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Parental Influence on Career Development Among College Students

Michael W. Ladd
Eastern Illinois University
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Parental Influence on Career Development Among College Students

Michael W. Ladd

Thesis
Submitted to the Department of Counseling and Student Development
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in Education
in the Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois

June 12, 2000

I hereby recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling
this part of the graduate degree cited above

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Dr. Barbara Powell, Thesis Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on their college and career choices and their emotional independence from parents. The relationship between satisfaction with career/major choice (as demonstrated by vocational commitment) and parental influence was also examined. In addition, relationships between emotional independence from parents and commitment to a career field were explored.

To meet the research objectives, four research questions were addressed. First, is the Perceived Parental Influence scale, developed for this study, a reliable and valid scale? Second, is there a significant relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on career development and their emotional independence from parents? Third, is there a significant correlation between students' perceptions of parental influence and their vocational commitment? Fourth, is there a significant correlation between students' vocational commitment and their emotional independence?

It was hypothesized that there would be an inverse relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on career development and their emotional independence from parents. Further, it was postulated that there would be a direct relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on career development and their vocational commitment. Finally, it was hypothesized that there would be a direct relationship between students' vocational commitment and their emotional independence from parents.
Two subscales from the Iowa Student Development Inventories, which functionalize Chickering and Reisser's theory of student development, were used to assess students' emotional independence from parents and vocational commitment. In addition, perceived parental influence on career choice was measured using an inventory developed expressly for this purpose. Data were collected using Internet-based survey forms and a CGI script.

Results indicate support for the first hypothesis, with an inverse correlation identified between perceived parental influence on career development and emotional independence from parents. The second hypothesis was also supported, with a significant, but weak correlation found between vocational commitment and perceived parental influence. However, no significant relationship was established between vocational commitment and emotional independence from parents.

During the course of the research it was established that the Perceived Parental Influence scale is a reliable and valid self-report measure of parental influence on career development. The items from the PPI were analyzed for reliability and produced a .86 Cronbach's alpha reliability. Split-half reliability tests were also conducted, yielding coefficients of .83 and .69, for parts one and two, respectively. The confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the scale indicated that all items loaded reasonably well on one factor, generally indicating that the theoretical conception of the PPI as a discreet entity is valid.
I would like to thank everyone who has been patient and supportive of me throughout this process. Every learning experience is a challenge, and the self-discipline and motivation required to complete this project made it even more difficult for me. Ideas come easily... Follow through is an entirely different matter. Most importantly, I want to thank my wife for her careful and constructive criticism of everything from my title page formatting to the proper analysis of my statistics.

My committee deserves special recognition for not forgetting me, even when it seemed I was hiding from them. Dr. Judy Lyles' continued support, even with limited mobility, was a great motivating factor. Dr. Chuck Eberly was especially efficient at cutting to the root of many problems. Dr. Barb Powell went above and beyond the call of duty, taking the time to read and critic a draft of my thesis while on a plane to Italy.

My friends and family who continually asked me, "So, how's your thesis coming?" were also a constant source of motivation. My mother's influence on my career development is evident in the ambition required to take on a project of this magnitude!

Additional thanks to Dr. Bill Gibbs of Media Services for the idea of putting my instrument online and to Gerry Wagner for providing the CGI scripting which made it work. Thanks, as well, to all the professors who handed out my survey fliers and provided me with the subject pool, especially to the psychology department who provided an excellent sample of freshmen. Finally, thanks to the participants who independently took the time to complete my survey and provided the data upon which this study is based. Without you, a vast portion of the following pages would be blank.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Research Problem

The equation which determines an individual’s career choices is made up of many complex variables. These variables include everything from personality and ability to family background and opportunity. Each of these variables is, in turn, influenced by factors such as geographic location, the sociopolitical climate, and even simple chance. When assisting students with career decision making, it is essential that counselors have an understanding of the many variables influencing career choice and that they are able to clarify these variables with their clients. The purpose of this study was to explore one of those variables, parental influence on career development and choice of college major.

A growing body of research has described the role that the family plays in career development. Factors such as the socioeconomic status of the family, parental work values, maternal occupation, access to education, family configuration, and perceived parental influence are predictors for adolescents’ occupational aspirations and the range of career choices considered (Isaacson & Brown, 1997). Parental involvement in education is strongly related to academic achievement, as well as career planning, interest, and motivation (Isaacson & Brown, 1997; Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Young, 1994).

Extensive research by Young and Friesen (1990; 1992) has explored the intentions of parents in influencing their children’s career development. One study
described data gleaned from interviews with parents that focused on specific incidents during which parents indicated they attempted to shape their children's career development. Parental intentions in influencing the career development of their children were demonstrated by the messages parents gave to their children about activities, choices, values, means of interacting with others, and their composite view of the world in which they live (Young & Friesen, 1992). Further research has indicated that, while parents often demonstrate the intention of influencing career development, these efforts are successful only when they are correctly perceived and interpreted by adolescents (Paulson & Sputa, 1996).

Purpose of Study & Definition of Variables

The primary focus of this study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on their college and career choices and their emotional independence from parents. The relationship between satisfaction with career/major choice (as demonstrated by vocational commitment) and parental influence was also examined. In addition, correlational relationships between emotional independence from parents and commitment to a career field were explored. Recommendations for further research are also made.

