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The interviews were done either in person (19 interviews, 17 of which were used in the analysis) or over the phone (2 interviews), depending on the availability and location of the participants. At the beginning of the interview, I presented participants with a paper copy (or PDF for the phone interviews) of the consent form (Appendix D), to ensure they were reminded of their rights as a research participant. Afterwards, I asked the open-ended interview questions. For a copy of the interview protocol, see Appendix E. The open-ended questions were designed to uncover how college students are experiencing balancing their lives as a student, friend, and/or parent. I chose to conduct interviews in order to gain a richer description from participants about their thoughts, feelings, and obstacles regarding being a student (Tracy, 2013). Interviews that were analyzed ranged from 17 minutes to 59 minutes, with the average length at 35 minutes. This resulted in 235 pages of single-spaced transcripts. During the interviews, I took notes on copies of the protocol form, noting any preliminary observations. After conducting the interview, which I audio recorded, I had the interviews transcribed by a hired third-party transcriptionist. Before receiving the audio files, the hired transcriptionist signed a Confidentiality Agreement, seen in Appendix G. I transferred these audio files to her using a password protected online file-sharing service, only accessible to us, then promptly removed the files after each transcription was complete. To verify that these transcriptions were accurate, I personally listened to each of the recordings while looking at the written transcripts, making any edits necessary. In addition, I removed names and identifiable content from the

transcripts. All interview audio files and transcripts are being stored in a locked cabinet or a password-protected computer.

Analysis

After receiving the transcriptions, I reviewed and reread the data several times in order to become familiar with the data and ensure it was consistent with the audio recording. I took an iterative approach to the analysis. “Rather than grounding the meaning solely in the emergent data, an iterative approach also encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 184). I utilized a qualitative coding software, NVivo, to help me keep codes consistent and organized, define each code, and track exemplars. After prepping the data so it was organized and accessible, I began Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. During the first step, I listened to each of the recordings while looking at the transcripts, making sure I was familiar with the data. Next, for primary-cycle coding, I first made sense of the data by noticing comments that spoke to the research question and then labeled them with a descriptive identifier or code. During this initial coding process, I utilized the constant comparative method to modify and reevaluate the primary codes (Charmaz, 2006). By utilizing constant comparative method, I took each emerging code and compared the code with the transcripts to be sure the data was supporting these codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). If there were not believable examples from the data that supported these emerging codes, the later themes would not have been valid.

Following the third step, I drew themes from the initial codes by noticing recurring ideas, concepts, or phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To follow an iterative approach, I also turned back to the research question and literature to inform my analysis, filling in the gaps with literature I had not read yet. During this secondary-cycle coding process, I was looking to

explain the patterns and findings in the primary codes and draw from previous literature (Tracy, 2013). While I created these secondary codes, I constructed a loose outline of my analysis and how it answered the research question. During this process, and before writing the analysis, I discussed the data with other scholars to help with sensemaking (Tracy, 2013). At the fourth step, I checked the themes against the data, making sure the theme was accurately capturing the participants' words, and readjusted if needed. After this step, I determined the final themes and named them. Lastly, I looked back at the exemplars, verified that the data was being accurately represented by the secondary codes, then constructed the written portion of the analysis.

To increase the credibility of this study, I incorporated verification procedures. In order to ensure that qualitative research is credible, Tracy (2013) provides three markers that I utilized: thick description, multivocality, and member reflections. Thick description is providing enough detail and contextual information so that the audience of the research can understand the concepts through participants' examples. Throughout the following results section, I provided multiple excerpts in the participants' voices along with information about that participant to contextualize their responses. In addition, the reader may turn to the breakdown of demographic information in Appendix H to be reminded of participants' age, race, major, and other identifying information. I also sought to provide multivocality, or the inclusion of multiple voices, by recruiting and contacting participants to interview who are diverse in gender, race, age, and employment status. Although the sample is disproportionately female and White/Caucasian, there were participants who did not fall into these categories who provided insightful reflections on their experiences.

Finally, I conducted a process of member reflections where participants had the opportunity to "react, agree, or point out problems with the analysis" (Tracy, 2013, p. 238). At

the end of each interview, I asked each of the participants if they were interested in member checking. In the later stages of analysis, I shared emerging conclusions with these participants and encouraged them to react to these conclusions. The participants responded positively to these conclusions, and their feedback further strengthened my results by confirming the conclusions were accurate. Now, I will turn to the results section.

Results

To answer the guiding question, “what do college students discuss when talking about issues of work-life?” I analyzed the interview data utilizing thematic analysis which resulted in eight major themes. First, college students discussed how their ideas were shaped, with four sub-themes being parents and family, other people close to them, mediated cultural messages, and their personal experience. Second, college students discuss that balance is vital, yet challenging for them. They also discuss the school/work/life conflicts that they face in theme three. Fourth, college students discuss the strategies that they utilize to prevent or cope with unbalance. Fifth, students discuss their expectations coming into college and how these expectations tended to be inaccurate, while also discussing uncertainty that they face now about life after college. In theme six, students discuss the prevalence of mental health-related concerns in college which impacts their ability to find balance. Seventh, students discussed that they are in a time of transition into the real-world, noting the importance of learning how to manage their multiple roles while in college. Lastly, although students were aware of differences among students’ lives, they talked about a “normal” college experience which does not entail finding a “balance.” Below, I will examine each theme in depth, providing excerpts from participant interviews to illustrate these findings.

Shaping of Their Ideas

College students talked about how their ideas surrounding managing work/life/school were shaped by outside sources, and also evolved through their own personal experience. Most frequently, participants discussed either noticing the behaviors of their parents and family members while growing up or receiving direct messages from them. In addition, students also mentioned whether their parents were right or wrong; some feel that their parents don’t really

“get it” because they did not attend college or they feel college is different now, but others believed parents still give pretty good advice because they’ve been there before. Other outside sources included other people in their networks such as bosses or professors, and larger cultural discourses about work/life portrayed in media.

Parents and Family. Nearly every participant noted their parents or family members as having a role in shaping their ideas about work, life, and school. This sub-theme encompasses the instances where participants discussed observing their parents, siblings, or grandparents’ behaviors while growing up, or receiving messages from their family members that emphasized the importance of work, school, and family. Bri, Ingrid, and Jaiden all discussed their observations of their parents while growing up when asked how their ideas of work and life were shaped:

I kinda saw how my dad did it, when I was growing up. And at first, I always just like that’s the weirdest thing ever. Like, if I would get sick, I would have to call mom, not dad. Dad’s at work, y’know. You better be dying if you’re calling dad. You better be bleeding out on the nurse’s little, like, stupid chair in the corner y’know, for you to call dad. And, it’s just growing up I was, like, that was stupid. Like why should I be like “No, no, I’m sick, no, no, don’t call dad!” y’know... But then as I got older I was, like, okay fine. I kind of see where he’s coming from. And then I saw, like, I suddenly came around to the idea. I was, like, alright fine. I kinda like that. It makes sense to me. And it’s probably because I have the same mindset that he does, that I understand the way he does things and so I was, like, okay I get it. That’s fine. So that’s how I just solely came about it growing up... –Bri, sophomore Criminal Justice major

But, I don't know my parents, my dad is all consumed in his work so he didn't really have time for social life. Um, so we never really got to see him. But, um, my mom – on the other hand – like she would go to work and then she'd come home and she'd have, like, sorority or she'd go do something else. So I don't know, I was just like “No, she can handle it, like, I can too.” –Ingrid, freshman Social Sciences major

My mom, I would say. Um, and a little bit from my dad but my mom in particular. She was a stay at home mom, um, once my younger brother was born. I was the first and I just went in to work with her – which was a lot of fun. Um, but once my brother was born... she just really felt like she needed to be home and be with us. Um, and so when I had three younger sisters that were born since and so just having her at home made our family closer. And it made it run smoother. She made me-she definitely loves her work and it was hard for her to leave. Um, and she still does work on the side but she did prioritize her family in that situation. Um... and just-and for my dad, he works through-like two to three jobs at a time to provide for our family. While he loves his job, he loves his family more and is willing to do more work for his family. So he's definitely prioritizing his-the family over himself, in-in the form of work. –Jaiden, freshman Math and Education major

All three of these women, in addition to several other participants, discussed picking up ideas about work and life from observing parents, but each of these quotes also highlights a difference in the way that their mothers and fathers approached work/life. Bri, Ingrid, and Jaiden's fathers' lives all emphasized work demands in service to the family over personal needs, whereas they saw their mothers working, taking care of family demands, and integrating social obligations.

Here, it appears that the mothers are observed as the parent who needs to “balance,” whereas fathers are observed as focusing on work as the priority. This falls in line with the gendered experiences of work-life issues that Douglas and Michaels (2004) and Drago (2007) describe. For Jaiden, she rationalizes this choice by her father, describing that he shows love for his family by working outside of the home. Participants in this study are not only learning about work-life issues from parents, but also picking up on these gendered ideas through their observations. Perhaps this, along with the challenge of getting college men to participate in this study, reflects that college women are more aware of and socialized to struggles with negotiating work/school/life roles.

Along with observations of parents’ behaviors, participants noted receiving direct messages from family members that influenced the way they thought about work, life, and school. Emma, 25-year-old Senior Photography major, discussed the ways her ideas surrounding the importance of school and the emphasis on family were shaped, and then also seemed to clash:

Um... Well, my mom and dad were 16 and 18 when they had me. And so they never went to college and so they’ve always pushed hard work, higher education, all this all that. And it was one of those things where family was always ranked first with them, always always, no matter... Even if your family member was wrong, they’re your family so they’re right. And so whenever... I tried to come and go to school... I would try, y’know, to focus more on my family’s needs or my friends’ needs and not so much my school work. But then I would get... I don’t wanna say yelled at, but lectured, by my parents “No, you need to be focusing on your school work.” And then it was a big

conflict of “Well, what do I do here? You didn’t come to school so how do you know what I need to do?”

Here, Emma struggled with her parents both emphasizing the importance of working hard in school and staying close to her family. Wang (2014) also found that first-generation college students often received messages from parents about keeping familial relationships an integral part of their life. Emma found herself in this bind when she would try to be there for her family and close friends, and her family would tell her to focus on school instead. Quinn, 22-year-old Senior Computer and Information Sciences major, also discussed her mother, who raised Quinn as a single mom while also achieving her college degree from an esteemed university, and her grandmother, an elementary school teacher, as emphasizing to her that her education should be her number one priority:

Normally, school is always at the top. Um, just because that’s-as far as I know I was always, um, not learned... I was taught [laughs] to believe that, uh, school was the gateway to every opportunity that, um, I can have. Especially, as a black woman [laughs] because of reasons but, um, because of school allows so many opportunities. That’s always been taught to put at the top.

Quinn also discussed having attended an advanced high school, which gave college credits, and being on a four year scholarship to attend college – both of which demonstrate her commitment to school work. In Emma and Quinn’s responses, we see the hierarchy of priorities, school being at the top, as being shaped by their parents’ emphasis on education. However, Emma and Quinn both discussed in their interviews conflicts that occur in their personal health and/or social lives because school is such an emphasized high-priority in their lives. Conflicts between school, work, and life will be discussed in-depth in the third theme.

While discussing these direct messages from parents, Emma displayed frustration with her family who also wants her to finish school and reflected on the idea of whether her family's advice is justified, since they had not attended college:

...my family is mostly just "Are you done yet? Are you done yet?" They-I am the first in my immediate family to even come to college so for my mom to sit there and tell me "Oh, you just aren't trying hard enough." It really upsets me in a way that I'm just like "Why don't you go? Why don't you go and then tell me how hard it is or isn't?"

Coming from a family where her parents had not attended college, Emma's position as a first-generation college student had an impact on the way that she viewed her parents' messages. For students with parents who have not attended college, they may struggle with the advice or messages that their parents give. Parents frequently give their college children message of support and advice; however, these messages tend to be positively charged (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012). Although participants in this study did report receiving positive messages, they also revealed instances where they felt misunderstood by their parents or questioned their advice. Emma was one of several participants who discussed whether or not messages of advice regarding college from parents and others were accurate. Vinny, 24-year-old Senior Communication major, noted:

I mean, I heard, a lot of my advice about college was antiquated because, y'know, you're only 17-18 listening to a bunch of people who are, like, 40, 45, 50, like, my parents are old as fuck and my father turned 50 in my Senior Year of high school so, like, his experience-I mean, he grad-he got his degree when he was 33 but it's different because I was born at that time so he-his advice of college life would be like "Oh, yeah, I fucked up when I was 18 but, like, I went back and did it when I was 33 so the bulk of my

experience is much different than what you're going for." Um, and my mom. I mean she's old too-she's older than him so it's like old advice, you got teachers that wanna tell you about college advice stuff but shit you go to college in 1980, it's much different than 2011, you know... They-they tell you what-how it will be to sort of prepare you for when you go into, but once you get into it, like, you are now entering uncharted waters, like, they may have been in college before but like I said, like, you know, a 30 year or a 40 year difference that's so long to, like, they don't really know what they're talking about anymore.

Vinny here discussed receiving advice about what college would be like from parents, but felt like coming into college was different now than what his parents experienced. Darby, Sophomore Visual and Performing Arts and Communication major, also noted that because her parents' experience with college is different, they can't fully understand what she is going through as a student:

Umm, they... They understand, I think... That I am busy and stressed but I don't think that they fully get it. 'Cause my mom is always like "Well, I went to nursing school so don't tell me how hard your life is." So, um... I think they understand that I am more stressed out than I was in high school but I'm not sure that they, like, get it! 'Cause, like, it's so much harder now and I don't think that they understand.

Participants in this study who did have parents who attended college also discursively separated what the college experience was like for them compared to their parents, saying it was "much different" and "so much harder now." If college students view their experiences as different from their parents' experiences, they may not consider the information that they receive as relatable or helpful, which could reduce the likelihood of this information reducing their uncertainty.

Almost every participant mentioned their parents or another family member as influencing the way they thought about work, life, and school. Family members are an influential source to individuals throughout the vocational anticipatory socialization phase (Jablin, 2001). Participants observed parents' behaviors, which tend to have gendered patterns of dealing with work/life issues, and also received messages from their parents about work, about life, and about the importance of education. Sometimes these views clash for college students, like in Emma's situation, who finds it difficult to balance the importance of both family and schoolwork. Furthermore, college students discussed the accuracy of the advice or messages about school they received from their parents. Instead of this advice functioning as uncertainty reducing information, these interactions with their parents could be perceived as unhelpful or not relatable. This could contribute to the later theme of uncertainty that students feel both towards college and life after college.

Other People in Their Networks. Participants ideas' about work and school also came from other people in their networks, such as professionals they have met or worked with and coaches. In this sub-theme, participants specifically discussed the interactions that they had with individuals who were not family, but could have been academic faculty, coaches, or working professionals. From these interactions, students also picked up on the emphasis to do well in school to prepare for their future career. Grace, freshman majoring in the Physical Sciences, discussed how professionals she met at her internships, along with parents and cultural influences, taught her about the competitive industry and the need to put work-related demands over all else:

Partially from listening to other meteorologists talk about things because it's a really, really competitive, um, what's the word... It's really competitive to get jobs, um, in

meteorology.... And, uh, it was really important that I did well in school.... And, I don't know, also just like... I hate to do-I hate to pull this card, but like the society thing.

Looking around me and seeing other people who-it's really important to other people and it's really important to, like, adults when they're looking at résumés and, like, applications and stuff and, um, things like that. So, it's multiple things.... Yeah. I-when I did my internship it was with two meteorologists at a news center. And so, whether you're at the news center or the national weather service or it doesn't matter where you go, weather is always gonna have strange hours because weather is happening whether you are awake or at the office or not. So, um, yeah I definitely already knew that. I've talked to people about it. Mostly people who are already, like, who are in the workforce so not necessarily professors. It's mostly, like, actual meteorologists who are working.

Throughout her interview, Grace discussed the importance of getting ahead in her career while in college by doing well in classes, working at internships, and being involved in her extracurricular activities. Although only a freshmen, Grace asserted she knew exactly what she wanted to do after college. In addition to a push from her parents to figure this out and a cultural idea of what she needs to do to get there, she has received messages about working in this competitive industry from professionals who have had to work around the clock reporting weather news. Grace most likely picked up on the "society thing" from her past experiences working in the meteorology field, taking notes from "adults" in the industry about what should be on her resume and application. As she saw these ideal worker norms of employees who had to put work first to be successful in the industry, Grace was being socialized into what it means to be an ideal employee in this line of work.

