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The current study examined the memorable messages first-generation college students received from their on-campus mentors about college and family. Accordingly, 30 first-generation college students shared mentors' memorable messages during in-depth, semistructured, responsive interviews. Four hundred sixty-seven pages of transcripts were analyzed for emergent themes. First-generation college students' voices revealed five college memorable messages themes including (a) pursuing academic success, (b) valuing school, (c) increasing future potential, (d) making decisions, and (e) support and encouragement. In addition, three family memorable messages themes emerged, including (a) comparing and contrasting, (b) counting on family, and (c) recognizing the importance of family.

Keywords: First-Generation College Students; Mentoring; Memorable Messages; Teacher–Student Relationship

Since the early 1970s, the relational approach has heavily influenced instructional communication scholarship (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006). Relational researchers argue that teachers and students construct shared meaning within the context of the teacher–student relationship (Mottet & Beebe, 2006) through facets of friendship such as affection, equality, and mutuality (Rawlins, 2000). To build this argument, relational researchers posit that teacher–student relationships share characteristics with other interpersonal relationships (DeVito, 1986; Fink, 2003; Frymier & Houser,

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2000; Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). To illustrate that the teacher–student relationship is indeed an interpersonal relationship, researchers have explored the types of communicative messages that teachers use to construct meaning and build interpersonal relationships with their students in the classroom.

For example, Frymier and Houser (2000) concluded that communication skills that are important to friendships are also important to teacher–student relationships and that these communication skills can lead to satisfying outcomes for teachers and students. Several researchers have expanded this line of inquiry by exploring specific teacher communication behaviors that contribute to an interpersonal relationship such as teacher confirmation, "the process by which teachers communicate to students that they are valuable, significant individuals" (Ellis, 2000, p. 265). Subsequent research explored the impact of perceived teacher confirmation on teacher perceptions and student outcomes including teacher credibility and evaluations (Schrodt, Turman, & Soliz, 2006), teacher power use (Turman & Schrodt, 2006), and student communication (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). Another teacher communication behavior that contributes to an interpersonal relationship is caring, which includes three factors: empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (McCroskey, 1992). Subsequent research explored the impact of caring on student outcomes (Teven & McCroskey, 1997), student perceptions (Teven & Gorham, 1998), and teacher nonimmediate behaviors (Teven & Hanson, 2004).

The confirmation and caring literatures indicate that interpersonal relationships develop when teachers engage in communication behaviors that promote interaction (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). One way teachers can promote interaction is through mentoring (Buell, 2004). In the instructional setting, Lasley (1996) found that mentoring was an effective method for increasing students' self-esteem and helping students reach their potential. In the organizational setting, Frazee (1997) argued that mentoring was critical to successful socialization into the organization. In settings that are both instructional and organizational such as the classroom, mentors can serve as "a person who looks after, advises, protects, and takes a special interest in another's development" (Buell, 2004, p. 58). Thus, understanding more about mentoring may enrich the understanding of what teacher communication behaviors constitute effective communication.

To date, communication research has focused on mentoring as a dialogic practice (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000) and the precursor to career success (Hill, Bahniuk, & Dobos, 1989), the effectiveness of mentoring over time (Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, & Kearney, 1997), and the impact of mentor and mentee characteristics on the mentoring process (Bell, Golombisky, Singh, & Hirschmann, 2000). Mentoring communication has received less attention (Buell, 2004). Thus, researchers should study the skills and knowledge mentors transfer through their messages. In the present study, I explored the interpersonal dynamics that create mentoring relationships by examining the messages mentors communicate to their mentees. The study is framed by existing research that has focused on understanding the effects of communication competence in mentoring relationships (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993), conceptual models for understanding mentoring (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1993), and communication aspects

of mentoring relationships (Bullis & Bach, 1989; Kalbfleisch, 2002; Kalbfleisch & Keyton, 1995).