Three separate variables were included to paint a clearer picture of the impact and importance of parental influence. The first variable, perceived parental influence, describes the extent to which students reported their parents discussing career plans or offering guidance in career matters. This variable also measures the extent to which students attributed parental influence as a factor in their career decisions.
Since student perceptions of parental influence are tempered by the relationship between the student and his/her parents, any study examining student perceptions of parental influence must address the closeness of the parent-child relationship (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). The second variable included in this study, emotional independence from parents, was included to account for variation in reported levels of parental influence on career development. This variable is a factor in the developmental process moving through autonomy toward interdependence proposed by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Emotional independence from parents indicates the closeness of the parent-child relationship and measures the extent to which students continue to make decisions based upon the wishes of their parents.

Finally the third variable, vocational commitment, was included to clarify the extent to which students had made and were intentionally following vocational plans. This variable is a factor in Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) maturational process of developing purpose. Vocational commitment measures the development and implementation of career goals and plans while assessing the degree to which an individual will continue to pursue those plans despite obstacles. Addressing these three separate variables allowed for the study to more effectively address the research questions that follow.

**Research Objectives**

The objective of this research was to examine the relationship among vocational commitment, emotional independence from parents, and perceived parental influence on
career development. To meet this objective, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is the Perceived Parental Influence scale a reliable and valid scale? This was investigated by performing reliability tests, running factor analyses, and by examining the results of research questions 2 and 3.
2. Is there a significant relationship between students’ perceptions of parental influence on career development and their emotional independence from parents?
3. Is there a significant correlation between students’ perceptions of parental influence on career development and their vocational commitment?
4. Is there a significant correlation between students’ vocational commitment and their emotional independence from parents?

Hypotheses

Three separate hypotheses evolved from the research questions. First, it was hypothesized that there would be an inverse relationship between students’ perceptions of parental influence on career development and their emotional independence from parents. Second, it was postulated that there would be a direct relationship between students’ perceptions of parental influence on career development and their vocational commitment. Finally, it was hypothesized that there would be a direct relationship between students’ vocational commitment and their emotional independence from parents.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Virtually all major career choice and developmental theories acknowledge the role of the family in the career development of late adolescents and young adults (Bluestein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991). While the exact nature of parents' contributions to the career decision-making process remains unclear, socioeconomic status, parental occupation, and family configuration have been found to play important roles (Schulenburg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984). Further findings (Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996) suggest that family functioning and the relationship established between parent and child during adolescence impacts career development.

Parent-Child Relationship During Adolescence

To understand the influence parents have on their children's career development, it is essential to consider the relationship between parent and child during the formative adolescent years (Penick & Jepsen, 1992). Adolescence is the period during which children begin to more firmly align themselves with their peer groups, explore their identity and future goals, and struggle for autonomy from their parents (Newman & Newman, 1995). According to Young (1994) adolescence is also a critical time in the child's career development, as many adolescents struggle to make decisions about future career and educational choices. Research also suggests that parental influence during this
time is moderated by the existing relationship between parent and child (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). This relationship evolves throughout the life of the child and is enhanced by parents who are consistently involved in their children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development (Newman & Newman, 1995; LeFrancois, 1995; Paulson & Sputa, 1996).

The popular view of adolescence characterizes it as a terrible time of turbulence for most children and stereotypes teenagers as being difficult to parent (LeFrancois, 1995). However, most research has shown that adolescence is not a stressful time, but is instead a period of positive and energetic growth (Steinberg, 1990). As children move through the transformations of adolescence, both parents and society grant them increasing levels of autonomy and independence (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). This enhances the child’s ability to make good decisions as an adult.

Decision making skills are essential to career planning, and parents assist their children in acquiring these skills through their expectations and involvement in their children’s lives (Isaacson & Brown, 1997). Parents who set clear limits and make rules calmly, while avoiding condemnation of their children and overt criticism of their children’s judgement, will be better able to maintain an atmosphere of respect in their relationships with their teens than parents who are overly critical and cynical about their teens’ ability to make choices and decisions (Grolnick, McKenzie, Weiss, & Wrightman, 1996). According to Paulson and Sputa (1996), parents who are involved in their children’s lives and decisions and demonstrate acceptance and nurturance of their children contribute to higher levels of adjustment, maturity, social competence, self-esteem, and academic success.
Parents who provide supportive family environments and develop positive relationships with their children enhance their children’s career opportunities and likelihood of making successful vocational commitments (Isaacson & Brown, 1997). Successful career development is enhanced through the acquisition of occupational skills and abilities learned in the family, such as teamwork, punctuality, communication skills, work ethic, and interdependence (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Furthermore, family environments which support the acquisition of skill mastery and encourage career exploration develop children who demonstrate higher levels of career search self-efficacy (Ryan, Solberg, and Brown, 1996).

Some research has examined the role of identity development in career choice (Sankey & Young, 1996). For example, the maturity required for adolescents to choose a career direction and obtain secure employment necessitates the integration of the self into a fused identity. Parents can have a significant influence on their adolescent children’s career direction as their children seek to answer questions of identity and begin the transition to adulthood (Middleton & Loughead, 1993). Parental influence may take the form of directive interactions, such as conversations about potential occupational paths, or it may come in a more indirect form through the traditions and roles established for family members.