Corrine, sophomore double major in Social Sciences and Communication and a student athlete, noted her coach as another source influencing the way she thinks about balance while in school:

Um... I think my... coach preaches a lot about, um, like, having a healthy balance. Like, he is never mad. If you have to be, like "Hey, coach, like I'm struggling in this class and I gotta meet this professor, is it okay if I'm like ten minutes late to practice?" Like, he's never gonna say no to your academics getting in the way of, like, practice. Like, he's very good about, like, if there's a class you wanna take or you have to take and if there's this practice, I mean he's just... He, like, will either meet up with you before or just trust that you're gonna get your run in or your work out done by yourself. 'Cause, he, like... He always preaches that you're a student athlete, you're not an athlete student. Like, your studies become-become, come before any athletics.

Notice that Corrine's coach emphasizes the priority of school over his sport which is conceptualized, at least by Corrine, as a "healthy balance." Corrine notes that her coach is accommodating to school demands, communicating to his team that their obligation as a student should take precedence over athletics. However, notice that Corrine's coach's message focuses on balance between her academic work and athletic work, not necessarily work and the rest of Corrine's life. This frame of balance leaves out time for personal and social interests, such as self-care and relational maintenance. For college students, it seems that school work takes the place of paid employment, and therefore the ideal worker norms are present but taking place as their role of student instead of employee. As students, such as Grace, learn about the emphasis placed on paid work after college, they're probably not surprised as they've learned this in their role as a student as well, such as Corrine's experience with her coach. Although participants

reported having uncertainty about work after college, a theme I will discuss later, the traces of ideal worker norms found in college are likely to continue in their future professional lives.

Cultural Messages. Intertwined with interpersonal messages that participants received were messages about what is culturally understood or socially acceptable, oftentimes transmitted by mediated entertainment. This sub-theme encompasses the instances where participants discussed their ideas being shaped by a (Western) cultural idea of the importance of work, communicated by media such as television and movies. Anthony, 24-year-old Junior who is a Visual and Performing Arts major, discussed how his ideas about work were shaped by mass-mediated cultural messages and also his observations of his parents:

So socially, like socially and culturally through-through television and all that kind of stuff. I mean I watch *Parks and Rec*, all that kind of stuff. So that's a really good, like, indication, um, but also people that are older than me that I look up to. ... I don't think I've heard too much about it. I don't know if I just don't look out for it or not. But as far as like balance and stuff it's not something that I feel like culturally we really talk about a lot... I don't think so. Personally, I think people we're just like 'Work your ass off' and that's it. 'Go capitalism!' [Laughs]

Here, Anthony revealed that messages surrounding work are prevalent, whereas "balance" messages are not necessarily discussed. It appears that Anthony has gained cultural messages about work, which emphasize work over all else, another indication of the ideal worker norms discussed previously. Vinny, 24-year-old Senior Communication major, added:

Man. That's easy. You watch-you watch parents, you watch movies, movies, movies, movies, movies, movies. Those are, like, almost essential, like, movies and TV shows they are essential in showing you how at least, uh, the idea of work goes so most the-the

easiest way to conceptualize work is through time so most common phrase about work “9 to 5. I gotta go to my 9 to 5.” Even though workdays will probably go from, like, 6:30 to 4:30 or some weird shit, like, it’s never, like, 9 to 5 or at least rarely, but we, uh, conceptualize it through time first so that’s how-that’s my first understanding. [later] Um. How else, a lot of movies. Movies capture the time thing really easily they try, uh, show adults in the workplace, um, they sort of show, like, how work goes [sniffles], at least you know, they, you know, form our ideas about it. How else did I learn about it. I mean that’s really, that’s really how I first learned, and then shit once you get a job then you learn about it, like, you know, these things are pretty accurate. That’s one thing that, uh, TV-media hasn’t gotten really wrong is that work is like, it becomes the core of your existence most of or at least it becomes so integral to your identity that you cannot separate it.

Here, Vinny noticed the way that media reflects our cultural tendency to place work as a central marker of our identity. As a Communication major, Vinny discussed that he is primed to think critically about the messages that are distributed through media. He notes the time commitment and cultural emphasis on work in our lives, communicated to us through mass-mediated messages. Both participants’ quotes highlight the Western cultural emphasis on work, communicated by the media they consumed. Although media is one of the more prevalent sources of information during vocational anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001), “television’s representation of occupational roles, as with other roles, is both a wider perspective than everyday experience and a caricature of the actual world of work” (Peterson & Peters, 1983, p. 81). Although participants such as Vinny and Anthony are learning cultural ideas as they are

socialized into the working world, their perceptions shaped from these sources alone may not be entirely accurate.

Personal Experience. Lastly, participants noted that their ideas surrounding work/life/school were not only shaped by others, but by their own personal experience. This sub-theme, discussed by over half of the participants, encompasses the instances where participants discussed learning about negotiating the demands in their life through their own trail-and-error. Lillian, 26 year old Junior Business & Communication major who works off-campus and is currently in a long-distance relationship with her husband, noted:

I think through doing it. I'm a very experience kind of person that doesn't really make sense until I get down in it. Um. And I think just, like, making mistakes or seeing how things didn't work out then it gives me perspective of saying like "Okay. Well, how could it have been different or how can it be different in the future?"... I've learned the hard way that if you don't take care of yourself, uh, everything else goes to crap quickly. Um, so I've learned that in kind of the hard way.

Here, Lillian discussed her ideas as being shaped by her experience of making mistakes and then readjusting her lifestyle. Specifically, she discussed her previous failures in self-care, and why it is so important to her now to incorporate that as a priority in her life. Vinny, 24-year-old Senior Communication major, also agreed that he learned about balance through his own trial and error:

But I will say that I think it takes a lot of – for some people – for me, it took a lot of trial and error to get to this point that I'm at, um, and it takes a lot of tears and pain and, uh, it takes a lot of other uncomfortable experiences to-to learn how to balance all these things. Um, we for the most part think, you know, as humans like "Oh man, I got such a reasonable understanding of the world and I'm so fucking smart" and all this and you

know, truth be told, you know, especially when you come fresh out of high school, oh, shit, you could be years into college and you still don't know shit... But I would tell people that it takes, you know, some, uh, it takes some learning, a lot of failure before you get success at least sometimes.

Here, Vinny discusses learning about balance through his past struggles. In the interview, he discussed his experience of coming to college, not taking classes seriously and prioritizing his social life, then finding himself in a difficult situation financially and with low grades. Upon returning to the college he currently attends, he discovered what he needed to do in order to maintain a good GPA, a healthy relationship, and with a financial plan to stay in school.

The sub-theme of college students' ideas being shaped by their own personal experience demonstrates their knowledge of balancing multiple domains from trial and error. This is not surprising, especially as the population of college students sees an increase in older students with more lived experience (NCES, 2014) and students with increased responsibilities (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2011). Learning by experience is arguably the most practical way for students to experience work/life issues. However, as Lillian and Vinny note, this is often a trail-and-error process. Although we learn from making mistakes, when the stakes are increasing in the college environment, the "error" portion of the process is more costly to students. The cost is especially high for students coming from backgrounds of low socioeconomic levels, who likely can't afford to lose scholarships, enroll in extra semesters, or get fired from a job. In addition, the habits and behaviors that are formed in the years that a student attends college are likely to follow them beyond these years. If students struggle throughout college in negotiating their multiple roles, or solidify unhealthy ways of negotiating these roles, this could later negatively impact their relationships and access to social support networks in the future.

College students discussed outside sources as shaping their ideas about work, their personal life, and also the importance of school. Parents and family members most frequently contributed to the shaping of these ideas about work/life and the emphasis on getting an education. However, participants questioned whether their advice about college life was accurate or not. Outside sources such as bosses or coaches also reinforced the idea that education, in preparation for work, should be a students' number one priority. Cultural messages again emphasized work as integral to our identity as people, and participants such as Anthony and Vinny noticed these messages are often spread through television or movie depictions. Finally, participants also discussed their ideas surrounding work/life/school to be shaped by their own personal experiences of trying to manage these realms.

Balance as Vital but Challenging

These college students believed that balance is important to achieve/strive for, but also admit that they struggle with balancing their lives in college. This theme can be defined as the instances where students articulated the importance of striving to find balance in their life and the challenges they face while trying to do this. To these students, oftentimes balance means being able to incorporate all of the various aspects of their life successfully, the absence of stress/anxiety, and they also believe it is a personal learning process – a process that they are currently in.

Every participant, except for two, commented that balance is important to achieve, or at least strive towards. When asked whether she thought that balance was important to achieve, Corrine, sophomore double major in Social Sciences and Communication and a student athlete, answered:

I think so because you, like – yes, it’s very hard to maintain balance – but I think everyone should try to, like, achieve some kind of balance ‘cause like... Like if you take a student athlete for example, like, you can’t... focus more... Like if you focus more on your grades, your-your, um, athletic side is gonna, like, fall behind but if you focus more on the athletics, your academics are gonna fall. So you wanna, like, definitely try to achieve a balance so you can be the best student and athlete as possible.

Here, Corrine discussed balance as necessary in order to be the “best” at her commitments in both academics and athletics. To her, being balanced means more than being well-rounded, it means being exceptional in multiple realms of her life. Specifically, she defines balance as positively impacting her roles as a student and athlete. Notice that Corrine does not include balance as being important to be a better “self” outside of these roles. In her interview, she discussed being the type of “go-getter” person who “spreads herself too thin.” Because of this, she sometimes feels “guilty or ashamed” when she can’t give her all to each of her commitments. In fact, although participants thought balance was important, the majority of the participants admitted they also struggle with finding balance.

Frannie, senior Physical Sciences major who works part-time off campus, also agreed that while it is possible to live “unbalanced” as she has while in college, balance is important:

And it’s... If you know the balance, then normally you’re being more productive so you don’t end up as stressed. I would love to have my life balanced. That’d be nice... It’d be nice. I mean I can live in a limbo. I have for three years but it’s... It’s easier on me and on anxiety and just stress, in general, to be able to balance.

For Frannie, balance is important because it makes one more productive and less stressed, however she has struggled to find balance while in college. She posits balance as more of a

future goal, rather than something that is realistic to achieve while in college. She suggests that at one point she has experienced a state of balance which was easier on her mental wellbeing, but while in college her life succumbs to the overarching script of living in “limbo.” Heather, junior Social Sciences major, also discussed her struggle with balance while in college:

Um... It kinda sucks ‘cause it’s like... I feel, like, I’m doing it well for a month and then, next month I’m, like, skipping all my classes again and I am... didn’t clean anything for a week and I haven’t showered for a week. So it’s like... It’s so hard to get into that routine and to actually keep yourself motivated throughout the whole time and not have that, like, fake sense of success, like “I already did it.” Like, “I don’t need to keep trying anymore.” Like... I don’t know, it’s like one extreme to another. There is no balance in my life right now.

Heather discussed the way she has struggled with finding a balance, because it seems like she could not maintain it for a prolonged period of time. Because of this, she discussed how her ideas of living a “balanced life” have changed, saying:

Three years ago, I would’ve thought that I need to have my meals planned and everything planned out. But, especially with my counseling, like, everything that happened I just. My standards have dropped. Well, not dropped but kind of like redefined is-to what I consider balance. So, like, I just hope to be at least healthy and getting most of my stuff done and hanging out with my friends. Not too much but like enough to where, it can give me a break from all of my things.

However, this specific conceptualization of balance was not typical of all of the participants. Perhaps college students note struggling with finding balance because of the way participants think about balance. Over half of the participants discussed balance as being able to

incorporate all the various aspects and obligations in their life. Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, discussed what it means to have achieved balance:

Um... Achieve balance... I think it would just be, like, I don't know if it's planning or organization or cutting back but, like, but just reaching-for me, it would be reaching a point where, like, I don't have to choose between them. Like, everything is taking up as little or as much time to the point where, like, I'm not constantly worrying if I have to, like, if I have to bail on someone.... Looking to have times with my friends is like "That's three hours, I can't sleep because now I'm gonna be doing those things." So it's just, I don't know, just getting to a point where I don't have to choose between things all the time. There'll just be time for everything.

Shaye, junior Interior Design major who works off-campus, adds:

Um. Making sure I get everything in on time while still allowing myself to have time for myself and friends and other... responsibilities, I guess.... Um... I guess that you are still accomplishing things you need to while still taking care of yourself mentally, physically, emotionally, all that and, like, having time for things that you not only have to do but want to do.

Taylor and Shaye both discuss balance as being able to do everything they need and want to do. More specifically, they discuss having time to do all of this without having to make a trade-off. It's not surprising that it would be a struggle to find this ideal, as we live in a world with limited time and constantly have to make choices and trade-offs. Perhaps the idealized notion of balance that these participants hold is part of the reason why they find achieving balance in college unrealistic. As Wieland (2011) suggests, "reframing conflict as a positive sign that one is well rounded" (p. 180) may lead to a more inclusive idea about balance that students are able to

attain. In other words, it is important to promote the notion of balance that involves making choices and trade-offs which is part of managing a healthy balance. Vinny, 24-year-old Senior Communication major, also recognized this idealized notion of balance:

So it's difficult, you know, this whole balance. I don't-I don't know if there is ever really a healthy work-life balance. I saw this stupid fucking meme one time, it was like a triangle... So here is, here's school work, here's social life, and here's sleep and the meme said "In college you gotta choose two" and I thought it was stupid for a really long time until I started doing well in school and then I was like "Wow. Like. This is true." So if I focus on school work and sleep, then I'll have less of a social life. If I focus on my social life and sleep, then well it's goodbye to school work. If I focus on... school work and social life, then it's goodbye to sleep. So, um, I think that's what college is like. It's a very, uh, condensed version of, like, the nuance of it all or the minutia I guess but, uh, I mean it's pretty true. So how-how work-life balance looks to me is, I don't know. I'm fucking doing my best, focusing on school first and then if I can balance those two I will but if not then I'd choose sleep every single time. Um. Most of my friends have already left [city], you know, pursuing whatever they're pursuing so, um, I hate to be one of the last ones but I am, so fuck the social life I guess if I have to.

In his interview, Vinny stressed the importance of striving for balance. But here, Vinny also recognized the impracticality of incorporating everything into his daily life as a college student. In order to complete school work and get a healthy amount of sleep, he finds he generally has to sacrifice his social life.

Earlier, Frannie mentioned balance would make her stress and anxiety levels more manageable. A little over half of the participants agreed with her, that balance would mean the

absence of overwhelming stress or anxiety. Anthony, 24-year-old Junior and Visual and Performing Arts major, mentioned:

Um... Hmm... I think it's... It's a mix between, like, feeling busy but not being too overwhelmed. Um, like, so for the beginning of this semester I would say in the current state I'm in, it would be overwhelmed.

Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, also described the presence of stress in her life throughout her interview. She discussed balance as something she wish she could achieve to reduce her stress:

I'm sure it would be much healthier. Like, I am... I don't know. I'm in-I'm a Psych major so in my Psych classes they've told me the negative, like, things that stress, like, prolonged stress does to, like, your body and your brain. So like, I intellectually know that I need balance. Um. I don't know. I just, like, like what I wasn't-so like last year or, like, this year and last year, like, are completely different years. And like, last year, like, I kind of felt like, I don't know, like, I was a failure, like, I wasn't living the college life 'cause I wasn't involved in anything and I wasn't doing anything and now I'm at the other extreme. So, like, I do need balance but I also just don't wanna go back to doing nothing.

Although she wanted to find balance, Taylor also wanted to be involved while in college. She too, in addition to Heather, talks about going from one extreme to another. The extreme Taylor is experiencing right now is stressful for her. She discussed the tension between the idea of achieving balance and the idea of doing college right. In her view, "college life" doesn't lend itself well to the concept of balance. However, she also seems to conceptualize balance as close to "back to doing nothing," which is another problematic frame. Instead, thinking about balance

as incorporating “doing” multiple roles (school work, paid employment, self-care, developing relationships, etc.) but to varying degrees at different points in life would possibly ease her stress.