Although mentors communicate many messages to their mentees, not all messages are retained. When messages are internalized and remembered, they become an influential socializing force in the recipients' lives (Stohl, 1986). Within the mentoring relationship, memorable messages can remain salient throughout students' college experiences and postcollege careers. Thus mentors' messages can serve as a support system and a socializing force. When informal mentors guide professional and personal development by nurturing intellectual growth, self-efficacy, resourcefulness, and identity, the mentoring relationship can develop into a "high-quality social and reciprocal relationship" (Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008, p. 315).

Mentoring relationships are distinguished from other interpersonal relationships by the degree of support and individualized contact between the mentor and mentee (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). To better understand these messages, this study is guided by the memorable messages framework (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981). Memorable messages are defined as "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 et al., 1981, p. 27). Memorable messages involve brief prescriptive oral commands (Knapp et al., 1981) that often come from an authority figure (Ellis & Smith, 2004). The content of these messages is shaped by context (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keeley, 2004). Thus, the focus of the present study was memorable messages students received from their on-campus mentors.

First-Generation College Students

In this study, I focused on first-generation college (FGC) students, a subset of the college student population. These students merit study because they cope with unique challenges as educational pioneers who are often the first in their family to complete a four-year degree (London, 1996). Today, although FGC students comprise roughly 30 percent of entering freshmen, they continue to face many challenges as they transition from high school to college (Ramsey & Peale, 2010). This transition is complicated by "a highly interrelated, web-like series of family, interpersonal, academic, and organizational pulls and pushes" (Terenzini et al., 1994, p. 61). Navigating this web involves balancing complementary or competing personal and collective goals (Benmayor, 2002). While balancing complementary personal and collective goals is fairly easy, balancing competing personal and collective goals can be more challenging. As FGC students adopt competing personal and collective goals, they must decide which goals to privilege (Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004). Many FGC students who struggle with balancing competing goals also struggle to match continuing-generation college (CGC) students in credit hour enrollment (Nichols & Lucas, 2010), time of major declaration (Nichols & Lucas, 2010), GPA (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Nichols & Lucas, 2010), retention rates (Ishitani, 2006; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Nichols & Lucas, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004;

Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004), and graduate education rates (Pascarella et al., 2004).

While researchers argue that there is a gap between FGC and CGC students, Arellano and Padilla (1996) suggested that strong mentoring relationships can help narrow this gap. As FGC students transition from high school to college, they begin to establish an identity apart from their family (Orbe, 2008). However, they still remain linked to their family since their success remains a part of family pride and success (Orbe, 2003, 2008). Although parental pride can translate into support for FGC students (Orbe, 2003) success can also be contingent on FGC students' ability to connect with others and seek support outside the family (Orbe, 2004). Finding support on campus impacts academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Finding support is critical because academic and social integration predict retention (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000) and persistence (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993; Pollard, 1990). Supportive mentors can provide necessary assistance for FGC students (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006) by making the college experience easier (Arellano & Padilla, 1996) and helping FGC students build a community of significant and supportive relationships (Sanchez et al., 2006).

Out-of-class communication (OCC) and out-of-class support (OCS) illustrate two ways teachers can build significant and supportive relationships with students. OCC places teachers in a position to connect with students and maximize the interdependence between inside and outside the classroom learning (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003) and has been shown to lead to positive outcomes such as retention (Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997), academic performance (Pascarella, 1980; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996), perceived immediacy and trust (Jaasma & Koper, 1999), and student satisfaction (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). OCS, a type of OCC, places teachers in a position where they can help students effectively address college stressors and challenges and has been shown to lead to positive outcomes such as student satisfaction and motivation (Jones, 2008). For FGC students who succeed at establishing mentoring relationships, these relationships and human ties can also lead to academic success (Benmayor, 2002). Because college and family are both central to FGC students, I designed this study to focus on memorable messages FGC students received from their on-campus mentors about college and family.