Dysfunctional families make the establishment of identity and separation from parents difficult and may explain hindered career development or chronic career indecision seen in some adults (Penick & Jepsen, 1992). Ryan, Solberg, and Brown (1996) describe dysfunction by stating, “family dysfunction refers to family relationships
that are either excessively close and enmeshed or extremely disengaged" (p. 85). While attachment to parents is conceptualized as offering a secure position from which to explore career possibilities, children who are unable to develop secure attachments may face limited opportunities for career exploration or the development of strong vocational skills (Ryan, Solberg, & Brown, 1996).

Young (1994) encourages parents to play an active, intentional role in assisting their adolescent children with career development, suggesting that parents and children can work together to broaden the occupational possibilities available to children. The active role of parents in encouraging the pursuit of life goals enhances identity development among adolescents and builds in children the beliefs that they can achieve their goals (Sankey & Young, 1996). Many researchers agree that the active development of occupational aspirations in children can certainly be considered a parental responsibility (Paulson & Sputa, 1996; Bratcher, 1982; Young, 1994).

**Parental Influence and Perception**

The direct and indirect influence of parents on their children’s career development has been explored utilizing a variety of research tools, including surveys, observations of interactions between parents and their adolescents, critical incident interviews, and the collection of demographic and environmental data (Young & Friesen, 1990). The data collected led researchers to further examine the socialization of children by their family and the intentional guidance provided to children by parents in career development. For example, several studies have found that one of the best environmental predictors of males’ occupational aspirations and attainment is the socioeconomic status of their family
of origin (Young & Friesen, 1990; Schulenberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984). In contrast, Schulenberg et al. (1984) found that female children's occupational aspirations and attainment were most strongly impacted by the occupation of their mothers and by the gender role socialization provided by their family.

Socialization is an indirect form of parental influence on career development. The traditions and expectations found in the family influence the development of acceptable roles for family members, thereby influencing the individual's career interests and perceived occupational choices (Bratcher, 1982). In describing the impact of this unspoken influence, Middleton and Loughead (1993) suggest that "many people apparently seek to gain acceptance and support from parents well past their early childhood... A common family phenomenon is when the child follows in the parent's occupational footsteps as one way to gain approval" (p. 171).

However, studies done thus far have failed to isolate the specific impact of indirect unspoken socialization upon career choice, primarily because parental influence on career development also takes the form of direct involvement through parent-child interactions. Parents engage in many activities aimed at enhancing their children's career development, ranging from encouraging the development of skills and attitudes necessary for successful career attainment to enhancing their children's ability to choose appropriate occupational aspirations (Young & Friesen, 1992). In addition, Young and Friesen's (1992) findings suggest that many parents believe they can have a critical impact on their child's career development.
However, the majority of parents report that they do not attempt to directly influence their children’s specific career choices, but instead attempt to enhance their children’s self-image and self-confidence (Young & Friesen, 1992; Middleton & Loughead, 1993). Many parents encourage their children to participate in a wide variety of activities which develop comprehensive understanding of values and beliefs. These activities include both individual and group pursuits which provide children with opportunities to acquire additional skills and experiences (Isaacson & Brown, 1997).

**Career Development and Parental Influence**

Most career development theorists, including Holland and Super, have emphasized the connections between personality, the development of an individual’s identity, and career choice (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In describing the importance and meaning of work to an individual’s lifestyle and identity, Havighurst (1982) states:

> The job ... orients and controls the behavior of those persons who participate in it. It sets a goal for the worker, determines the manner in which the goal may be attained and the reward offered for its achievement, and affects the whole range of his/her participation in the society of which s/he is a member. Its influences extend even beyond the actual work life of the individual ... In short the job in our society exerts an influence which pervades the whole of the adult life span. (p. 708)
Having such a profound impact on later life, the importance of proper career selection is emphasized throughout the child's development by teachers, counselors, and parents (Herr & Cramer, 1972; Isaacson & Brown, 1997).

The impact of career choice on an individual's life is moderated by the dynamic relationship between career choice and socialization. Much information regarding the world of work is gathered from parents as children are encouraged and guided toward their life roles (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). For example, a parent who encourages a male child to develop his mathematical talent may contribute to the child's future success as a computer systems engineer. The female child possessing similar mathematical talents who is socialized by her parents to be a nurturing caregiver may instead find success as a pediatric nurse. The extent to which parents influence their children's career choices is moderated by the emotional bonds which exist between parent and child (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986; Lucas, 1997; Middleton & Loughead, 1993).

Emotional Independence from Parents and Career Development

Autonomy begins to develop as the adolescent disengages from his or her parents. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identify emotional independence as one aspect of autonomy: "Emotional independence means freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval" (p. 47). This emotional independence from the family leads to stronger bonds with peers and commitment to vocational and lifestyle ideals. Bluestein, Walbridge, Friedlander, and Palladino (1991) reviewed numerous empirical studies which have demonstrated that late adolescents' perceptions of parental
Parental Influence on Career Development

separation and attachment are predictors for many aspects of adolescent development, including career development:

Dysfunctional families, those in which independence of thought and feeling are perceived as threatening the integrity of the family, are likely to discourage the young adult (covertly or overtly) from developing a sense of psychological separateness, which in turn would likely inhibit the necessary career decision-making and implementation tasks. (p. 40)

Research conducted by Bluestein et al. (1991) evaluated the relationship between psychological separation, parental attachment, and progression toward career choice among undergraduate students. Results suggested that the level of autonomy displayed may provide significant means of predicting progress toward commitment to career choices. Family support and freedom from conflict appeared to provide positive conditions for an individual to examine potential career choices.