Finally, participants viewed balance as a personal learning process, one that they are currently in. Shaye, junior Interior Design major who works off-campus, noted:

Umm... Well. I, myself, am still trying to figure it out. Um. I guess, it's different per person but you really have to, like, prioritize what's important to you and find ways to, like, mix them together.

Vinny, 24-year-old Senior Communication major, adds upon this idea that finding balance is a learning process:

But I would say for people who are trying to find the work-life balance, definitely find, like, mentors, um, you know tell them they're gonna fuck up a lot, you know, while trying to find this balance but, you know. What's the thing they're supposed to, uh, what's the thing, um, “Rome wasn't built in a day.” Is that what people say? That's a stupid saying, right. But it's true because of, I don't know if people have ever built anything or you know, assembled a fucking Lego play house or something but it takes one Lego, you know, upon one Lego upon one Lego and that's like, how, you know, college and learning goes, you know, it takes one thing on top of one thing, you know. So it won't happen instantaneously but you know finding the decent balance or at least one that works for yourself or, you know, that's attainable. It's just fucking hard but you know hard don't mean it's not worth it.

Vinny and many other participants agree that balance is important to strive for, although he notices that it may not be realistic. Balancing life in college is increasingly difficult for

students, as Taylor and Shaye admit, and Heather learns after realizing that she needed to reevaluate how she previously thought about balance. Assuming that balance is “achievable” as a fixed state in the first place is probably one issue for college students. With an ever-changing schedule and multiple daily demands, it’s unlikely a student will find a “balanced state” for more than a few hours. As Golden, Kirby, and Jorgenson (2006) discuss, reframing work-life to recognize integration rather than separation and fluidity rather than stability is a more advantageous approach. Reframing the way that students conceptualize a “balanced” life, and then helping them along the way, at the organizational level, to negotiate their roles and obligations would be beneficial in possibly cutting down the cyclical behaviors that lead to unhealthy outcomes. More insights on what organizations should do will be discussed in the practical implications. Next, I turn to the theme where students discuss navigating the various conflicts they experience while in college.

School/work/life Conflicts

This theme consists of the instances where students discussed the areas of their lives that conflict while in college. This theme illustrates that the most common “work-life” related conflicts students have are between school and their personal relationships (parents, friends, and romantic partners) and also between school and work. Advice that students give about managing these realms typically place school as the top priority, or the realm that should win out when there is conflict. On a positive note, students also mostly report that people around them are mostly supportive when they must make “work-life” related negotiations, specifically citing professors, people at their job, and their parents or friends.

Grace, freshman Physical Sciences major, discussed conflicts when people close to her get upset that she’s not more available because she has things to do at school:

Um... Well, so... I do have a boyfriend. I've been dating him for over four years now. And, um, he-he stayed home. He is not here. And so he gets frustrated a lot and this is- and my family gets frustrated too actually since I don't visit more often and so, um, like, mostly because I'm busy so I'm like saying "You know, I can't come this week-end. I have stuff to do." I either signed up for something or I have too much work. So, often times my family and my boyfriend get really frustrated by that they don't get to see me as often. And then, even during the day when I'm in classes, like, I can't text them. And so, uh, sometimes I feel like I'm pushing them away and that's really frustrating 'cause it's like no I just wanna do good in my classes- do well in my classes. So that's, that's something for sure.

Grace's choices surrounding her competing demands between family, her boyfriend, and her classes, often leave her frustrated and with strain in her relationships. Because college students report receiving memorable messages from parents about remembering the family while in college (Wang, 2014), it is not surprising that students notice the negative reactions of their parents when they cannot stay in touch. Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, gave a similar account of schoolwork taking priority over her relationship with her significant other, although they are not in a long-distance relationship:

I'm in a relationship and, like, I just get to see him, like, once a week. He's a Freshmen so he doesn't-he still in, like, GenEds. and everything and he doesn't quite understand why my schedule is this hard to manage. He thinks I'm just, like, not managing it or, like, I'm prioritizing everything over him and I'm like "No. Literally. I have an hour. Like, I'm sorry you feel like I'm budgeting you. But I have an hour." Anyway, so, um... Friday, we were supposed to have, like, date night and I have Mono right now.

[Chuckles]. Like, it's-it's so bad 'cause, like, I don't have time for fatigue but [Giggles]. Um, but, like, sorry, I missed a clas-I missed class for, like, two days in a row. And I'm so behind so I had to cancel date night for academics 'cause it was the only way I was gonna catch up. It's silly. He's obviously disappointed and I'm, like, I can't do anything. Um, social and academics, like, buff a lot.

Both Taylor and Grace discuss their personal relationships conflicting with their schoolwork. In both cases, their boyfriends and families are frustrated and disappointed when they are surpassed for other commitments. Similarly, Shaye discussed her friends' frequent disappointment with her for not having time to spend with them since she is both taking a full credit load and working part-time:

So, last semester, I was very lonely because I was very, very busy. 18 credit hours, like, 21 hours a week at work so, like, I didn't have time to make time for my friends, right so they're, like, taking that, super personally and that, like, really conflicted. That's, like, why I wanted to do this study for you 'cause I'm, like, the perfect example but, like, yeah, so my personal life and my school-slash-work life really conflicted a lot last semester 'cause I'm obviously more focused on, like, school and working so I can stay in school but yeah they took it personally that I didn't have time...

Shaye's situation demonstrates how her work also takes time away from personal obligations. One problematic outcome that we can observe in the situations of Taylor, Grace, and Shaye, is that by forgoing time with people in their social networks, they are also likely missing out on the social support that these people provide. Because emotional and informational supportive communication have potential to mediate the effects of academic stress on mental and physical health (MacGeorge et al., 2005), these students are lacking these opportunities to reduce their

stress. As Shaye, Taylor, and Grace push away their friends, parents, and significant others, they are likely damaging positive relationships that could benefit them in the long run.

Other college students also reported their work schedules conflicting with school demands, in addition to social relationships. In one instance, Rachel, who has two kids and works full time off-campus, experienced a work schedule conflict with a planned exam in school. When asked about a conflict in her life, Rachel answered:

I can tell you several. [Giggles]. Um, last semester, one of my final exams was from noon to two, on a day that I taught at [work] and I didn't get out of work there until 1, so there was a major conflict with that. I thought I was going to completely miss my final... Freaked out. Was able to take it. [Giggles]. ... I have another conflict this semester, that's already been resolved and my professor's been supportive. So... I've never had a negative or bad reaction.

Rachel mentioned that her professors have been supportive when she had to make a negotiation, something that many other participants also mentioned. Frannie, who had experienced a series of traumatic events in her personal life such as a death in the family and personal illness, discussed being met with support from professors when she fell behind in classwork:

I mean, I was communicating with them through e-mail and trying to... Also, they can sort of tell if you speak with them on a regular basis, if you have bags under your eyes and you can't really function or speak.... 'cause I was taking calculus at the time. I missed-so I missed essentially three full weeks of school. And um, my calculus professor was letting me turn-she didn't have-she had a, like, no late work policy and she was letting me turn in stuff, like, three weeks late.

Frannie discussed part of the reason why she continued taking classes instead of withdrawing was because she would have lost a semester of financial aid. So Frannie decided to instead inform her professors about what was going on, and they reacted by making certain exceptions for her. Jaiden, freshman Math and Education major, also reported that her professors were supportive when she was ill during finals week the previous semester:

Um, last semester my professors were pretty understanding. Um, they're great people, like, I got super sick the Monday of finals' week and so I was down for the count, like what, for about two and a half days. And my professors were very understanding about, um, the quality of my work. [Chuckles]. I didn't get to quite finish everything. Um, so they were very lenient and very understanding about that which has really-that relieved a lot of stress for me, personally. And, so I've found that people are generally very nice, [coughs], and understanding human beings and so that's definitely helped if I have felt off-kilter in any way, so.

When Jaiden fell sick during a busy time, she discussed how her professors were understanding about her work. In addition, she discussed her parents and her roommate as also being supportive when she was in a place of feeling unbalanced:

With my mom I'd definitely talk with her about how I can fix a situation. Um, and a lot of times that helps me a lot. Here, um... I have felt like I've just had to do it on my own when my mom isn't here. But, I have found that, like, my roommate has been really helpful with me like figuring out how I should go about, um, fixing a problem that I've had.

The most common work/life-related conflicts that students discuss are between the realms of school, their personal relationships, and paid employment. Furthermore, these excerpts

from Grace, Taylor, Shaye, and Rachel demonstrate that when conflicts occur, the realm that typically takes precedence is school. The expectation for students to live out this ideal worker norm is corroborated by Knight and Wiedmaier (2016), who discuss the impact on emerging adults' relationships. Knight (2009) found that emerging adults preference casual sexual relationships because it gives them the freedom to develop professionally, without having to make early commitments to a more involved relationship or family. However, when students are so busy that they can not spend time with those in their social networks who may provide much needed support, they may be missing out on stronger interpersonal relationships and the potential to mediate stress (MacGeorge et al., 2005; Petronio, 2002; Wittenberg-Lyles & Villagran, 2006). In addition, as most students cannot shut out committed relationships long-term throughout their professional life, they are likely to struggle by having to find another way to cope with work-life demands (Knight & Wiedmaier, 2016). When attending class or schoolwork does become impossible for college students due to crisis or illness, like for Frannie and Jaiden, students do also note that their professors are supportive and understanding.

Strategies to Prevent or Cope with Unbalance

Students discuss utilizing strategies such as planning/prioritizing (naming some specific organizational strategies such as using a planner or calendar app) and communicating with those around them in order to avoid or solve conflicts. This theme can be understood as the instances where students describe their strategies to avoid conflict or reduce stress, which took the forms of planning in advance and communicating with people around them. Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major who discussed the prevalence of stress in her life, noted:

I guess, know your priorities would probably help. [Giggles]. Um, so you know what you should be giving the most time to. Um. I do a lot of planning. I have, like, a planner and

it's color-coded and it's like my entire life- If I was to lose that I would, I might as well just drop out of school, I don't know. Um... I am so, very organized, write everything down. Um, have a regular schedule. [Chuckles].... I try really hard to be intentional about it. Like, I know that I struggle with, like, maintaining, like, giving time to relationships, like, because for me I don't need, like, personal time with a relationship but, like, I guess with, like, my bestfriend I can be three months removed from her and still feel as close as, like, when we'd spend every day together. So, like, I forget that other people aren't like that. And that, like, if you don't spend time with them, they think something's wrong. [Chuckles]. Um, so... like I have a list of people I feel like I need to be intentional with time about – 'cause I'm so organized – and I just, like, I, like, put them in my planner. I might use acronyms 'cause people get really offended if they think that, like, you have to write them down to remember them. They're, like... They do not like that. [Chuckles]. Um, I don't know so just, like, everything that needs my time – including relationships – I try to, like, be intentional about making sure I have that scheduled into my life.

Here, Taylor recognizes the importance of planning and prioritizing her life, specifically mentioning her use of her planner to keep track of not only her schedule, but to hopefully remind her of people she needs to reach out to maintain a relationship. However, she realizes that some people take offense to the fact that Taylor has to write them into her schedule, rather than being flattered that she is taking the time to touch base with them.

Rachel, 30 year old sophomore majoring in Biology/Life Sciences, also mom of two, mentioned that prioritizing and constantly reevaluating those priorities are what helps her stay on track:

Pick your priorities, and then kind of make that... Make it your priority make that the top of your time management so if class takes two hours, outside the class, do that first and then kind of fill in from there.... I would just say trying to use time management on things. Um, pick out my priorities and every day, it changes. My balance changes every day. You know what is more important, when I have homework due, when I have stuff at work that needs to get turned in. So, it's picking out the priorities and time management.... I can recognize what is a priority on a day to day basis. Um, and then plan from there. I am constantly making plans in my head and they are ever-evolving so I think that's helped. My brain never shuts off but, like, it helps. [Giggles]

Rachel discussed the evolving nature of her schedule and priorities, given she is a college student, a mother, a small business owner, and she also works for another university. It's clear that what Rachel is describing is less about an achieved ideal balance and more a balancing act. She discussed in her interview there are failures when a "wrench is thrown in her plans" or if she happens to forget something, which is understandable when your brain is expected to be constantly on. Grace, freshman majoring in the Physical Sciences, also discussed her reliance on planning while utilizing a calendar:

You gotta work that thing, like, you better have a big calendar like I do and if you don't... Put alarms on your phones, and notifications, like, reminders, you're gonna forget something 'cause I did that yesterday. And then, people get upset with you so you definitely, like, write everything out. You always wanna write everything out and make sure you're planning things ahead of time. Like a calendar works for me, a big calendar so that I can write everything and then I have it for the day.... And I write everything down on my calendar and I plan out really far ahead. Um, because I have to partially but

also so that, um, I know that, like, I won't plan things on the same day. Times for me to visit or talk to them or things like that so every now and then I'll go back home and I'll stay a week-end with my boyfriend. Um, but we have to plan this really far in advance and that's the only way that I can resolve that 'cause I-cause I can't do impromptu stuff 99% of the time so if he's frustrated that I'm not texting him or visiting him. There's nothing I can do about that. You-you have to reserve me. You have to talk-you have to make plans in advance.

Here, Grace not only discussed her specific strategy for trying to balance her multiple obligations, but also touches on the idea that making last minute plans is difficult for her, even with her significant other, because it will throw off her carefully planned schedule. This rational choice approach to scheduling time, which is also highlighted in Taylor's earlier quote, are two examples of how work-related ideologies appear in conversation even before these students work in the corporate world. As Denker and Dougherty (2013) discussed, this corporate colonization, or dominance of organizational interests, is a form of control over an individual's life outside of work. In this case, work-related ideologies are impacting students' decisions regarding their personal relationships. For many college students, it seemed as if their planner or calendar was the visible marker of control. In Taylor's quote, she notices that her friends do not enjoy being "scheduled," and for Grace, she needs to be "reserved." These mechanized and insensitive approaches are likely taking a toll on their relationships with the people these women are close with.

Another strategy that several participants discussed utilizing was communicating with others in order to prevent or cope with unbalance. Anthony, Junior Visual and Performing Arts

major who works off-campus part-time, noted communicating with his workplace and his professors:

Hmm... A lot of communication really. I mean, it is. I mean 'cause I have to communicate with work before every semester and let them know where I'm-what my plan is for the semester and what I'm gonna do. Um, I had to let my professors know what's going on in my life, um, which is-which is a weird balance 'cause you don't wanna get too personal. You don't wanna... But they also need to know kind of... the struggles that you're dealing with.

Pat, a Senior History major who works on-campus and is also heavily involved in extracurricular activities, also mentioned communication, but with potential significant others, to avoid conflict later on regarding his personal preference to be absorbed in his work:

Um. I'm very, uh, transparent when it comes to that like I tell people that I meet or something like whoever that might be like potential significant other or something like that, that I'm very dedicated to my life as, uh, like, my-my work life and my personal life and if I'm not able to find that balance and if they're-if like, usually they're okay with that because they understand that you can't give somebody your entire-your entire time because that's just not possible. So it's, it helps strengthen our relationship because I've put it out on the table, like, that day one or day two of meeting them and tell-and it shows that you know I'm a very dedicated and busy person and it makes them feel like "Okay. He's doing something with his life. He's got a goal. He has a plan. That'd be something that I'd like to surround myself with" because it just makes them feel better because it's- they're not upset if they, like, have to cancel a hang out or a date or something because they have something to do because they know I might-I might have to do that as well.

Pat had previously discussed the ending of his last relationship, which he believed ended partly because of his ex-girlfriend's dislike of his lack of time he had to spend with her. This was due to the fact that he was busy with schoolwork, his on-campus job, and other on-campus activities. He discussed here that to avoid another relationship fallout, he tries to be upfront about his busy schedule and even hopes that quality would attract a future partner.

In hopes of avoiding or to cope with an unbalance in their life, students discussed utilizing planning/prioritizing and communication with others. Specifically, students discussed the importance of writing in a planner or on a calendar, setting reminders, and constantly reevaluating priorities. Communication with professors, family, and friends was also noted by several participants in order to avoid or solve conflicts. Despite being good at managing their time, however, these participants continued to report feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and conflicts still occurred in their college lives. This links back to the idea that although balance is suggested as something that everyone can attain through clear-cut steps (Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006; Wieland, 2011), the reality may be that for some individuals, like college students, balance is complex and at times unachievable because of the prevalent ideal worker norms permeating college life.