The focus on messages is appropriate because mentors build closeness and strengthen their relationships with mentees through communication and interaction. While FGC students often seek support from their parents first, their parents are often unable to understand FGC students' challenges or offer practical advice (Orbe, 2003) because parents lack the college experience needed to understand their children's experiences (Ceballo, 2004). When parents lack the specific first-hand insights FGC students need to succeed in college, FGC students begin to seek "how to" messages from mentors who have the first-hand college knowledge their parents lack (Nichols & Lucas, 2010). When FGC students are able to learn the "how to" messages from their mentors, they have the first-hand knowledge they need to be successful in college.

Guiding Frameworks: Memorable Messages and Relational Dialectics Theory
(RDT 2.0)

Benmayor (2002) described memory as the nexus between students' experience and cultural citizenship. From amongst the thousands of messages FGC students receive each day from different sources, some messages are remembered (Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001). These memorable messages can be distinguished from other messages in four ways. First, memorable messages are both legitimate and personal, and occur at difficult, equivocal, watershed points in time (Stohl, 1986). In the present study, the decision to attend college represented an important issue and the high-school-to-college transition represented an equivocal point in time for FGC students. Second, memorable messages are retained rather than released from memory's cache (Smith et al., 2001). Thus, in the present study, FGC students recalled specific messages they remembered hearing rather than describing general everyday talk that occurred over time. Third, memorable messages are internalized (Knapp et al., 1981). Finally, memorable messages continue to influence people's lives long after they are received (Stohl, 1986). Thus, in the present study, FGC students recalled messages that have shaped them into who they are today and continue to influence their current actions. Memorable messages are an appropriate framework because they are "a rich source of information about ourselves and our ways of communicating and socializing" (Stohl, 1986, p. 232). In the present study, memorable messages illuminated what FGC students remembered hearing from their on-campus mentors and helped explain the socialization process that occurs as FGC students make sense of mentors' messages.

Because memorable messages serve as socializing forces, extending this line of inquiry makes sense in light of organizational socialization researchers who have explored how mentors socialize newcomers through memorable messages (e.g., Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Bullis, 1993; Kassing & Pappas, 2007; Stohl, 1986). For FGC students, learning and socialization represent the process of meaning construction (Giddens, 1979). Communication remains central to socialization because communication is the primary means by which socialization is achieved (Kassing et al., 2004; Mean, 2001). Thus, I extended memorable messages research to a new organizational socialization context: the college campus.

Because FGC students may experience highly interrelated pulls and pushes between college and family (Terenzini et al., 1994), this interplay of discourses may be best understood using RDT 2.0 (Baxter, 2011). RDT 2.0 expands the work of the first formal articulation of relational dialectics theory RDT 1.0 (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Since Orbe (2008) used RDT 1.0 to advance an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for understanding richer concepts, RDT 2.0 may further inform our understanding of FGC students. Baxter (2011) outlined five interrelated differences between RDT 2.0 and RDT 1.0 including (a) underscoring that contradiction is a discursive struggle, (b) reconceptualizing an utterance from an isolated sequence of words to an utterance chain, (c) focusing on the interplay of competing discourses as the place where meanings are made, (d) drawing attention to discursive inequality, and (e) favoring interpretive methods. I utilized RDT 2.0 rather than RDT 1.0 in this

study to examine the interplay of the competing discourses Orbe (2008) introduced in his interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

Research Questions and Rationale

My purpose in this study was to extend previous work in organizational socialization and memorable messages research to the instructional context using RDT 2.0 as a theoretical framework for understanding the interplay of competing college and family discourses. I focused on five aspects of memorable messages: memorable messages as (a) organizational socialization, (b) meaning construction, (c) a sensemaking framework, (d) a powerful linguistic tool to interpret meaning in future experiences, and (e) a coconstructive process between college and family socialization. My goals included studying socializing mentor–FGC mentee communication, describing how language transforms college–family boundaries, and uncovering how social knowledge is communicated among diverse communities (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). Thus, the following research questions guided the study:

RQ1:   What memorable messages do FGC students receive from on-campus mentors about the role a college education should play in their lives?