Developing Purpose: Vocational Commitment

According to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of college student development, the development of purpose is addressed throughout the individual's college experience. The development of purpose is composed of vocational, social, and lifestyle components. Career exploration and self-awareness help to foster the deeper understanding of what an individual wishes to pursue vocationally, both with and without compensation.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain that vocational commitment involves the extent to which an individual is willing to state and defend vocational and occupational
goals. The development of career plans and the ability and desire to persist despite obstacles are critical components to assess when evaluating vocational commitment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While the specific career path an individual pursues may change and evolve over time, the development of the ability to make and support vocational plans is a part of the evolutionary process of maturity (Isaacson & Brown, 1997).

Summary

The parent-child relationship during adolescence has a profound impact on children's career development. The family unit imparts decision-making skills, social skills, self-management, and identity formation. Active, involved parents nurture their children and foster self-efficacy and competencies that are necessary for career exploration, planning, and commitment.

Parents have direct and indirect influences on their children's career development. Gender roles adopted by the family, as well as employment types and status, influence the range of choices children will consider when planning their careers. The activities in which families engage, and encourage their children to participate, also influence children's career development. These activities can expose children to a wide variety of individual and group skills that are necessary in the occupational environment.

Parents also have a specific and significant direct impact on the career choices their children make. Much information regarding the world of work is gathered from parents as children are encouraged and guided toward their life roles. Parents' reactions
to various interests and pursuits of their children have a life-long impact on the pathways their children follow.

Emotional independence from parents requires that the child gradually disengage from his or her family and develop autonomy, self-efficacy, and interdependence on others. Parents foster this disengagement by encouraging their children to develop independence through decision-making opportunities as the child matures. Parents that do not encourage emotional independence overtly or covertly discourage a child from developing an individual identity and goals.

Vocational commitment evolves as individuals begin to take steps toward identifying their future career plans. The commitment to family, career, and others that is modeled by parents will serve to demonstrate to the child how he or she is expected to behave as an adult. Individuals who are successful in developing a secure vocational identity will be more successful and satisfied with their chosen careers.

The important role played by parents in the development of career goals was the guiding principle behind this study. Through the exploration of the relationship between students' perceptions of parental influence on their career choices and their emotional independence from parents, a greater understanding of the direct impact parents have on career decisions can be established. The relationship between satisfaction with career/major choice (as demonstrated by vocational commitment) and parental influence will lend validity to the importance of career planning within the family.
Subjects

Participants for this study were college students attending a Midwestern state university. Students were made aware of the survey through the use of fliers (see Appendix A) distributed in classes and posted in various campus locations. Students enrolled in introductory psychology classes were awarded research credit if they chose to participate. No effort was made to control for demographics, as this study was initial and non-comprehensive in nature.

Three hundred forty-five college students participated in the study by completing the Career Development Survey (CDS). An examination of the demographic data indicates that the CDS was completed primarily by female freshman and sophomore students of traditional college age (18 – 21 years). Females comprised 68% (n=235) of the sample; 110 of the participants were male (see Table 1). By class year, 57% (n=196) of respondents were freshman and sophomores; while the remaining 43% (n=149) were evenly divided across the junior, senior, and graduate levels (see Table 2). The average age of the survey respondents was 21.06 years, with 75% of the subjects falling in the traditional college student age range (18 – 21 years old). Table 3 illustrates the percentage of respondents by age range.
Table 1
Frequency and Percentage by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 345

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage by Year in School

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<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 345

Table 3
Percentage by Age Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 21</td>
<td>75.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 – 25</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<td>26 – 30</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 345
Instrument

The Career Development Survey (See Appendix B) consisted of three parts. The first section, the Perceived Parental Influence subscale (PPI) was created for this study. This fifteen-item scale was designed to assess parental influence on: career/major choices, moral/ethical values, and lifestyle. The PPI consists of fifteen questions, which subjects answer on a 5-point Likert scale (1=low, 5=high). To assess emotional independence from parents (IND) and vocational commitment (VOC), two subscales from the Iowa Student Development Inventories (Hood, 1997) comprise the second and third sections of the CDS. These subscales also consisted of 15 questions each and were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Demographic data regarding age, gender, and year in school were collected via subject self-report.

Perceived Parental Influence Scale

The Perceived Parental Influence subscale (PPI) was developed for this study to assess respondents' perceptions of parental influence on career and college major choice among college students. The questionnaire was developed following preliminary exploratory research (Ladd, 1998) which assessed the relationship between students' perceptions of their relationship with parents and career development. Twenty-five questions were developed for inclusion in the PPI and were reviewed by several experts trained in psychological assessment and evaluation. Following this review, the list of questions was shortened to twenty and was included in the CDS (See Appendix B) as questions one through twenty.
The questions on the PPI were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("never" or "strongly disagree") to 5 ("frequently" or "strongly agree"). One-fifth of the items are negatively worded to control for responses at only one end of the scoring continuum. Two sample items from this scale are: "My parent(s) helped me to decide on my choice of college major" and "My parent(s) do not approve of my chosen career field."