Expectations about College and Uncertainty for the Future

Students discuss the inaccuracies in the expectations they had about college life, and now also feel they have uncertainty about what to expect after college in regards to work-life issues. This theme encompasses the instances where participants talked about either the inaccurate expectations they had about college, or about being unsure or uncertain about the future after college. Students notice a lack of information, both about college life when they were a high school student and now as a college student about the "real world." In response to questions

regarding whether discussions surrounding work-life-related issues should be implemented at the college level, all students reported that having more specific information and discussions about work-life while in college would be helpful.

Several students discussed inaccuracies in the way they expected college life to be.

Anthony, Darby, and Vinny all noted:

Umm... I'd say no. It wasn't what I was expecting. Um... And that's because I... I just imagined... I didn't understand the financial aspect of how college worked. And so I just expected that, um... like whether it was loans or not I-I would be taken care of so that I would just be a student full time. I didn't realize that I would be... You know... If-if I had a part-time job I thought some of that money... Like I thought all that money would just be extra spending money. I didn't realize that I would be keeping a job to help me actually get through school. –Anthony, junior Visual and Performing Arts major

I expected to be busy but I didn't realize I was going to be this... stressed. Like I thought I would probably have better time management skills or, like, be able to handle more, I guess, when I went to college but... –Darby, sophomore Visual and Performing Arts and Communication major

Um. So, I guess, going along with that a lot of, uh, things in the media made me believe that college was much different than it is and not that it was just work but it was, like, a lot of fun and so, I did that, y'know. In my Freshman Year, I had the fun but, like, I shirked the work and I knew that too, I guess. But I mean it's hard, you know, you just start at 18, like, you know, someone gives you, like, a whole load of freedom but it costs

you, like, \$20,000 and you don't really know what that means until, like, all that shit gets snatched away. So, anyway, going back to the question, no I didn't, uh, think college was gonna be like this. Um, I mean I knew it'd be some work but I didn't know that it would [sighs] take me so long, I guess, y'know. So, it's been a motherfucker. –Vinny, senior Communication major

Anthony highlighted work as something he wasn't expecting to need to do while in college, while Darby and Vinny talked about the stress and workload that comes along with the college experience, that was more of an unknown at the start of college.

In addition to having incorrect expectations about college life, college students also discussed again being in a position of uncertainty about the future. Ingrid, freshman Social Sciences major, explained that she hopes her life after graduation will not be like it is in college, but she is expecting her job to take up a significant portion of her life:

Um, hopefully it won't be the same. But, um, I'll probably still, like... Be, like, okay like – especially after having, like, figuring out, like, having a big kid job and, um, doing all that stuff, like, it'll probably consume most of my time so I won't be able to do all those extra stuff that I wanna do. Um, but if there is time available, like, I might continue teaching [color guard] or whatever so...

Shaye, junior Interior Design major, also shares this hope that life after graduation will be different. When asked what she expects balancing her life will be like after college, she answered, “Um, I wouldn't call it an expectation. I'm hopeful that it's not like this. If it is that would be, like, really upsetting. But, I guess, no, to answer your question. I'm just hopeful.”

Shaye hopes that her life after college is not as chaotic and exhausting as her current state, trying

to manage her school work with her paid employment, and having to turn away her friends. However, she doesn't expect for life after college to be different, rather just hopes that it will be.

Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, admits she does not know what working life will be like, however she plans on attending graduate school after college. She discussed receiving messages previewing graduate school life from friends, but admits she's unsure what balance looks like in this realm:

Um... Well, I know, like, almost next to nothing about, like, what the workforce is gonna look like so, um... An educated guess...[Giggles]. I don't know about that. Um, I have some friends in Grad school and, like, you know, like, Graduate Assistants and I'm working with one for research and so just kind of what they told me, it sounds awful... And, like, their work – like, especially since they have, like, assistantships and stuff – like, their work is so intertwined with their school that I don't know how they, like, separate that. And then that's just like a huge time commitment and I don't know how they balance their personal lives. I don't know. [Chuckles]

Taylor does notice that work and school are more integrated for graduate students, and she guessed that this was difficult on them to manage. However, her friends have not yet provided her with information about how, or if, they try to find balance. These results show that there is a need for information, on all levels, about what to expect about college life and now what to expect afterwards. Reducing newcomer's uncertainty in an organization is key to them understanding and succeeding in a new environment. The role of uncertainty reduction theory throughout transition periods is valuable in understanding an individual's behavior in this setting (Kramer, 2010). More communication about expectations and norms between higher education

institutions and college students may aid in reducing uncertainty both about college and the professional work realms.

Finally, because students often discussed lacking information before entering college, and now lacking information about life after college, they were asked whether or not discussions should be introduced at the college level surrounding work-life-related issues. Every one of the students answered yes, and gave reasons why or how these discussions should be implemented.

Jaiden, freshman Math and Education major, answered:

Yeah. Because not a lot of us are currently working, um, in the profession that we are expected to enter after graduation. Um, I know people who are further along in college. They are doing internships, um, where-they're doing, um, shadowing jobs or they're helping a lot of teachers or doing student teaching and things like that. Um, which is a great introduction to professional life but it's not the full-fledged thing yet. You don't necessarily have a family yet. You're not taking care of kids of your own. You're not getting married. You're not necessarily in that situation yet. And so I think it would be very helpful if you had somebody teaching you, um, I don't know necessarily in a course but, like, someone who's giving you that advice and stuff that I could see that being extremely beneficial.

Jaiden discussed how internships and experiential learning is helpful, but some work-life concerns such as taking care of a family will not come to light in these situations either. She suggested that there should be others who give advice about these issues to current students.

Quinn, 22-year-old Senior Computer and Information Sciences major, agreed:

M-hm. For sure. I think that, uh... We're at that cusp of age where we're not-we're young so we can-we have that time to make these changes and habits easily without it,

um, completely crumbling our foundation. Um, but also old enough to where we can respect, um, hearing from people that give us advice about, um, balance between work-life and, uh, socialness and everything.

Here, Quinn was referencing why students should have more training in balancing work-life demands while in college. In her view, habits are formed in college, so to be better prepared for what life will be like in the future, it would be helpful to discuss balance now. Finally, Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, agrees with introducing this idea, but gave some suggestions about how a program should be implemented:

Yeah. Especially if it was... Okay, if it was realistic though... Like, um... I don't know, like, I... I hear all sorts of stuff on like stress management and, like, like eat healthy, exercise, um, I don't know... Make time to sleep eight hours a night. Like, I don't wanna hear that stuff 'cause, like, we hear that stuff and we choose to either, like, go by it or ignore it. Like, realistic things about, like, what it's actually like in the workforce or like what actually works... Like, that would be super helpful. Because like I said, I have no idea of what, like, to actually expect. And, like, an actual workforce or even graduate school, really. And I didn't know what to expect coming into college either so that would have been nice to actually hear.

Taylor discusses hearing messages already about leading a "healthy" lifestyle, including a healthy diet, exercise plan, and sleep schedule. In Taylor's view, this "healthy" lifestyle seems to be unrealistic, or at least ignored, by students like herself. This could be damaging, because a cycle of behaviors that cause more stress may follow students into their life after college.

Instead, Taylor said she would like to see messages about what to actually expect while working or what strategies to balance work for others who are working. Later, she suggested:

I think it would probably have to be, like, almost like a panel because I would want to hear someone who is, like... They know what is, like, presently being preached to us and what we're ignorant about. But I would also kinda wanna hear from, like, people who are, I don't know, successful or established or doing it right so that we hear-we hear what not to do but then we'd also hear at least at their time what worked for them.

Students discussed college as an experience they weren't entirely expecting, and now report having uncertainty about what to expect when they leave. Because they report receiving little information about work-life issues, they also report feeling unprepared but hopeful about the next chapter in their lives. To remedy this, participants agreed that having discussions surrounding work-life issues would be helpful to them both as a college student and as a future professional.

Prevalence of Behavioral and Mental Health Concerns

When discussing balance, students discussed a range of health-related concerns and strong negative emotions. In this theme, students discussed their experiences feeling negative psychological emotions while navigating their demanding schedules. For example, over half of the students reported feeling or experiencing exhaustion, stress, burnout, anxiety, and/or depression while in college. This finding corroborates the results from the American College Health Association's *National College Health Assessment of Undergraduate Students* (2016), which found a prevalence of stress, hopelessness, and exhaustion on college campuses. Shaye, junior Interior Design major who works off-campus, recalled her overwhelming experience the previous semester:

So, like, the last month and a half of last semester I was basically dying. I was drinking three Mountain Dew Kickstarts a day, um, just to, like, really stay awake and do all my

work. I was so exhausted and cranky because I was exhausted and I feel like my work, like, my school work really suffered because, like, my heart wasn't in it 'cause I was exhausted and just doing things to meet deadlines and it was the holiday season at work so everyone was cranky and just, it was a lot.

Here, Shaye's commitments to both her paid employment and her schoolwork were taking a toll on her physically and emotionally. It was also during this time that she reported that her friends were upset with her for not spending more time with them. With a lack of a strong social support network, Shaye was probably experiencing the negative mental health outcomes of not having people around her to provide that support and encouragement (Fink, 2014). Darby, sophomore double major in Communication and Visual and performing arts, also reported the prevalence of stress in her life, saying, "My mom describes me as a giant wad of stress just because I am so tightly wound and I think... Like, if I had time for, like, Yoga or like... something relaxing that might be nice but... I don't." Darby's mom describing her as a "giant wad of stress" demonstrates that as a college student, stress has become a defining characteristic of Darby's life. However, Darby doesn't perceive having time to make the behavioral changes necessary to aid her in reducing the amount of stress she carries, further subordinating her self-care needs to work.

A few of the students reported seeking help from a Guidance or Counseling Center and several others discussed mental health concerns. Heather, junior Social Sciences major, admits: I'm an avid counsellor-receiver, I guess, I don't know. I've gone, like, pretty much the entire time that I've been here. I fully believe that every college student is depressed and anxious on some level because it's, like, so impossible to put all the time and energy into that and still be sane, I think.

Here, Heather talks about believing that every student is depressed and anxious on some level. It's important to note that these participants often did not differentiate between experiencing anxiety and depression and being diagnosed with these psychological conditions. Further, in Heather's quote she suggests that to behave like a proper college student, you can't possibly be mentally healthy, showing that behaviors expected of college students have a negative impact on their mental health. It's likely that she does not mean that all college students have a diagnosed mental illness, but rather that the behaviors associated with college life tend to create negative psychological feelings. However, it is both concerning and problematic that we are normalizing these experiences. Lastly, some students even reported feeling burnout. When asked about her experience feeling burnt out, Grace, freshman majoring in the Physical Sciences, answered:

It's kinda like wanting to lay in bed all day and not wanting to do anything and you don't care anymore whether your grades drop or you get fired because it's all just too much and you want it to go away, even though it doesn't.

Grace, who defines herself throughout the interview as someone who is very driven, notes that sometimes she has gotten to the point where she does not care about her work and wanting it to "go away." Lillian, 26-year-old Junior Business & Communication major who works off-campus, also discussed feelings of burnout, and described how depression has impacted her college experience:

Um. And so to get to the place where I just really lost a lot of motivation. Um, I also struggle with depression so I noticed, like, all of the stress from classes and the stress from my personal relationship and not having a lot of time, uh, did-did cause a flare up in my depression, um, which I was able to get help for. But then... Kind of realizing-that was one of the times that I had a realization about like "I need to call off work today."

Because although I might not be sick, like, I-I just need that, I'm burnt out, like, I need this time. Um, so kind of through those periods of being burnt out taught me... how to manage myself a little bit better and to find a little bit more of that balance.

Although participants were never explicitly asked about their mental health, a majority of the students reported experiencing exhaustion, stress, depression, anxiety, and even burnout.

Exhaustion and stress while in college is probably not a groundbreaking discovery to anyone who has attended or heard anything about college. After all, college is supposed to be challenging. But it appears that challenges extend past just the level of academic rigor and into the entire college experience. Participants report being exhausted and stressed because of the amount of activities they feel they need to be involved in and their employment which they need to afford college, on top of the academic work. What is alarming is the increased rates of prolonged stress and more serious mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression for college students (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2012), which this group of participants also has experience in dealing with.

Being in a Time of Transition into the Real-World

Students discuss college as a time of transition into being an “adult” in the “real world” and learning how to balance responsibilities is a part of that process. They also discuss their experience in college as a means to an end – as a stepping stone to the future. This theme is best defined as the instances where students discuss the time that they are in college as a transitory period of becoming “adults” and preparing for and entering the “real world” outside of college. Anthony, 24-year-old Junior who is a Visual and Performing Arts major, discussed the reason why he felt he wasn't prepared for college, despite receiving good grades in high school:

Umm... Just because there... 'cause you're actu..-You're actually taking on the full responsibility of being a grown up, for the most part. I mean, it's different for each student. But umm... It's not just a school work that you have to be good at. It's actually keeping a schedule. Um... being able to balance schoolwork, actual work for money and like social life so you won't go crazy [giggles]. Yeah.

Bri, sophomore Criminal Justice major, also felt that overwhelming jump into adult life, stating, "You're suddenly just like thrust in the world by yourself and you're like "I'm an adult? Who let me be an adult? I don't know how to adult." The words "adult" and "adulthood" appeared quite frequently in participant interviews. When asked about the concept of balance, Frannie, senior Physical Sciences major who works part-time off campus, said:

I don't know. I think it's just... It just always seems like a social construct. That you, everyone has to look well put together. In reality, I realize that it's just... Most of us are just faking it [Laughs]. We're all adults looking for adult-ier adults. That's essentially what happens.

Here, Frannie draws a connection between balance and being an adult, noticing the performance of balance and how that suddenly makes us "adults" when we figure out how to appear like our lives are together. "Doing adulthood," similar to "doing gender," seems to be a performative act where individuals co-create what it means to be an adult. Doing gender focuses on how individuals interact to recreate and reify their female or male roles (West & Fenstermaker, 2002). However, we should be critical of the enactments of "adult" and notice where it restricts our ability to find a healthy balance, seek help, and connect with others on a genuine level, rather than going through life "faking it."

Lillian, 26-year-old Junior Business & Communication major, distinctly separates college life from the notion of the “real world,” and discussed this transition time as not as much of a jump, but a slower, safer progression:

It’s hard ‘cause I think there are two sides to it. I think there is a lot of people who do learn in college because you’re not sheltered anymore but college isn’t exactly the real world. I mean... It’s just not. Like, um, it’s a- a safe environment. It-I mean there are dangers and things that come with college but you-it’s not like being thrown out into the real world. There are a lot of things that you have to learn very quickly if you just go into the workforce.

Here, Lillian talks about college as being a safer environment, where students can learn at a slower pace compared to the world outside of a college campus. When asked about her idea of what the “real world” is, she answered:

Probably the workforce. [Giggles]... Maybe starting to get the real world would be starting to get into upper management or like middle-or becoming a supervisor, learning what it means to something you actually have to take on responsibility in your job. I think a lot of the, like, the jobs college students typically get as like a... Just an hourly employee, you know, flippin’ burgers or even at [retail stores], like, we hire a lot of college students. Um, but they don’t have, they don’t typically have a lot of responsibility. They don’t... Like, you can show initiative but you really don’t have to try. Um, and even those are kind of, like, safe jobs.

Jaiden, freshman Math and Education major, had a different view of the “real world,” although she also noticed that college was the time to transition into adulthood:

I think now being here and looking at people who are older than me, being a college student is kinda like becoming an adult. Um, a lot of the people that I look up to are Juniors and Seniors. They're getting to that point where they're coming up on the end and they're getting ready to enter the quote and quote "Real world." I don't really like that term but before-it's like... For four-like, once you leave your education, like, you go out, you get a job and you start your family and do whatever but. A lot of what I've been seeing-just observing is, like, you mature and you become, like, this-the best version of yourself. It's kinda like the goal more. Um, and so they kinda just showing me that being a college student isn't just not... It is academics and you know getting friends and meeting people but-getting all these opportunities but it's also becoming an adult and making sure that you're maturing and getting something out of it.

Jaiden here notes the larger social scripts of leaving college, getting a job, and starting a family, which is a part of the "real world." But, while in college, she believes it is a time for personal development and maturation to really "get something out of" the experience. When asked about her dislike of the term "real world," Jaiden answered:

Because, like, we're all living in a real world. Just because you're in school doesn't mean you're not in the real world. Um, when people use that term, I-it... You understand what it means, I just don't think it's very accurate necessarily. Um, you are living in the real world, you're living presently in the universe, like, you're not living in a fake world. Um, it's... I guess people try to--younger people I guess, like me, and high schoolers are middle schoolers and stuff. They think it's so far off. It's not. It's just a world that-it's separate from, like, the life that you're living right now but, really, it's not. And so it's more of a transition into an occupation or adulthood, really.

Although Jaiden and Lillian have differing opinions on whether or not college life is the “real world,” they both agree that taking on more responsibility in your personal life and becoming more mature is a process that should occur while in college, so you are ready for a job or for life after college. Either way, in both views, a boundary is constructed between college and “real” life. If we continue to think of college as just a transitional period meant to be challenging and difficult for students to overcome, we ignore larger structural issues that can impact a students’ health and life in their future careers. This may also give the illusion that after graduation, negotiating work-life demands suddenly is not complicated, when the majority of work-life and work-family research would suggest otherwise (e.g. Abetz, 2016; Bochantin & Cowan, 2016; Denker, 2015; Dixon, 2015; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Schultz et al., 2012).

Participants often discussed their time in college as a means to an end. Several participants discussed why they do what they do in college--why they put their school life first, why a job while in college is important, or why finding balance is important--because they have their sights set on the future. Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major, explained:

I just tell myself I’m choosing the long-term over the short-term, like, people, like, people I’m in relationships with or my friends, like, they should understand that, like... Like, I don’t necessarily want to spend the night studying or at work or, like, at this organization or whatever but, like... Like, they should understand that, like, I have to, like, it’s not really, like, a choice. And that, like, they’ll be more forgiving that if, like, I missed work or, like, a professor will be then if I, like, don’t turn in the assignment.

Here, Taylor discussed why she often spends her time on school work or at her job over being with friends or family. She felt like she did not have a choice, and she didn't want to, but that's what has to happen in her life to complete her assignments and be better off in the long term.

Grace, freshman majoring in the Physical Sciences, described preparing for a future job while in college as a reason why she takes on a lot of extra responsibility:

And um, like, I just worry about my future a lot and so if I don't get good grades in college and if I don't manage my money well and I don't do the things that are gonna get me a job like working at a radio station and internships, there's no way that I'm gonna have a good future and that's just equally as terrifying as the other things I've already said that are terrifying.... So in the end I would still continue to be busy and do things that I'm doing because I feel like it's really important for my future, even though it's incredibly stressful.

Although she talked about being stressed while in college, Grace discussed not being able to get the job she wants out of college as "terrifying," and the reason why she is content with being overwhelmed for the time being. Here, Grace seems to be taking a fatalistic view, describing a slippery slope of incidents that may happen if she does not take such a future-oriented focus to her time in college. It seems to be a dangerous cycle of being stressed about the uncertainty of her future, which she tries to remedy by packing her schedule and reducing the time she spends with her friends and family, which could further negatively impact her stress levels. Perhaps focusing on other behaviors and strategies to cope with the uncertainty she feels about life after college would be more beneficial.

Jaiden, freshman Math and Education major, also discussed her time in college as an experience that will help her reach an end goal:

Um. I would say my school life is gonna help me reach goals that I've set for myself, um, and for the purposes that I have for myself. Um, I think they're more of a means to an end goal than anything right now, particularly. Um, in high school, middle school, like, even in elementary school we were preparing for college and so... That was the goal, was college. And now that I'm here, I guess, my goal is, like, having an occupation and having an, uh, aspirations in life. I guess. And I feel... Ed-education to me is extremely important.

Jaiden here recognized the constant forward momentum of her educational experience. She discussed that students are always preparing in school for completing the next milestone, up until the point that we have enough degrees to reach an occupation. Here, Jaiden discussed education as completing a sort of decades long job training, which is what makes it important in our lives. Lillian, too, talks about the importance of job training while in college, but while she discussed obtaining paid employment in addition to attending college courses:

I would say to treat a job as practice of being professional. Um, you know, it might not be-it's not a job that you want for the rest of your life but still give your best, you know. Those managers that you have can be stepping-stones towards something good or they can give you written recommendations for an internship, like, to really try and treat it like a real job.

Finally, Quinn discussed why she thinks it is important to find a strategy to balance while in college, "I always say, now is the time to find your method to do it. Um, this is definitely the stepping stone to life I'd say. Um, 'cause it only gets harder from here. [Giggles]." Quinn recognized that the struggles that college students face in finding balance hardly end after graduation. Because of this, she asserted that it is important to form positive habits while in

college, before life gets even more tough. If that requires seeking outside help, she stated, that isn't something that a person should be ashamed of.

Participants discussed the transition from college into the “real world” as difficult but necessary, and a part of this transition is learning how to be an adult. College students discussed being future-oriented as the reason why they stay in college and lead busy lives. Finally, students felt that what happens in their college years has a direct impact on what their future might look like, so it is important to give their best effort and form positive habits.

A Normal College Experience, Although Awareness of Differences

Students are acutely aware in differences of students' lives, but also agree there's a notion of the normal college experience and that they do share commonalities (such as a busy schedule, financial concerns, and a lack of sleep). In this theme, students discussed the similarities and differences among students' lives. They both spoke to larger social narratives about what it means to be a college student, and differentiated the experiences of a diverse population of college students.

Several participants made qualifying statements such as “this may not be true for everyone in college” or “because of my situation I may be a different case” which may reflect their understanding of the growing and changing demographics on college campuses. Anthony, Lillian, and Vinny, who all identify as non-traditional students, discussed being aware of the ways that their experience may differ from other students:

And for me personally, I mean that may, for some people that may be different but for me personally, um... Like I said, I mean, I'm going part-time right now. And that just seems to be the best balance for me. –Anthony, 24, junior Visual and Performing Arts major

Um, but... I guess, it is a little bit interesting because I am 25 and so I have a very different perspective on a lot of things granted that most of my classmates are sometimes 19, 18, 20, like... –Lillian, 26, junior Business and Communication major

I deal with people that are, like, 19 and 20. Like I already went through the hell that they have that they are going through now, like, I've already quieted that storm. So, I don't feel the pressures that they do, I'm not like learning what they're trying to learn like I've already learnt that – whatever that, you know, this or that is. –Vinny, 24, Communication major

In addition to these differences, Taylor and Karen discuss how college students' financial backgrounds may play a part in how they view working while in college. On one hand, Taylor talked about pushing working while in college to the bottom of her priority list, while Karen suggested getting a job since that's what she had to do to have money to spend:

Um. Okay. Like, I know everyone's financial situations are different so I guess, like, this is probably going to be only applicable to people who come from, like, the same financial, like, background as me 'cause I don't know about anything else... –Taylor, sophomore Social Sciences major

It kinds of depends of where they come from, because I come from a family that, like, I had to work to have my money in high school. My parents didn't have, like... They had extra money, like, we were comfortable, but if they did have it would be spent on like getting ahead on bills or something like that. And so my mom said "If you want extra money, like, we're not gonna pay you, you have to go find a job". Um, so, if it's

something like that, I would say definitely start looking on the [school] website, or even I know like some places will hire students. Just start looking around the community.

–Karen, junior Education major

Although differences in student lives were noted, there was still a notion of the “college experience” that was present in the interviews with participants. When asked about this idea of the normal college life, Heather, junior Social Sciences major, responded:

Umm... Expect to be poor, sick all the time, um, kind of like... I remember seeing all those triangles memes it was like “School, work, friends... And it’s like you can only concentrate on two of those.” So accurate! Now that I’ve lived through it.

Here, Heather discusses being busy, financially struggling, and also possibly sick as all a part of the normal college experience. She also confessed that her experience has matched this expectation. Frannie, senior Physical Sciences major who works part-time off campus, reiterated this idea of financially struggling as being part of college life:

It’s normal to be poor in college. It’s normal to be like “Oh well, I’m 30 thousand dollars in debt but oh well, we’ll figure it out.” Yes, it’s very normal for financial troubles and to hear “Well, I’m going to Aldi, do you wanna come?” Stuff like that.

Financial concerns appeared several times throughout the interviews. Furthermore, a lack of sleep and a busy schedule seemed to bind students together. Corrine, sophomore double major in Social Sciences and Communication and student athlete, noted these ideas about college life are often shared and joked about on social media:

Or just like oh, I got, like, two hours of sleep last night but then I had to get up super early to go to class today and then they go to practice and then, like, go out with my sorority sisters tonight, like it’s like kinda, like, “That’s college for you.” So I would say

more... So you kinda makes jokes on Twitter or Facebook and they're like "Oh, that's college."

Corrine goes on to explain that although these messages may be exaggerated from time to time, they are based in truth about the college experience. These ideas that the normal college experience is busy, sleep deprived, and poor can restrain some students and reinforce bad decisions. Quinn, 22-year-old Senior Computer and Information Sciences major, reflected on why she once felt like she couldn't ask for help when faced with a particularly busy week in her life:

Um. Probably, I might've, like, asked for help. That's definitely been a problem for me. Um, 'cause I feel like I have to take on everything just to feel like I am actually being a college student to some degree. Like, "If you're not tired, you're not doing college right," that sort of thing. Um, which isn't necessarily true. I still get a good amount of sleep, most nights. Um, but yeah.

Here, Quinn discussed even knowing that the damaging idea of college life is not completely accurate, saying she often gets a good amount of sleep, though she still felt like asking for help would make her less of a student. She discussed that "taking on everything" is what it means to be a college student. As Russel and Arthur (2015) revealed, students accept stress as a part of their everyday college life. In this theme, the ambient messages that communicate the "normal" scripts of college life are having a major impact on the way students discuss their life. Similar to ambient messages that Dallimore (2003) examined, these messages seem to be playing a huge role during this organizational socialization stage, creating an ideal student norm that reflects larger ideal worker norms in corporate life.

In sum, it appears that college students recognize that there is an expected notion of what college life should entail. Participants in this study reported being busy, a lack of sleep, and financial concerns as a part of this norm. With this social narrative about college life, it is no wonder that students in this sample struggle with finding a balance between all they have to do. However, they also realized that the college student population is made up of a diverse set of people with different backgrounds and circumstances which may influence the way that a student experiences work/life/school issues.

Summary

The eight major themes described in this section answer the research question, “what do college students discuss when talking about issues of work-life?” The first theme illustrates that students discuss how their ideas were shaped, which include messages from parents and family, other people close to them, and the media, as well as their personal experience. Observations from parents and family members could pass along gendered expectations about balancing one’s life, particularly making college women more prone to struggle with finding balance while in college. In addition, students who question the accuracy of parents’ messages about college and viewed their experience as being more challenging than their parents’ could reduce the opportunities for them to reduce their uncertainty about college from hearing their parents’ advice. The ideal worker norm (Bernard, 1992; Denker, 2015; Williams, 2000) was prevalent in messages that students received from parents, other sources close to them, and cultural mediated messages through channels such as television and movies. The second theme, “balance as vital but challenging” is where college students discussed balance as being important to achieve, revealing some problematic ways of conceptualizing balance for students, and finally the struggle that students face as balance is often unattainable for them while in college. In the third

theme, students discuss the conflicts they face between school and their personal relationships and paid employment. School work often takes priority over the other realms, which is where the ideal worker norm is seen played out at the college level, with students being expected to commit their life to their academic pursuits. This could be creating problems for students in the future who put personal relationships on hold during college. The fourth theme is where college students discussed the strategies that they utilize to prevent or cope with unbalance, which consists of planning and prioritizing and communicating with others. Although these are valuable skills to learn, these strategies are focused solely on the individual and are unlikely to work for students long-term. The fifth theme, “expectations about college and uncertainty for the future” reveals the high amount of uncertainty college students had about coming to college, and now have about life after college. More information about these transitions would be a beneficial implementation at the higher education level to reduce their uncertainty. The sixth theme of the “prevalence of behavioral and mental health concerns” is where students discuss experiencing negative psychological feelings and discuss behaviors that probably negatively stimulate these feelings. “Being in a time of transition into the real-world” is the theme where students discussed college as a transitory period where students learn the performative means of “adulthood” and drew boundaries between college life and the “real world.” The final theme is where students discuss the similarities and differences between college students’ lives. This reveals that they acknowledge the greater diversity of college campuses today, though there are still larger social narratives of what it means to be a college student. This larger social narrative encompasses some further damaging behaviors such as a lack of sleep and over-packed schedule, which may further inhibit students from finding an attainable healthy balance while in college. I will unpack

these themes further in the next chapter as well as look at limitations and suggestions for future research.

Discussion

The eight themes presented as the results of this study reveal the answer to the overarching research question: what do college students discuss when talking about issues of work-life? In the following section, I discuss how these themes intertwine to highlight three key areas of study and relevant literature: 1) memorable messages and uncertainty in anticipatory socialization, 2) the permeation of cultural expectations in college students' discussions, and 3) the tensions that exist for students in striving to find balance. Then, I present implications of these results for theory and organizations looking to hire new workers. Finally, I conclude with limitations of the current study and possible areas for future research.

Uncertainty and Memorable Messages in Anticipatory Socialization

The three themes about college students discussing their *time of transition into the real world*, their *expectations about college and uncertainty for the future*, and the *shaping of their ideas from interpersonal networks and personal experience* reveal the role of memorable messages and uncertainty in the anticipatory socialization stage. Students who are in the anticipatory socialization stage (Jablin, 1987), which is categorized by high uncertainty, desire to reduce this uncertainty, and receive messages which aim to do so (Nazione et al., 2011; Wang, 2012; 2014).

First, participants of this study recognized that they were in a transitory period. Specifically, vocational anticipatory socialization is the stage these students would fall into, where an individual learns about a job or career without yet being introduced to a specific organization (Myers et al., 2011). For these participants, learning how to manage the demands of schoolwork, paid employment, and everything else while in college is an integral part in preparing for being an “adult” in the “real world,” according to participants of this study such as

Anthony, Lillian, and Jaiden. On one hand, this highlights the reality that forming good habits while in college are important for future success. However, as Clair (1996) suggested, positioning the work (academic and otherwise) students do while in college as separate from the “real world” implies that is not “real work.” This delegitimizes struggles that college students face when they fail to balance their multiple roles, chalking up their concerns as just an aspect of what it means to live a college life. If students’ struggles are not seen as legitimate, or just a part of “college life,” it is not surprising that so few college students seek help even though they are experiencing such high levels of stress, exhaustion, hopelessness, anger, anxiety, and sadness (ACHA, 2016). Moreover, as students who continue to not seek help for overwhelming stress are at risk of dealing with further issues with anxiety and depression (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2016), reification of these norms has severe health consequences. In addition, jobs that students mainly hold, such as retail and food service jobs, are not considered “real jobs.” In O’Connor and Raile’s (2015) reevaluation of the colloquialism, millennials revealed that a “real job” most importantly provides financial autonomy, requires a college education, begins a long-term career, is enjoyable, and offers benefits. Because the current occupations students mainly hold do not fulfill these criteria, it makes sense that students in my study consider these jobs as merely stepping stones. However, subordinating their current occupation roles, which many need to be able to attend college, further delegitimizes their experience as workers and sets up an expectation for a “real job” that may not be realistic of the role they take on after graduation.

Although some participants in this study discussed their disdain for the exclusive nature of the colloquialism, such as how participant Jaiden described the phrase “real world,” the fact that a college degree is seen as necessary for producing a “real job” reveals that the college experience is socializing individuals to these occupational roles (Fonner, 2009; Jablin, 1987; Lair

& Wieland, 2012; Roloff, 2014). In sum, students recognize they are in this vocational anticipatory stage, and they are getting a taste of the “real world” by struggling to balance competing domains. However, delegitimizing their experiences is dangerous, and fails to question structural issues in the notion of the “college experience” like limited options for course scheduling, rigid four year academic plans, the high cost, and lack of alternative employment opportunities for students to fund their endeavors. Further, the way that students are socialized is possibly setting up an ideal expectation for a “real job” which could be inaccurate due to the competitive job market, crippling student debt (Patton, 2015), rise in job insecurity (Farber, 2010), and diminishing benefits (Dickler, 2012). Upon graduation, a student who finds her/himself not in an occupation that would be defined as a “real job” could then further take a hit to her/his esteem, frustrated with the financial and time investment they made in college (Silva, 2003). Paying close attention to discourse which occurs during this transitory stage of socialization is imperative, as it sets the stage for how young adults conceptualize “work” and “adulthood” and creates a hierarchy of legitimacy for certain occupations and experiences.