Following data analysis and further review, it became apparent that only fifteen of the original twenty questions were appropriate for measuring perceived parental influence on career development. Factor analysis, conducted using SPSS 7.5 on a Windows 95 platform, identified five questions which loaded poorly or negatively with the overall scale (see Appendix C). The remaining fifteen items were selected and identified as the final Perceived Parental Influence Scale (PPI). The items from the PPI were then analyzed for reliability and produced a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .86, sufficiently strong for a fifteen-item scale (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989).

Iowa Student Development Inventories

The Iowa Student Development Inventories were developed in alignment with Chickering and Reisser's theory of college student development (Hood, 1997). These instruments measure the constructs identified as part of the seven vectors proposed by Chickering and Reisser, two of which are the development of autonomy and the development of purpose. For this study, two subscales of the Iowa Student Development Inventories were chosen to specifically measure the relationships between students, their parents, and their vocational commitment.
Iowa Developing Autonomy Inventory: Emotional Independence – Parents Scale

The Iowa Developing Autonomy Inventory measures the extent to which an individual has disengaged from his or her parents. Reliance shifts from parents to the individual's peer group as the individual becomes more emotionally independent and free of the need for reassurance and approval from parents (Hood, 1997). Two aspects of independence are measured by the Iowa Developing Autonomy Inventory: emotional and instrumental. For the purposes of this study, the subscale designed to evaluate emotional independence from parents was chosen to isolate the parent-child relationship and lend greater validity to the evaluation of perceived parental influence on career development.

The Emotional Independence-Parents (IND) subscale contains fifteen items which are specifically designed to assess disengagement from parents. Items are presented using a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 ("never a characteristic of me") to 5 ("almost always a characteristic of me") with equal numbers of positively and negatively worded questions to control for the acquiescence response set. These items were included in this study as numbers 21 through 35 on the CDS (See Appendix B). Two sample items are: "I can reject my parents' advice" and "I would prefer to compromise myself than to go against my parents' wishes." Previous research conducted in the development of this scale indicates a strong reliability of .88 (Hood, 1997).

Several studies have been conducted with various college student populations to produce normative and validity data for this subscale (Hood, 1997). The mean indicated for this subscale in prior research was 47.53 with a standard deviation of 10.79 and a range of 22 – 74 with a maximum possible score of 75. Autonomy measured using this
subscale displayed a strong (.61) correlation with age, suggesting that students become more autonomous as they get older and move through college. Additionally, in previous research, males displayed a tendency to report more emotional independence from parents than females of the same age (Hood, 1997).

Iowa Vocational Purpose Inventory: Vocational Commitment Scale

The Iowa Vocational Purpose Inventory was designed to evaluate Chickering and Reisser's vector of developing purpose (Hood, 1997). Although the development of purpose includes recreational, vocational, and general lifestyle interests, the Vocational Purpose Inventory targets the development of vocational and career goals and decisions. While the inventory focuses on three components of the vocational aspect of purpose, only the Vocational Commitment (VOC) subscale was utilized in this study to isolate the focus to career development. The Vocational Commitment subscale measures the extent to which an individual has been able to declare and follow his or her chosen career or vocational path.

Fifteen items comprise the Vocational Commitment subscale and were included as items thirty-six through fifty on the Career Development Survey (see Appendix B). One-third of the items are negatively worded to control for response bias. Again, a five-point Likert scale is utilized with responses ranging from 1 ("never true") to 5 ("always true"). Two sample items from this subscale are: "I am prepared to work towards my current vocational goals" and "I do not know what I'd like to do with the rest of my life."

Research conducted upon the Vocational Commitment subscale indicates a .83 reliability, a mean of 56.89, a standard deviation of 8.02, and range of 33 – 70 with a possible
maximum score of 75 (Hood, 1997). In research studies, college seniors typically scored higher than freshmen, and females tended to score higher than males (Hood, 1997).

Procedure

Data were collected using Internet-based survey forms and a CGI (Common Gateway Interface) script. Data collection via the Internet was chosen to replace the traditional pencil-and-paper method of administration for several reasons. First, the online administration method eliminated the printing costs normally associated with a survey of this type. Second, data collection was managed via email and responses were easily received, sorted, and stored in digital format. Third, because of the flexibility allowed by the Internet’s twenty-four hour access, students were able to complete the survey at their leisure in about fifteen minutes. This both encouraged participation and eliminated the need to disrupt an instructor’s class time with a pencil and paper administration.

Security was maintained by requiring each student to enter his or her name and student Internet username. This prevented students from completing the survey repeatedly. Each completed response was also screened individually by the researcher and examined for errors and incomplete items. The survey was available on-line for forty-seven days from March 1, 1999 to April 16, 1999. Survey data were kept strictly confidential in a secure database and were retrieved through file-transfer protocol. Anonymity was maintained through a data importation process which separated usernames from survey data.
Statistics

Original statistical data collection was conducted using Microsoft Outlook 98 and Microsoft Excel 97, using a Windows 95 operating system. Statistical manipulations, including descriptive statistics, frequency information, Cronbach’s index of internal consistency, factor analysis, and Pearson product-moment correlations, were conducted using version 7.5 of SPSS (SPSS Inc., 1997) on a Windows 95 platform.
Validating the PPI

As part of this study, the reliability and validity of the perceived parental influence subscale (PPI) were investigated (research question 1). The items from the PPI were analyzed for reliability and produced a .86 Cronbach’s alpha reliability, significantly strong for a fifteen-item scale (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). Cronbach’s alpha is the standard, generally accepted and useful measure of reliability (Keppel & Zedeck, 1989). Split-half reliability tests were also conducted, yielding coefficients of .83 and .69, for parts one and two, respectively. Table 4 illustrates these findings. Again, these are strong results for a brief scale. Based on this initial study, the PPI appears to be a reliable instrument.