Second, an emphasis throughout the socialization process is about reducing uncertainty (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995). Students in this study reported experiencing high levels of uncertainty about the future, particularly what work-life balance will look like after graduation. Compounding this anxiety is that many of them also felt unprepared for college life, especially the financial commitment and the stress. The role of communication in students’ lives is central to how they form relationships in order to learn and reduce uncertainty about the future. As of now, the participants suggest that this communication is either lacking or misleading due to their high levels of uncertainty for the future and inaccurate expectations about what college would be like. Students in the sample agreed that discussions of work-life issues should occur while in

college, indicating a need and desire to learn about managing their roles both in college and after graduation. Further work should be done to explore and address this need for students, which I will discuss later in the implications for organizations.

The shifting expectations surrounding work and adulthood may add to even more uncertainty for college students. There is now decreasing expectations of organizational commitment and job security, which impacts a lack of commitment in personal relationships as well (Pugh, 2015). As Silva (2003) argued, traditional markers of becoming an adult are now often unrealistic for many young working class individuals, leaving them feeling stuck and hopeless even after receiving their college degrees. This is likely the reality that the students in this study seek to avoid as comments focused on racking up achievements and other reflections of ideal worker norms in order to build their resume to fight against job insecurity. However, as college students notice this ambiguous environment, they are left uncertain, confused, and anxious about their future, adding pressure to perform well in college and add extensive resume lines to make them stand out among other job applicants. As participant Grace explains, in the theme of *being in a time of transition into the real-world*, if she doesn't take on so many responsibilities in college, "there's no way that I'm gonna have a good future and that's just equally as terrifying as the other things I've already said that are terrifying." However, how healthy is it for students to add unnecessary stress to their lives while in college to participate in activities that may not have an impact on their ability to get a "real job" after graduation? College career centers should work with students to provide support in determining how valuable a student's activities are both in present and future terms.

Third, college students report receiving memorable messages which shaped their ideas about work, school, and life. Memorable messages which are communicated face-to-face in

informal settings help reduce uncertainty in times of organizational socialization (Barge & Schlueter, 2004). One theme from my results suggests that college students' ideas about managing demands between work, school, and the rest of life were shaped by their interpersonal networks and media. Participants were able to generally describe messages that they received from parents, family members, coaches, academic mentors, professors, bosses, and also mediated messages about these topics. These messages tended to be indirect or through observation, rather than specific recollections of conversations students had with their parents, which would categorize these messages as ambient memorable messages (Dallimore, 2003). The messages are consistent with the sources and content that Wang (2012; 2014) and Nazione et al. (2011) suggested when studying memorable messages that students received about college. In addition, this mirrors the research that noted that ideas are formed during the anticipatory socialization process as a result of interacting with family and peers, as well as the media before entering the workforce (Hoffner, Levine, & Toohey, 2008; Jablin, 1987).

Most frequently, parents and other close family members were cited as having a role in shaping a participant's ideas. In the way that participants described these interactions, I noticed gendered differences in the ways that mothers and fathers were observed when dealing with work/life demands. The gendered expectations about prioritizing work and personal relationships is certainly not a new finding. In fact, these gendered expectations have been realized throughout the body of work-life research (Bergen, 2010; Bergen, Kirby, & McBride, 2007; Denker, 2013; 2015; Denker & Dougherty, 2013; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Edley, 2001; Favero & Heath, 2012). However, the presence of gendered expectations in memorable messages surrounding work-life might be. Students noticed the gendered inequalities in work-life issues when it comes to household responsibilities and as caretaker in addition to paid employment that Williams

(2000) and Johnson (2001) described. Specifically, students are learning gendered ideas about managing work and life roles such as the idea that women are expected to take care of household chores, act as caretaker for children, participate in volunteer or unpaid work, in addition to paid work from observing their mothers. Whereas students observed their fathers prioritizing their full-time employment and establishing more segmented work and home boundaries, and they discussed this work as being a service to the family. This gendered observation helps reify the notion that work-life issues and work-life balance is primarily a women's issue.

When it came to advice about college in particular, many students noted that they believe there are significant differences in the way that their parents experienced school. Whether it's due to a changing corporate culture, political climate, increasing cost, and/or academic demands, students question whether their parents or people around them really understand their struggles or give correct advice. There are two issues here. First, if messages really are incorrect, this could provide students with a false sense of certainty. Instead of being a tool to reduce uncertainty, inaccurate messages could be setting up false expectations. Because several students are under the impression that they will have a much better future than their parents (Arum & Roksa, 2014), students may feel extremely discouraged when their life after college does not seem to progress in the same way (Silva, 2013). Similar to the experience these students went through when they realized their ideas about college life were inaccurate, they now have uncertainty about whether the ideas that they are forming about life after college are accurate. Second, it's likely that parents' college experiences were not so different from their children. However, if their messages are perceived as inaccurate, the messages they provide about college may be devalued by students. Instead of perceiving these messages as a realistic way to solve their problems or helpful in facilitating understanding (Knapp et al., 1981), students may

disregard or quickly forget this advice. In addition, because perceived similarity is low towards parents' advice, the credibility of that source decreases (Wright, 2000). By positioning their experience as different from their parents, students may be missing out on opportunities of social support that could lessen poor health effects (MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005). The role of parents as sources of memorable messages and social support is pertinent, and providing parents and students with suggestions for improving these interactions could be beneficial.

College students frequently discussed their ideas as being shaped by their own personal experience in managing these realms. So added to messages they receive from others, students' are learning through their own trial and error, which several participants noted specifically through their own failures and struggles in managing roles. As Vinny explains in the theme of *shaping ideas through personal experience*, "I will say that I think... for me, it took a lot of trial and error to get to this point that I'm at, um, and it takes a lot of tears and pain and... a lot of other uncomfortable experiences to-to learn how to balance all these things." Kramer (2010) does include personal experience in one of the ways individuals learn during vocational anticipatory socialization. However, as stated previously, when the stakes are increasingly high in the college environment (Patton, 2015), trial and error is costly for students. Having to take out another loan for an additional semester, making a mistake at a job or internship, wasting time in an extracurricular activity, or damaging personal relationships could be costly financially, temporally, and emotionally, depending on the severity of the situation. It is also important to note that this could affect students of differing socioeconomic backgrounds differently, as some students who do not have family to rely on financially. Institutions should make multiple efforts in ensuring that the college environment is a space where it is possible for all students to

experiment (academically, socially, and personally), so students are not missing out on arguably the most effective method of learning.

Cultural Discourse Permeating/Impacting Experience

The three themes about college students discussing the *shaping of their ideas from interpersonal networks and media messages*, the *school/work/life conflicts* they deal with, and the *strategies they utilize to cope or prevent these conflicts* reveal how larger cultural discourses about work/life are permeating their experience.

It is the intertwining of established cultural norms and interpersonal messages that makeup meaning, as Baxter (2011) describes through explaining proximal and distal discourses. Current cultural norms place work above all else, and as a central aspect of our identity (Brief, Konovsky, Goodwin, & Link, 1995; Pederson, 2013). This ideal worker norm (Bernard, 1992; Denker, 2015; Williams, 2000), that work should be privileged as more worthy of an individual's time than any other obligation, is hardly missed for college students. Even when Corrine's coach emphasized balancing academics and athletics, there was no mention of the importance of spending time fulfilling relational and self-care needs. Traces of cultural messages and norms invaded the discussions of college students in this study. I previously discussed their observations of parents, such as the gendered ways that mothers and fathers dealt with work-life demands, which revealed cultural gender norms about work-life like mothers taking on family demands at home while fathers prioritize work as their service to the family. In addition, messages students received from various people in their networks put an emphasis on school, in preparation for work, as their highest priority. Movies and television also depicted work to college students as central to our identity.

Conflicts that college students in this study frequently discuss occur between school and their personal relationships and also between school and work. In addition, the advice that they gave regarding these conflicts places school over their other obligations. Redefining the meaning of “work,” “school,” and “life” is first integral in understanding how students experience these conflicts. In this study, it appears that school takes the place of “work” in the traditional sense, creating an ideal student norm which places college and college-related endeavors as central to an individual’s identity in place of work (Knight & Wiedmaier, 2016). This is not surprising, as it complements the idea that college is a stepping stone to a “real job” and therefore should take precedence. This ideal student norm can be connected to the early stages of the ideal worker norm in the way students discuss their major as part of their identity (Lair & Wieland, 2012). To students, actual “work” in their college context is defined as the stop-gap jobs they are currently holding. Because work here does not fall under the already discussed definition of a “real job,” it is expected to come as a second priority. Finally, personal “life” is conceptualized in various ways for college students. It is made up of obligations to children, such as for one of the participants of this study, but also elements of leisure, health, personal development, and social needs. This is a more expansive idea of “life” than previously defined in organizational communication research, and pertinent when examining work-life issues in the lives of college students. As a whole, work-life research should expand the definition of “life” to provide a more accurate depiction of the depth and complexity of demands consisting in this domain.

Finally, the individualism norm (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008; Peck, 2005), or our tendency to focus on individual problems rather than larger social issues, which places work-life issues at the individual level, permeates college life. Students discussed their strategies of planning and prioritizing and communicating with others in order to avoid or prevent conflict between their

multiple roles. Strategies such as these highlight the cultural expectation that each person is ultimately responsible for their own wellbeing, placing the blame solely on those individuals who fail to do things such as balance on their poor individual choices in time management rather than complex social circumstances (Peck, 1995). Though learning beneficial skills of time management while in college is important, it is highly problematic to focus only on this expectation of individualism – that all the blame of students’ failure to balance is on their poor individual choices. Students who are unsuccessful at finding balance may think of themselves as lacking ability or competence, when really the rigid structure of higher education compounded with their individual social circumstances and pressure to conform to the dominant cultural discourses set them up for failure in the first place. The reality seems to be, for these participants, that they never had total freedom of choices. Rather they are bound to certain part-time or entry-level positions or military commitments in order to attend school, or take a heavier course load in order to graduate in fewer semesters, or to pack their schedules with extracurricular involvement in order to stand out for future employers. The individualism norm has reified a self-help society in which we are falsely led to believe that, in this case, we can find balance if only we are better at planning in advance, prioritizing obligations, and communicating with others around us (Cloud, 1998; McAdams, 2013). The participants in this sample paint a different picture: although the majority of them claim to be good at these strategies, they also report struggling to find or maintain balance while in college. It is possible that unless there are structural changes in college, such as decreased cost and more flexible schedule offerings, they will continue to run into these problems. One answer to their struggles, offered by others, could be to train students to cope with the demands, something that is being reflected in corporate America in neoliberal discourse.

Because the participants in this study have been socialized through these dominant discourses of the prevalence of work and individual responsibility to solve conflict, demonstrated by the three themes of *shaping of their ideas from interpersonal networks and media messages*, *school/work/life conflicts*, and *strategies utilized to cope or prevent these conflicts*, it is important to explore the roots of this dominant individualism norm and what solutions are currently being offered. Cabanas and Illouz (2017) explain that the rise of neoliberalism is what heightens our culture's individualistic expectations. They go on to describe the efforts of positive psychologists and their interest in making "happy workers" who are more productive, resilient, independent, and who better cope with uncertainty. The insecurity, uncertainty, and competitiveness in the market leads to a need for organizations to train employees to cope with this. Therefore, those who focus on self-improvement in mental control and reframing their struggles as positive learning opportunities advance. As college has already been established as a phase of socialization into the corporate world (Jablin, 2001), it is no surprise that this neoliberal discourse is woven into their life as a student. In focusing on individual methods of preventing and coping with conflict between their multiple roles (such as simply being better at utilizing a planner) and training students to mentally cope with an uncertain and competitive environment, again the shortfalls of the structure are masked by failures at the individual level, which work-life scholars have described as a problematic frame of balance (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Golden, Kirby, & Jorgenson, 2006; Wieland, 2011). In the short term, students may need the benefits of resiliency and optimism that positive psychologists promise to provide (Cabanas & Illouz, 2017). That could be a potential need in a college setting. But, we should also ask ourselves, is masking the structural issues of higher education with training in mindfulness, positive self-affirmations, and emotional coping ethical? Teaching students to cope may work for

some students in the short-term, who have the ability to successfully do so, but this does not challenge our institutions to develop in the long-term. In addition, at what point is it unhelpful to socialize students into these western ideals of work and life? I believe that as academic institutions, colleges should provide a space to challenge the status quo, rethink societal expectations, and further analyze our pervasive cultural norms. By simply focusing on education as job training, and socializing new generations into a neoliberal corporate discourse, we are doing a disservice to our students by limiting their ability to critically think and reflect.

Tension of College Life

Lastly, the three themes about college students discussing *balance as vital but challenging*, the *normal college experience although recognizing differences*, and the *prevalence of behavioral and mental health concerns* reveal a tension for college students between being able to balance their demands and being a productive college student.

The theme *balance as vital but challenging* highlights the paradox that college students experience when discussing balance and their work/school/life demands. On one hand, participants believed that balance is important to achieve, or at least strive for, however due to their current situation, they struggle with balance. One of the reasons they may struggle with this is the way that participants *conceptualized* balance. For many participants, balance meant being able to incorporate several commitments into one's schedule and still avoid stress or anxiety. Some realized that this is an unrealistic goal. This is depicted well in the visual that a handful of students referred to, the triangle that consists of "social life," "good grades," and "enough sleep" which insists that college students can only pick two, which has since been expanded to feature ten or so aspects of college life which still remain unattainable to students.

Although students in the sample noted understanding the diversity of students on college campuses, illustrated by the most recent statistical data (NCES, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), what they discuss as an overarching similarity is their busy schedule, financial concerns, and lack of sleep. Here, we see a tension in what it means to be a college student. Participants agreed that balance is important to achieve or strive for, but also often find their conceptualization of balance unachievable. If students subscribe to the ideal student norm of “work over everything” and also think of balance as being able to “do it all,” then it is no wonder they are struggling when there is not time in the day to incorporate each of their demands to the fullest degree. Similar to the “mommy myth” that Douglas and Michaels (2004) described, the idea that mothers can “do it all” is outdated and unachievable. The overwhelming participation of females in this current study could signal that women college students are experiencing this type of myth on a smaller scale: to “do it all” as a student, romantic partner, friend, athlete, employee, club member, and more. The tension is between being this “ideal student” and being able to “balance it all.” For example, Taylor discusses not “living the college life” when she wasn’t involved, and now finds herself “at the other extreme.” On the other hand, even if students conceptualized balance as just a positive mental disposition towards life, as positive psychologists urge, if the meaning of being a college student is being exhausted and stressed, and students feel pressure to live out this expectation, finding “balance” is still (as participants often stated) unattainable. When students come up short, finding balance unachievable, the stress of self-blame is possibly also adding to the problem.

The prevalence of mental health-related concerns on college campuses is a marker for this tension between being a successful college student and finding healthy balance. Overwhelming feelings, stress, anxiety, and depression are reflected in this group of participants

from the ACHA's (2016) reports. This theme in the results is troubling, because as overwhelming stress is normalized for this population, the long-term effects are dangerous. Students who suffer overwhelming stress over time are likely to also experience anxiety and depression (Anyan & Hjemdal, 2016). With the attitude of "stress is a part of everyday life" and "this is normal for college students to learn" we are potentially missing opportunities for behavioral health interventions which would improve students' quality of life. In addition, this attitude is likely to stigmatize and silence students with more serious conditions, like depression and anxiety, which may worsen over the course of their college experience. Finally, what is occurring in college may set the stage for future interactions and behaviors in a way that is problematic. If students continue to share the narrative that it is typical for a college student to be lacking in a vital area that contributes to their wellbeing (i.e. sleep, fulfilling relationships, exercise, nutrition), we see further reification of sacrificing self due to overarching ideal worker norms. Also, this behavior could be carried into their adult lives as young professionals, which again fails to push back against the ideal worker norms that are prevalent in corporate life, and could lead to these young professionals to also lack basic human needs of fulfillment. We should help students identify problematic behaviors (like minimal sleep, unhealthy diets, a lack of exercise, and pushing away valuable relationships), provide resources for behavioral or medical interventions if needed, and in doing so challenge the idea that a "normal college experience" is synonymous with an incredibly overwhelming and unhealthy sleep-deprived lifestyle.

Theoretical Implications

This study adds theoretical understanding to the areas of uncertainty reduction theory, memorable messages, and vocational anticipatory socialization. First, the context of uncertainty reduction theory is expanded by exploring the role of uncertainty in the context of college and

provided a cultural/class understanding about uncertainty students have about life after college. I assert that college students have high levels of uncertainty during transitional periods that are revealed throughout their discussions about work-life and entering the “real world,” and desire to receive information is increased in the context of college. The sources that Jablin (2001) identified for reducing uncertainty during vocational anticipatory socialization are reinforced by this study: family, educational institutions, part-time employment, peers and friends, and media. Specifically, students discussed observing family members and other people close to them to reduce uncertainty about what work-life balance will be like after graduation, in addition to receiving messages about “work,” “school,” and “life” from these five sources. The role of personal experience as a source in reducing uncertainty about making work-life demands is especially prevalent in this study, which enhances our understanding of reducing this specific type of uncertainty and adds more emphasis on the influence of this source than Jablin first did. However, students questioned the legitimacy of some messages from parents and older people, especially regarding college life, because students viewed their experiences differently. Because of this, these messages did not reduce uncertainty for students nor serve as socially supportive. This finding adds importance to the element of perceived similarity in the model of uncertainty reducing messages. In addition, this study frames these messages as memorable messages, which adds understanding to how these concepts work together. If individuals question the credibility of the source or accuracy of the message, the likelihood of that message being specifically memorable is also low. This may explain why many of the messages reported in this study were general rather than specific.

I also explored the role of ambient memorable messages in the process of vocational anticipatory socialization. Several participants were able to describe generally the messages that

parents, and other older individuals, gave about college and work, but few were able to recall specific messages. These ambient memorable messages occurred through observation and experience, and supports Dallimore's (2003) addition to the memorable message concept. I was also able to identify ambient messages that students received which reinforced the cultural norms of individualism and ideal worker. These ambient memorable messages permeate college life and socialize students into a neoliberal corporate environment. How college functions as a socializing agent for occupational roles, and the way that students are socialized into thinking about "real work" may delegitimize experiences of workers who do not fall into the category of holding a "real job." Silva's (2013) research noted that as students enter the workforce and fall short of reaching this ideal, instead of having greater understanding and lower uncertainty about their new role in the working class, young adults may be faced with disappointment and disillusionment. This study specifically addresses social discourse as ambient memorable messages in the process of anticipatory socialization, which is a new addition to this area of research and should be further explored in work-life contexts.

Organizational Implications

This study also adds to the understanding of college students' experiences with work-life issues. As work-life research typically focuses on the experiences of older, middle- to upper-class couples with children, it is valuable to gain insight from other populations. First, this study acknowledges that college students do experience conflicts between competing domains of their life. In addition, I define the changing meanings of "work," "school," and "life" for students, and identify strategies that students utilize to avoid conflicts in these areas. Most importantly, I trace the dominant cultural ideas that permeate students' lives. This reveals the tensions that students face when seeking work/school/life balance, and possible structural issues that are ignored

because of the individualistic norm of placing blame at the micro-level, leaving students in a bind when realizing that “doing it all” as a college student is unrealistic.

This study results in several implications for organizations, which in this case are the educational institutions that students are a part of and organizations who seek to employ college students. Implications of this study are increasingly relevant to higher education professionals in the areas of student affairs, career counseling, and student health. First and foremost, individuals who work with students to increase understanding about careers after college should also recognize that students desire information about what their work *and* non-work life will be like after college. Students will be better equipped with a holistic idea of the “real world” by gaining more specific information about making work-life demands in their future career, what work-life issues look like especially in relation to certain fields, and an honest and critical approach of gendered expectations towards work-life. All of these topics can be covered in addition to the career topics that are currently addressed in student learning development sessions in the forms of workshops, panel discussions, and one-on-one sessions. Throughout career coaching, what would be especially helpful to students is to hear honest feedback about what activities and commitments will make them more marketable to future employers, and to help students craft resumes and cover letters that communicate the value of what they are involved in instead of the quantity of commitments they make. Doing so would hopefully normalize making commitments to a smaller number of fulfilling activities rather than emphasis being overworked or overcommitted.

In addition, professionals who work with students along with professionals who seek to hire students should be constantly aware of how they position the notion of the “real world” in comparison to students’ current experiences. A discussion among these professionals (professors,

college advisors, administration, hiring managers, etc.) should take place that covers the dangers of delegitimizing students' experiences by treating the work that they do in college as less important than the work they may hold after college. These individuals should also recognize that many students do have experience in working a "real world" job or have transferrable skills from their college experience. Instead of focusing on how many years of experience recent graduates have in a specific role or industry, hiring managers should take note of these skills that may have been utilized in extracurricular activities, faith-based organizations, service or volunteer projects, or while working in groups or on teams. Dually, college career professionals should aid students in communicating their transferrable skills. Finally, these professionals can also work with students to challenge the ideas of a "real job" and "adulthood," or at least paint a more accurate picture for students of jobs they are more likely to hold in their young professional lives, to give students a more realistic preview of what jobs they should expect after graduation.

Third, colleges and university personnel, especially in the area of student affairs, should recognize the functions of memorable messages and observation in the socialization processes of college students both coming into higher education and leaving it. Professionals who work with incoming students should recognize that students are getting advice from parents or older people that may not be accurate. To address this, adding into freshmen welcome activities or orientation seminars the topics of "common advice" and discussing these messages would help students who question the credibility of advice they receive while also adding messages of clarity to students who came from a background of limited advice surrounding college. Creating brochures addressing common ideas and misconceptions about college to distribute could also be helpful. Other topics that would be helpful to approach in these formats include the role of stress in college, healthy ways to manage this stress, and a realistic picture of the financial commitment

college requires and implications of these financial choices. In general, by recognizing that students have high uncertainty, organizations can create more opportunities for students to seek and gain information both about their present struggles in college and work-life issues beyond graduation. Specific programs, whether done in a one-on-one or small-group format, aimed at helping students manage their multiple roles while in college, could help students both prevent conflict and deal with conflict in times of crises. Instructors and professors, although students in this sample reported them to be generally supportive when they had to make work-life negotiations, often do not have the time or resources to make comprehensive plans with each of their students to navigate a tough period. A better long-term solution for students may be having access to a resource who will look at their individual case, work with the student to develop a plan, and provide advice on how to communicate work-life negotiations which may carry into their professional lives. If academic faculty can obtain documentation that students are seeking help in this way, this could also provide faculty peace of mind that students are finding help they need which may not always require medical attention.

Recognizing when behavioral health interventions could be helpful to students in coping with the stress of their experience is also needed. Instead of Counseling Centers devoting a considerable amount of money and resources diagnosing and treating students for mental health concerns as illnesses, evaluating psychosocial factors and behaviors (such as financial stress, life crises, lack of sleep, feeling depressed or anxious, withdrawal from social relationships, tobacco and alcohol use, and lack of physical exercise) could give a more holistic perspective on a student's needs and recommend action that improves health. Immediate interventions are needed to address these issues and recommend solutions that could prevent future health problems. Interventions could take the form of social support sessions and promoting healthy behaviors to

deal with stress. Since a number of college students are likely experiencing similar issues, conducting interventions in tandem or small groups, when it would be appropriate to do so, could cut costs. Meeting students where they live by facilitating social support sessions through the existing structure of resident assistant staff is one option. Approaching notoriously involved students in organizations such as student government, student media groups, and Greek Life leadership, would also be beneficial. Asking these student organizations to host a program during one of their previously scheduled meetings would be beneficial to their members, and would not require students to add another item to their already busy schedules. Interventions and training for students to adopt healthy behaviors while in college could lessen their negative experiences, so they are beneficial to implement.

However, because of the orientation to view work-life struggles as a problem to deal with only at the individual level, we overlook cultural norms and structural issues which feeds into the problem. It is difficult, even impossible, to un-situate college institutions from the neoliberal environment which contextualizes these problems. Unless a paradigm shift occurs at much larger societal level, college students will still need to learn how to navigate in an overly competitive, individualistic, work-obsessed environment. Perhaps the goal of higher education institutions is to instead introduce alternative paradigms in which to view the world. Acknowledging pervasive norms and creating an environment to critique them, by requiring or offering academic courses that focus on these culture differences among others, would give students knowledge of problems in our current system and encourage future change.

Lastly, redefining the structure of higher education may be needed to work for the present day college student. With increased responsibility outside of the “school” domain for many students, balancing schoolwork with the rest of their obligations is unachievable. Encouraging a

wider range of options for course scheduling, more flexible academic plans, efforts to decrease the cost of higher education, more options to fund educational pursuits, and providing employment opportunities that work with a students' schedule could all contribute to a positive shift in college students' experiences. Instead of rewarding students for graduating in four or less years or expecting students to follow a predetermined four-year course schedule, academic advisers could be understanding, even encouraging, of some students who may need more time to complete courses and/or pick a major. Most importantly, work towards decreasing the cost of attending college and providing more funding options, such as organizations offering benefits to young employees to reduce the burden of student loans, could decrease the financial strain.

Limitations

Although this study overall gives valuable insight into the college student experience, there are some limitations. First, the results are highly dependent on the sampling methods and participation. First, these participants self-selected into the study. As volunteers, they may either have had overwhelmingly positive or negative experiences with work-life issues or were more willing to discuss these issues than other students. Although I made efforts to diversify the sample and include a variety of student experiences, there is still some lack of diversity in gender, parental status, race, and employment status. The population of students at the Midwestern university that this research was primarily conducted does contain more females than males and only 16% non-White undergraduate students, so this sample is reflexive of that population on those characteristics. Future research should work to correct these limitations. In addition, all of the participants attended college in the Midwestern United States. Students from other areas of the country or other countries may experience work-life issues in a different way.

Finally, including more voices of part-time students and first generation students could provide more diverse and helpful insight.

Future Research

This study paves the way for several possibilities for future research in the areas of anticipatory socialization, cultural messages and norms surrounding work-life, and training for students. First, we need additional research regarding how the anticipatory socialization stage is affected when the corporate climate is so uncertain. Second, further analyses of cultural expectations, also known as distal discourses, in interpersonal interactions could be a beneficial area of study. Taking a relational dialectics theory approach to this topic could further reveal the discursive sites in which these distal messages are transmitted and reproduced as well as ways that students embrace or resist them. Lastly, future research to develop and test training programs for students to learn healthy behaviors in balancing their life in college and what work-life balance will look like after college would be beneficial for understanding what strategies are effective. In the moment, training programs that influence healthy behaviors and reduce students' uncertainty about the future would likely help lessen their levels of stress.

In this study, I extend work-life research to the context of college students, who struggle to find balance among their multiple role demands. In interviewing and analyzing nineteen student interviews, I found eight overarching themes in the way that students discussed work-life, which highlighted: 1) high levels of uncertainty throughout this transitory period along with the messages they received surrounding this topic, 2) the permeation of cultural ideal worker and individualism discourse that creates a problematic ideal student norm, and 3) the tension students face between striving to achieve this ideal student norm and finding a healthy "balance." This study adds to the understanding of the interplay between uncertainty management theory,

memorable messages, and vocational anticipatory socialization. Finally, I provide several implications for organizations that work with students or seek to hire them. I propose that a larger societal examination of neoliberal discourse and redefining the structure of higher education is needed for sustainable change for students.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Letter

Are you a busy college student? Do you feel like you are juggling several commitments at once?

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study that aims to understand the “college student experience” and how it pertains to work-life balance issues. To participate in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently enrolled either part or full-time in undergraduate courses.

If you would like to participate, please follow this link for more information: https://bsu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5gXU1cbtNrZLgY5. The demographic survey should take less than 5 minutes to complete. If you are selected to participate, I will contact you at the e-mail address you provide to schedule a 1.5-hour time block for an interview. Interviews are expected to last between 40 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on how much you wish to say.

Your responses will be used to complete a Master’s thesis and resulting papers. Your identity will not be revealed during this process to anyone besides the primary researcher and faculty thesis advisor.

There is no compensation for participating in the study. However, your contribution will be a valuable addition to our research and understanding of college students’ experiences of negotiating multiple demands such as school work, personal life, and other obligations. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thanks!

Aly Sander
Department of Communication Studies
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47304
amsander@bsu.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Katherine Denker
kjdenker@bsu.edu

IRB ID# 984937-1

Appendix B
Consent Form: Survey

Project Title: College Students' Experience of Work-Life Balance

Researcher(s): I, Alyson Sander, am a second year M.A. graduate student in the department of Communication Studies at Ball State University.

Dr. Katherine Denker is the faculty adviser and an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Ball State University.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine college students' experiences of negotiating multiple roles such as school work, personal life, and other obligations by utilizing interviews.

Rationale: College students are expected to make many commitments to their education, family, friends, extracurricular organizations, athletics, employment, and others, that compete for their time and energy. Researching the way college students learn to negotiate these work-life related demands will add to the understanding of students' experiences during the anticipatory socialization phase.

Criteria: To participate in this research, you must be 18 years of age or older AND enrolled in undergraduate college courses either part or full time.

Time: This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The optional interview portion should take between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, depending on how much the participant has to say.

Procedures: If you choose to participate, you will first complete a short demographic survey. Following the survey, the researcher may contact you to give you the option of participating in an audio recorded interview. During this time, you will be asked to discuss your experiences of college life.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions while discussing your multiple responsibilities.

Resources: If you feel upset or uneasy following our interaction, please consult counseling services. You can access free and confidential counseling support over the phone by calling the Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline at (212) 673-3000, or by taking advantage of any of your institution's resources. After participating in the study, you will be given a sheet of resources that are available to you, for free, as a college student. If you wish to have a copy of the resources before you participate, please request this document from the primary researcher.

Benefits: The potential benefits of this study include providing a better understanding of college students' lives, obstacles, and barriers to success. After the study results are completed, you may ask for the completed document to review.

Confidential: Your identity will not be revealed in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality:

1. Consent forms will be kept separate from the data
2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data.
3. You may refuse to answer any questions asked.
4. Digital files will be kept on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked cabinet.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study, please contact the primary investigator, Alyson Sander at amsander@bsu.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor of this research, Dr. Katherine Denker at kjdenker@bsu.edu.

Questions: If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you feel that you are at risk, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306 or by phone (765-285-5070) or e-mail (irb@bsu.edu).

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time or refuse to answer any question.

Thank you for your interest and consideration,
Alyson Sander

For more information, please contact:

Aly Sander, Principal Investigator
Department of Communication Studies
Ball State University
(765) 285-1939 / amsander@bsu.edu

Dr. Katherine Denker, Faculty Advisor
Department of Communication Studies
Ball State University
(765) 285-1965 / kjdenker@bsu.edu

You may print, save, and/or retain a copy of this document for your records. At the time of your scheduled interview, you will be asked to provide your signature on this consent form. You may ask questions about the study or discontinue your participation from the study at any point in the process.

- I agree to participate in the study. I understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above. I am also at least 18 years of age and am currently enrolled in undergraduate college classes either part- or full-time.
- I do not wish to participate in this study. I am no longer interested in the study or do not fit the criteria to participate.

Appendix C
Demographic Survey

Link to Qualtrics survey: https://bsu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5gXU1cbtNrZLgY5

1. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Transgendered
 - Other (blank)

2. Please describe your race/ethnicity
(blank)

3. What year were you born?
(blank)

4. I am currently a...
 - Freshman/first-year
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - Unclassified

5. Which of these fields best describes your major or anticipated major? *Please choose one or more.*
 - Agriculture
 - Biology/life sciences (biology, biochemistry, botany, zoology, etc.)
 - Business (accounting, business administration, marketing, management, etc.)
 - Communication (speech, journalism, television/radio, etc.)
 - Computer and information sciences
 - Education
 - Engineering
 - Ethnic, cultural studies, and area studies
 - Foreign languages and literature (French, Spanish, etc.)
 - Health-related fields (nursing, physical therapy, health technology, etc.)
 - History
 - Humanities (English, literature, philosophy, religion, etc.)
 - Liberal/general studies
 - Mathematics
 - Multi/interdisciplinary studies (international relations, ecology, environmental studies, etc.)
 - Parks, recreation, leisure studies, sports management
 - Physical sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy, earth science, etc.)
 - Pre-professional (pre-dental, pre-medical, pre-veterinary)
 - Public administration (city management, law enforcement, etc.)