Table 4
Reliability of the PPI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Reliability</th>
<th>Reliability Coefficient</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split-Half</td>
<td>.83 (8 items), .69 (7 items)</td>
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</table>

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the PPI scale using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The results, included in Table 5, indicated that a four-factor solution best fit the data. However, only three to five questions loaded on each factor, limiting interpretation and usefulness. As described in the literature
review, the underlying theory of the PPI is based upon a single construct. Therefore, the fit of a single-factor model was examined.

Table 5
Exploratory Factor Analysis of the PPI – Rotated Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CDS Item Number</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
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<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
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<td>18</td>
<td><strong>.786</strong></td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>.171</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>.172</td>
<td>.299</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>.517</td>
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<td>.143</td>
<td><strong>.525</strong></td>
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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
* absolute value < .100
The confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the PPI scale indicated that all items loaded reasonably well on one factor. Specific evidence gathered from factor analysis is identified in Table 6. All items loaded strongly on one factor, generally indicating that the theoretical conception of the PPI as a discreet entity is valid. Obviously, this is an initial study and further research must be done. However the current results indicate that the PPI is a reasonably valid and interpretable measure of parental influence on career development.

Table 6
Single-Factor Factor Analysis of the PPI – Component Matrix

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<td>10</td>
<td>.403</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>.265</td>
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</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Perceived Parental Influence (PPI) vs. Emotional Independence from Parents (IND)

The second research question addressed the relationship between perceived parental influence on career development and emotional independence from parents. There was a significant negative correlation between emotional independence from parents and perceived parental influence, as measured by the IND and PPI scales on the CDS. The overall correlation between IND and PPI was \(-.548\), which was significant at the \(p<.01\) level. This indicates that students who reported higher levels of emotional independence from their parents reported notably lower levels of parental influence on their college and career choices. This was as expected, because previous research has demonstrated that college students strive to be distinct and independent from their parents (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Perceived Parental Influence (PPI) vs. Vocational Commitment (VOC)

The third research question examined the relationship between perceived parental influence on career development and vocational commitment. There was a significant correlation between vocational commitment and perceived parental influence, as measured by the VOC and PPI scales on the CDS. The overall correlation between the two scales was \(.125\), which was moderately significant \((p<.05)\) given the sample size of 345 participants. In general, this indicates that students who reported greater vocational commitment also reported greater perceived parental influence on their career and college major decisions. It would appear that students were more willing to commit to a career or college choice when parental guidance was provided. However, only a small amount of variance was explained by this correlation; therefore further research should be done to
investigate and confirm the relationship between vocational commitment and parental influence.

**Vocational Commitment (VOC) vs. Emotional Independence from Parents (IND)**

The fourth research question explored the relationship between vocational commitment and emotional independence from parents. The results of the Career Development Survey (CDS) indicate that there is no significant correlation between vocational commitment and emotional independence from parents, when measured by the VOC and IND scales on the CDS. The overall correlation between the VOC and IND scales was -0.009, which was not significant or meaningful. This result fails to support previous research (Bluestein et al., 1991), which found a significant relationship between vocational commitment and autonomy from parents.

**Additional Findings**

Correlations among other variables were also analyzed to assist in better understanding the research question outcomes. There were significant correlations between age and emotional independence from parents, year in school and emotional independence from parents, and gender and emotional independence from parents. Generally, older students reported higher levels of emotional independence from their parents as was demonstrated by a 0.215 (p<.01) correlation between age and IND.

Culturally, this is encouraged and expected as individuals age and separate from their parents. Students in the early years of their college careers reported lower levels of emotional independence ($r = -0.192$, $p<.01$), which was as expected (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As previously reported (Hood, 1997), female students indicated lower
levels of emotional independence from parents than did their male counterparts (\(-.245, p<.01\)). This would suggest that female students feel more emotionally connected with their parents, but may also reflect society’s encouragement of parental dependence for females and discouragement of dependence for males (Lucas, 1997).

Both age and year in school were negatively correlated with perceived parental influence (\(r = -.204, p<.01\) and \(r = -.162, p<.01\) respectively), indicating that older students and those further along in their educational careers described their parents as having less influence on their college and career choices than younger students. These results were as expected because the influence of parents is generally accepted as decreasing over time (Newman & Newman, 1995).

Results indicated moderately significant positive correlations between both gender and vocational commitment and between age and vocational commitment (\(r = .129, p<.05\), and \(r = .107, p<.05\), respectively). Generally, this indicates that older students and female students tended to report more dedication to their current major and career choices. Older students may be more committed to their choices due to life experiences and progress in their chosen field. In broad American society, females are generally encouraged to be loyal and committed (Lucas, 1997). However, it is important to note that these are only moderate correlations and need to be confirmed by further research.
Table 7
Descriptive Statistics

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<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>Range</th>
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<td>17 – 57</td>
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<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>47.70</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>8 – 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPI</td>
<td>47.80</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>18 – 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOC</td>
<td>56.66</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>30 – 71</td>
</tr>
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</table>

N = 345

Table 8
Correlational Matrix

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<th>IND</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>.215**</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.245**</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>.192**</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>-.548**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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</table>

N = 345  * significant p<.05  ** significant p<.01
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The underlying purpose of this research was to examine the extent of the impact parents have on their children's career development. In examining this influence, it was necessary to inquire about the perceptions students have of the extent to which their parents contributed to their career decisions. The development of the PPI scale was an integral component of this inquiry.

The results of this pilot testing indicated that the PPI is a reliable and valid measure of students' perceptions of their parents' influence on their career development. The questions on the PPI scale examine both direct and indirect parental influence and ask students to consider the impact their parents have had on their career decisions. The mean score from the PPI ($M = 47.80$) indicated that the majority of the subjects who completed the CDS perceived some level of parental influence on their career decisions, since scores above 45 indicate some agreement that parents influenced career or college plans.

The inverse correlation found between the PPI scale and the IND scale also serves to add validity to the PPI as a measure of the parent-child relationship. The IND scale is designed to measure the emotional independence a child feels from his or her parents. The significant inverse correlation between the PPI scale and the IND scale suggests that as children perceive themselves as emotionally independent from their parents, they also perceive less parental influence on their career decisions. This finding is further
strengthened by the correlation between age and the IND scale and the negative
correlation demonstrated between age and the PPI scale, suggesting that as children grow
older, they become more emotionally independent from their parents and experience less
parental influence on their career choices.

While this study provided a vehicle for the initial examination of the validity and
reliability for the PPI, the results also shed light on the role of the parent-child
relationship and the development of career plans. The weak correlation between the PPI
scale and the VOC scale suggests that while parental influence may play a part in career
development, it comprises only a small portion of the myriad factors influencing career
and vocational decisions. This finding is further reinforced by the lack of correlation
between the VOC scale and the IND scale, suggesting little or no affiliation exists
between the parent-child relationship and commitment to career choices.

In fact, none of the factors examined in this study produced strong correlations
with the Vocational Commitment scale. However, the mean score reported on the VOC
subscale of the CDS (M = 56.66) indicates that the majority of the students in the sample
report being committed to their chosen career path or college major. Scores above 45
indicate some level of commitment to current occupational goals. This commitment may
be the result of college coursework completed or interaction with peers who share their
interests (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While parents may not influence their children's
commitment to a chosen career path, they do appear to influence the path children choose.
This influence must not be taken lightly and should be considered by counselors working
with students or clients to develop career plans.
The final important outcome of this study was to provide additional data confirming the validity of the two subscales of the Iowa Student Development Inventories incorporated into the CDS. First, the mean, standard deviation and range results from the Emotional Independence-Parents (IND) subscale were very similar to previous research. Hood (1997) reported a mean of 47.53, a standard deviation of 10.79, and a range of 22 – 74 for the Emotional Independence-Parents subscale. The present study found a mean of 47.70, a standard deviation of 9.27, and a range of 8 – 75 (the low score of 8 indicates that not all items were completed) for the respondents completing the CDS.

Second, the Vocational Commitment (VOC) subscale also produced mean, standard deviation, and range results similar to those reported by previous researchers. The Vocational Commitment subscale produced a mean of 56.89, a standard deviation of 8.02, and a range of 33 – 70 in previous research (Hood, 1997), while the respondents to the CDS generated a mean of 56.66, a standard deviation of 7.66, and a range of 30 – 71 on the same subscale. These data not only continue to confirm the validity of the Iowa Student Development Inventories, but also suggest that the subjects examined in this study were a representative cross-section of the college student population as a whole.
The results of the Career Development Survey (CDS) offer both support and contradiction to previous research findings. The most significant correlation identified was a negative relationship between the perceived parental influence (PPI) subscale and the emotional independence from parents (IND) subscale. A weaker correlation was identified between the PPI subscale and the vocational commitment (VOC) subscale, but no significant relationship was found between the IND and VOC subscales. While this study was critical in determining the reliability of the PPI subscale as an effective measure of perceived parental influence, the correlations obtained were between the three subscales while significant were only of moderate size. This limitation prevents strong assumptions as to the meaningfulness of the findings.

While the findings of this study were not strongly predictive of the relationship between the parent-adolescent relationship and the establishment of career identity, they do suggest that a relationship exists. These results suggest that counselors must consider the family relationship in the development of career-related interventions. In particular, counselors may wish to explore the degree of support and conflict present in the parent-child relationship for those adolescents who seem to be struggling with the career decision-making process.

The present results should be considered in light of several limitations. First, while findings suggest that correlational relationships exist, causal relationships have been precluded. Second, the measure used in this study is based on self-report and must
be interpreted with some degree of caution despite generally favorable psychometric properties. Third, the sample was only loosely controlled and the findings do not account for family structure. Fourth, the voluntary method of sample selection and data collection may not provide a representative cross-section of the population as a whole.

Future research in this area should continue to examine the impact of familial relationships and parental influence on individual’s career choices. Samples from diverse settings would be useful in enhancing the validity of these findings. In addition, the impact of dual-parent versus single-parent and non-traditional families should be explored and accounted for. Despite its limitations, this study provides additional support to the theoretical framework which enhances the understanding of the complex association between the parent-adolescent relationship and career development.
REFERENCES


WIN $100 IN 15 MINUTES!!!