Social sciences (anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, etc.)

Visual and performing arts (art, music, theater, etc.)

Undecided

Other (please specify)

6. Are you currently employed?

Yes, part time

Yes, full time

No, looking for work

No, NOT looking for work

Other (blank)

6b. If you are currently employed, how many hours per week do you typically work?

(blank)

7. If you do have a job, is it on-campus or off-campus?

On

Off

I work for an off-campus organization via technology

8. What is your relational status?

Not partnered

Partnered

Married

Other (please specify)

9. Do you have children?

Yes

No

9b. If you do have children, how many?

(blank)

9c. If you do have children, what ages?

(blank)

10. During the school year, who do you live with? Check all that apply.

No one, I live alone

One or more students

My relational partner

My spouse

My child or children

My parents

Other relatives

One or more roommates who are not students

Other people: please specify

11. Do you participate in any student organizations?

No

Yes

11b. If so, please list each organization you are involved with and approximately how many hours per week you spend on this organization.

12. What other commitments do you have in addition to academic work? Please include approximate hours spent per week on these commitments.

13. Please provide your first name and an e-mail address that I can reach you at if selected to participate in a 1.5-hour interview. Remember, your name will not be utilized in any reports resulting from this research. (blank)

Appendix D
Consent Form: Interview

Project Title: College Students' Experience of Work-Life Balance

Researcher(s): I, Alyson Sander, am a second year M.A. graduate student in the department of Communication Studies at Ball State University.

Dr. Katherine Denker is the faculty adviser and an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Ball State University.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine college students' experiences of negotiating multiple roles such as school work, personal life, and other obligations by utilizing interviews.

Rationale: College students are expected to make many commitments to their education, family, friends, extracurricular organizations, athletics, employment, and others, that compete for their time and energy. Researching the way college students learn to negotiate these work-life related demands will add to the understanding of students' experiences during the anticipatory socialization phase.

Criteria: To participate in this research, you must be 18 years of age or older AND enrolled in undergraduate college courses either part or full time.

Time: The interview should take between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, depending on how much the participant has to say.

Procedures: During this interview, you will be asked to discuss your experiences of college life. Audio recordings will be destroyed after three years. Transcripts of interviews without names or other identifiable information will be kept for five years after collection, may be utilized for future research efforts, and then will be destroyed.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions while discussing your multiple responsibilities.

Resources: If you feel upset or uneasy following our interaction, please consult counseling services. You can access free and confidential counseling support over the phone by calling the Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline at (212) 673-3000, or by taking advantage of any of your institution's resources. After participating in the study, you will be given a sheet of resources that are available to you, for free, as a college student. If you wish to have a copy of the resources before you participate, please request this document from the primary researcher.

Benefits: The potential benefits of this study include providing a better understanding of college students' lives, obstacles, and barriers to success. After the study results are completed, you may ask for the completed document to review.

Confidential: Your identity will not be revealed in transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality:

1. Consent forms will be kept separate from the data
2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data.
3. You may refuse to answer any questions asked.
4. Digital files will be kept on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked cabinet.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study, please contact the primary investigator, Alyson Sander at amsander@bsu.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor of this research, Dr. Katherine Denker at kjdenker@bsu.edu.

Questions: If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you feel that you are at risk, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306 or by phone (765-285-5070) or e-mail (irb@bsu.edu).

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time or refuse to answer any question.

Thank you for your interest and consideration,

Alyson Sander

Signing this consent indicates you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above:

Signature

Date

For more information, please contact:

Aly Sander, Principal Investigator
 Department of Communication Studies
 Ball State University
 (765) 285-1939 / amsander@bsu.edu

Dr. Katherine Denker, Faculty Advisor
 Department of Communication Studies
 Ball State University
 (765) 285-1965 / kjdenker@bsu.edu

Appendix E Interview Protocol

Opening/Introduction

- Thank the participant
- Expectations: format, length of time, audio recording, note-taking
- Informed consent

Questions/Probes

- Tell me about your life as a college student.
 - What is your average day like?
 - What about your average weekend?
 - Has it always been like this?
 - Is this what you expected before coming to college? Why or why not?
 - What messages did you hear about college before you got here?
 - Do you think these were accurate messages?
 - What messages are you hearing about what to expect now?
- Tell me a story about a time in which two aspects of your life came into conflict.
 - How did you resolve it then? What influenced this decision?
 - How did those involved react?
 - Looking back on it now, how would you solve it if you had the chance?
- If you had to list all of your obligations at this time, how would you list them? In order of priority? Why? Would you have always ranked your obligations like this?
 - What source of influence shaped your ranking?
- What does balancing your school work or your school life with the rest of your life mean to you?
 - Where do you think you got these ideas? What shaped this view?
- What do you think it means to achieve “balance” in your life?
 - How do you feel about the process of balance?
 - Do you feel you should need to achieve balance?
 - Do you believe balance can be “achieved?”
 - Where did you get this idea from?
- Could you recall any specific messages you have received in the past about work-life balance?
 - Tell me about this message.
 - Who did this message come from?
 - What was said?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the message?
- Do you think it would be beneficial to have discussions regarding work-life balance at the college age?
 - Why or why not?
 - Who do you think would be a good source for this information?
- What advice would you give other college students? In regards to...

- Communicating with family
- Friends from high school or relationships you had prior to college
- Having a romantic relationship while in college
- Having children
- Having a job
- Participating in extra-curriculars while in school
- Time management
- What strategies do you utilize to achieve balance in your life?
 - Is this strategy successful? Why or why not?
- If discussing feeling overwhelmed or being burnt out:
 - Can you tell me about that experience?
 - How did you know you were burnt out?
- How do you think you will negotiate work/life after graduation?
 - Is this similar or different from now? Why?
 - How did you come to understand these ideas?
 - What other messages have you heard about work-life negotiations?
- Have your professors, bosses, or someone else in the industry/career path you're pursuing ever given you messages about balancing work and life later in your career?
- Is there anything else you would add to this discussion about balancing your life in college?

Closing

- Is there anything else you think I should know?
- Data will be kept safe and confidential
- Would you be willing to participate in member checking, which is where you would volunteer to discuss with me (at a later date) some of my study findings and tell me whether or not the results are reflective of what college students think?

Appendix F Resources for the Participants at Ball State

Ball State University Counseling Center (765) 285-1736 | Lucina Hall 320

This comprehensive services office provides free and confidential psychological and career resources to students. The primary mission of the agency is to assist students in reaching their educational goals, as well as to improve their quality of life. The staff is diverse, professional, warm, and receptive to students who seek services. To make your first appointment with the Counseling Center, call our office or stop in to Lucina Hall, Room 320.

Amelia T. Wood Health Center (765) 285-8431 | 1500 W. Neely Ave.

The Health Center provides ambulatory health care for currently enrolled sick and injured students in addition to providing care for on-the-job injuries for Ball State University employees. The Health Center is comprised of a Main clinic and pharmacy on the first floor, Women's Center and Health Education on the second floor, and a physical therapy unit on the lower level. Our mission is to provide ambulatory medical services and patient education. Our goal is to have you leave the center not only feeling better but also better informed.

The Learning Center (765) 285-1006 | North Quad 350

The Learning Center is part of University College, which offers student-centered programs and services that enhance students' success. The services provided by the center are free and available for Ball State students for general courses they are currently enrolled in at BSU and for courses they are preparing to take at BSU, as well as general study skills tutoring to aid in their overall success at BSU. Tutoring sessions are led by Ball State students who meet certain academic requirements and are available one-on-one or in small groups.

The Writing Center (765) 285-8370 | Robert Bell 295 or online

The Writing Center has helped thousands of Ball State writers through free one-to-one feedback sessions, workshops, presentations, writing communities, and online resources for writers. If you are working on a writing project and are looking for individualized feedback, make an appointment for a free one-to-one tutoring session. Students may meet their tutor in Robert Bell 295 or online for their sessions. Students, faculty, and staff use this service to consult on issues of punctuation, grammar, usage, and citation in addition to other questions that come up while writing. During off-hours, you might find the answers you need in our writing resources.

College Stress Support Group <https://www.dailystrength.org/group/college-stress>

This community is dedicated to the unique challenges and stresses of being in college or university, including: relationship challenges, roommates, financial issues, academics, and questions about careers and future. College is exciting, scary, fulfilling, and sometimes a little out of control. Get support from other students and make a new friend!

Resources for the Participants at Hanover

Hanover College Counseling Services

(812) 866-7399 | Campus Center, third floor next to Health Services

Register for an appointment on MyHanover via the intake form (login required). We are able to work in tandem with a provider from your hometown if requested. All services are free and confidential. Counseling staff comprised of a licensed clinical social worker, licensed mental health counselor, and staff psychologist.

Hanover College Health Services

(812) 866-7082 | Campus Center, third floor

Services include lab testing, wound care, apothecary medicines, physical exams, immunizations, treatment for acute illness or minor injury, referral to specialist services, and general health & wellness. There is no office visit fee charged for students. Health Services staff comprised of registered nurses, a certified family nurse practitioner, and a doctor of medicine.

The Gladish Center for Teaching & Learning

(812) 866-7128 | learningcenter@hanover.edu | 1st floor of Duggan Library

The Gladish Learning Center offers Academic Tutoring, Mentoring and Coaching *free* to all students at Hanover College in their pursuit of academic excellence. Our goal is to help good students become better students through active engagement. Our trained peer tutors are here to help make sure that each student has the opportunity to get the most out of their Hanover education.

Hanover College Career Center

(812) 866-7127 | careercenter@hanover.edu | Hendricks Hall

Our hours are 8:00 - 5:00 Monday through Friday. Among the services we provide are career guidance, job search assistance, resume help, grad school assistance, and extensive alumni support to students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Additionally, job and internship seekers may attend our annual job fairs and participate in our on-campus recruiting program.

College Stress Support Group

<https://www.dailystrength.org/group/college-stress>

This community is dedicated to the unique challenges and stresses of being in college or university, including: relationship challenges, roommates, financial issues, academics, and questions about careers and future. College is exciting, scary, fulfilling, and sometimes a little out of control. Get support from other students and make a new friend!

Resources for Participants, Non-Institutional Specific

College Stress Support Group

<https://www.dailystrength.org/group/college-stress>

This community is dedicated to the unique challenges and stresses of being in college or university, including: relationship challenges, roommates, financial issues, academics, and questions about careers and future. College is exciting, scary, fulfilling, and sometimes a little out of control. Get support from other students and make a new friend!

Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline

(212) 673-3000 | <http://samaritansnyc.org/24-hour-crisis-hotline/>

Samaritans completely confidential 24-hour crisis response hotline, staffed by professionally trained volunteers who have responded to over 1 million calls, provides immediately accessible ongoing emotional support to those who are in distress or suicidal. Samaritans hotline is completely confidential and anonymous, and, unlike some other hotline services, does not utilize caller ID or call tracing, making it a safe place to turn for people who are afraid to go someplace else or feel they have no place else—due to social, cultural, economic or other reasons.

7-Cups Online Support and Therapy

<http://www.7cups.com>

Do you need help with your life? 7 Cups is an on-demand emotional health and well-being service. When you need to chat we connect you to a real listener or therapist when you want someone to talk to. When you may not feel ready to chat, you can try simple activities to help boost your mood. Whatever step you take first - chatting one-on-one, doing solo activities, watching short videos, reading self-help guides, forum posts, and uplifting feed posts, or participating in group discussions - starts you on a path that will encourage and support you as you take steps daily to become stronger.

The Khan Academy: Online Academic Help

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

Khan Academy offers practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalized learning dashboard that empower learners to study at their own pace in and outside of the classroom. We tackle math, science, computer programming, history, art history, economics, and more.

Grad Life Choices: Online Career Assistance

<http://gradlifechoices.com/index.html>

Grad Life Choices is here to help. We are a free service provided by volunteer professional coaches to grads who can't afford paid coaching. And there really are no strings attached. Our coaches and mentors can help you to assess your strengths, plan your job-seeking strategy, fine-tune your résumé, work through financial and life issues, network productively, get a foot in the door of your chosen field, and begin to work toward your ultimate goals.

Appendix G
Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

This research is being conducted by Alyson Sander, a master's student at Ball State University. The purpose of this research is to study college students' communication in the process of negotiating work-life concerns. Participants have been assured that the interview data will remain confidential. All names and other identifying information will be removed from the transcripts after they are completed.

I, _____, the transcriber, agree to:

1. keep all information confidential by not discussing or sharing research information in any form or format (e.g., audio recordings, transcripts, names of participants) with anyone other than the researcher.
2. keep all research information secure while in my possession, including audio recordings, transcripts, disks, or any other research information.
3. return all research information in any form or format when the research tasks are completed, including audio recordings, transcripts, disks, or any other research information.
4. after consulting with the researcher, I will erase or destroy all research information I have remaining in any form or format regarding this project that is not returnable to the researcher. This includes information stored on a computer hard drive.

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

Appendix H Participant Demographics

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Born	Year in School	Major	Work Status	Relational Status	Parent	Extracurricular Involvement (# of activities)
Anthony	Male	White/Caucasian	1993	Junior	Visual and performing arts	Part time off-campus	Not partnered	No	Yes, 4-6
Bri	Female	White/Caucasian	1997	Sophomore	Criminal Justice	Weekends off-campus	Not partnered	No	No
Corrine	Female	White/Caucasian	1996	Sophomore	Social sciences & Communication	Not working	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Darby	Female	White/Caucasian	1997	Sophomore	Visual and performing arts & Communication	Looking for work	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Emma	Female	White/Caucasian	1992	Senior	Photography	Part time on-campus, plus military commitments	Engaged	No	Yes, 1-3
Frannie	Female	White/Caucasian	1994	Senior	Physical sciences	Part time off-campus	Not partnered	No	No
Grace	Female	White/Caucasian	1997	Freshman	Physical sciences	Looking for work	Partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Heather	Female	Hispanic	1994	Junior	Social sciences	Part time off-campus	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Ingrid	Female	White/Caucasian	1998	Freshman	Social sciences	Part time off-campus	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Jaiden	Female	Biracial	1998	Freshman	Mathematics & Education	Looking for work	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Karen	Female	White/Caucasian	1995	Junior	Education	Part-time on-campus	Partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Lillian	Female	White/Caucasian	1991	Junior	Business & Communication	Part time off-campus	Married	No	Yes, 1-3
Marcy	Female	White/Caucasian	1995	Junior	Business	Part time off-campus	Partnered	No	No
Pat	Male	White/Caucasian	1994	Senior	History	Part time on-campus	Not partnered	No	Yes, 4-6
Quinn	Female	Biracial	1995	Senior	Computer and information sciences	Not working	Partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Rachel	Female	White/Caucasian	1987	Sophomore	Biology/life sciences	Full time off-campus	Divorced	2 kids, between 4-8 yrs. old	No
Shaye	Female	Biracial	1996	Junior	Interior Design	Part time off-campus	Not partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Taylor	Female	White/Caucasian	1996	Sophomore	Social sciences	Part time on-campus	Partnered	No	Yes, 1-3
Vinny	Male	Black	1993	Senior	Communication	Military commitments	Partnered	No	Yes, 1-3

Note. Participants' names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Appendix I
Interview Data Information

Table 2
Interview Length and Transcription Data

Participant	Minutes	Pages
Anthony	34	11
Bri	47	15
Corrine	26	9
Darby	17	7
Emma	35	10
Frannie	42	12
Grace	24	9
Heather	37	11
Ingrid	26	9
Jaiden	50	13
Karen	28	9
Lillian	40	13
Marcy	43	13
Pat	35	11
Quinn	38	13
Rachel	20	9
Shaye	25	12
Taylor	28	12
Vinny	59	16
Average	35	11
Total	729 min.	235 pgs.