• Give me ten to fifteen minutes of your time to fill out my online survey, and not only will you be a part of landmark research at EIU, but I will also enter your name in a drawing for a $100 gift certificate to the EIU bookstore. (And we all know how handy that would be!)

Greetings fellow students!

My name is Michael Ladd and I am a graduate student working on my thesis and conducting research on career development. Instead of taking valuable class time or wasting valuable paper resources on data collection for my study, I am attempting to utilize the Internet as a research tool. My survey questions are available online -- now all I need are willing subjects to participate by taking time to answer the questions!

We're all very busy, which is why I'm offering the drawing as an incentive for people to complete my survey. (It's that or beg, as this is the last hurdle between me and graduation!!!)

Help a guy out! Please direct your web browser to the following URL:

http://www.eiu.edu/~csdres

Follow the instructions at the start up screen, complete all the survey items, include your name and e-mail address at the bottom of the survey, and press the submit button. I'll take care of the rest!

Thanks for your support in this endeavor,

Mike
APPENDIX B

Career Development Survey

Questions 1 & 2 are answered using the following scale:

5 = Frequently; 4 = Many times; 3 = Sometimes; 2 = Rarely; 1 = Never

1. I spoke with my parent(s) about my choice of major prior to enrolling in college.
2. I spoke with my parent(s) about my choice of career field prior to enrolling in college.

Questions 3 - 20 are answered using the following scale:

5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat agree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

3. My parent(s) had high expectations for me to attend college.
4. My parent(s) helped me to decide on my choice of college major.
5. My parent(s) have had the greatest influence over the direction my life has taken.
6. My parent(s) helped me to decide on my choice of career field.
7. My moral/ethical values are similar to the moral/ethical values of my parent(s).
8. My choice of major was made because my parent(s) directed me into my field of study.
9. My parent(s) do not approve of my choice to attend college. (-)*
10. The career field I have chosen is similar to that of my parent(s).
11. My career field reflects the expectations and influence of my parent(s).
12. My work values are similar to the work values of my parent(s).
13. My parent(s) do not approve of my chosen career field. (-)
14. My future lifestyle (after graduation) will be similar to that of my parent(s).
15. My parent(s) and I have a close relationship.
16. I have had the greatest influence over the direction my life has taken.*
17. My parent(s) do not approve of my choice of college major. (-)*
18. My chosen career field was suggested by my parent(s).
19. I am very satisfied with my choice of major.*

20. I am very satisfied with my chosen career field.*

* These questions were eliminated from the PPI scale following preliminary factor analysis (see Appendix A).

Questions 21 - 35 are answered using the following scale:

5 = Almost Always Characteristic of Me; 4 = Often Characteristic of Me; 3 = Sometimes Characteristic of Me; 2 = Seldom Characteristic of Me; 1 = Never Characteristic of Me

21. I would go against my parents' wishes if the issue was very important to me.

22. I get upset if I don't get a letter or phone call from my family. (-)

23. My opinions are quite independent from those of my parents.

24. I need to contact my parents when I feel discouraged. (-)

25. I solve most of my problems on my own without family help.

26. I get upset if my parents don't approve of my leisure activities. (-)

27. I don't feel the need to call my parents before making a financial investment.

28. I look to my parents for solutions to personal problems. (-)

29. I can reject my parents' advice.

30. I would prefer to compromise myself than to go against my parents' wishes. (-)

31. I do not feel the need for family reassurance when I embark on a new venture.

32. I would not feel upset when entering a place that lacked my parents' approval.

33. I don't need my parents' approval of the people I date.

34. I feel emotionally independent of my parents.

35. It's very important to me that my parents accept what I'm doing. (-)

Questions 36 - 50 are answered using the following scale:

5 = Always True; 4 = Often True; 3 = Sometimes True; 2 = Rarely True; 1 = Never True

36. I am prepared to work towards my current vocational goals.

37. My career commitment helps me to make decisions.
38. I have not formulated a vocational identity. (-)
39. I am always considering a new career direction. (-)
40. I have no special interest in the courses I'm taking now. (-)
41. I am just drifting along in life. (-)
42. My first choice and second choice of future employment are in a similar area or field.
43. I do not know what I'd like to do with the rest of my life. (-)
44. I feel confident I have chosen the best field for me.
45. I wish I could select another career field. (-)
46. I identify with people working in my career goal.
47. When completing assignments my own satisfaction is more important than the grade.
48. I am more committed to one vocational path than I have ever been.
49. I exceed all basic requirements in my courses.
50. I have answered this questionnaire honestly.
### APPENDIX C

Factor Analysis of the Original Perceived Parental Influence Survey

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<thead>
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<th>CDS Item Number</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
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</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, restricted to one factor
APPENDIX D

VITA

NAME: Michael Wayne Ladd

DATE OF BIRTH: July 27, 1972

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Ed. S. in Guidance & Counseling, August 2000
Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL

EXPERIENCE:
Vocational Coordinator / Guidance Counselor
Shiloh C.U.S.D. #1, August 1999 - June 2000

Guidance Counselor / Guidance Intern
Windsor H. S. / Shiloh H. S., August 1998 - June 1999

Graduate Assistant
Eastern Illinois University, August 1996 - May 1999

Middle School Teacher
Thunderbolt Middle School, August 1994 - June 1996

Resident Advisor
University of Illinois, August 1993 - May 1994

Residential Camp Counselor
Camp Tecumseh YMCA, Summers 1991 - 1993