RQ2:   What memorable messages do FGC students receive from on-campus mentors about the role family should play in their lives?

Methods and Procedures

Researchers have approached memorable messages research from postpositivistic (e.g., Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Holladay, 2002; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith et al., 2001) and interpretive (e.g., Ford & Ellis, 1998; Keeley, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981; Stohl, 1986) paradigms. For interpretive researchers, human action is situated in meaning rather than causes or functions (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Thus, interpretive researchers seek to understand what human action means to people (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). By framing this study in the interpretive paradigm, I got "in the inner experience of participants to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). The examination of FGC students' memorable messages helped me understand what on-campus mentors tell their mentees about college and family from the FGC student's perspective. I situated the study in the interpretive paradigm so I could ask detailed questions about contextual information and message interpretation, contextualize and interpret meaning from the FGC student's perspective, and derive themes from FGC students' understanding of message context and mentoring relationship history (Medved et al., 2006).

Participants

Interpretive researchers try to see the world through their participants' eyes (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, I chose a purposive sample of 30 participants who had experienced the phenomenon of interest (Baxter & Babbie,

2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These participants were 19 or older and met the U.S. Department of Education's (1998) definition of a FGC student: neither parent had completed a bachelor's degree.

Data Collection

I used semistructured interviews to obtain FGC students' interpretations of mentors' memorable messages (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In these interviews, I asked FGC students to describe and explain their mentors' memorable messages using their own words and phrases. Although a protocol guided the interview, I also used followed-up questions, probed interesting insights, and changed course as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). By listening to each student, I gained an aggregate sense of the memorable messages FGC students received from on-campus mentors. Semistructured interviews also allowed me to derive detailed, rich exemplars related to the research questions.

Using Rubin and Rubin's (2005) guidelines for producing an interview protocol and Knapp et al.'s (1981) memorable messages characteristics as a guide, I created a semistructured protocol, used open-ended questions, and prompted FGC students to describe and explain on-campus mentors' memorable messages using descriptive personal stories and examples. As is customary in previous research, I asked FGC students to recall messages from a mentor of their choice rather than prescribing a certain type of mentor.

Using theoretical saturation as the measure of completeness rather than a specific number of interviews, I conducted 30 interviews, estimating that theoretical saturation was reached at the 13th interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical saturation represents the point in analysis when all categories are well developed, and further data collection and analysis add little to the existing conceptualization (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Since I continued to discover variations after the thirteenth interview, interviewing continued in order to develop a credible data set and to ensure the most descriptive exemplars. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The mean age of the participants was 22 with a range of 19–64 years of age. There were 20 female and 10 male participants. Of those participants 12 were freshmen, 10 were sophomores, five were juniors, and three were seniors. There were 20 Caucasian, four Asian, four Hispanic, and two biracial participants.

Data Analysis

Data for the present study were 476 pages of double-spaced interview transcripts. Using Smith's (1995) qualitative thematic analysis guidelines, I read the transcripts twice: initially to gain a holistic perspective and subsequently to note emerging college and family memorable message themes. I noted emerging themes by typing key words and comments in the margins. To derive themes, Owen's (1984) method of interpretation was used to ensure each theme met his criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. I then clustered these themes into college and family categories in line with the research questions and looked for connections. Each theme

was labeled using the extant FGC student and memorable messages literature. Once theoretical saturation was reached, I generated a theme list and matched each theme with exemplars (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Verification

I assessed the validity of the results using an interactive data conference (Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Stake, 1995) and member checking (Creswell, 2007). At the conference, I discussed my results with two qualitative research methods experts and invited them to offer feedback related to my results. Member checking involved taking summaries of the findings back to key participants to see whether the findings accurately reflected their experiences (Creswell, 2007). From these two processes, I adjusted the analysis as needed.

Results

Five college and three family memorable messages themes emerged. College themes included memorable messages about (a) pursuing academic success, (b) valuing school, (c) increasing future potential, (d) making decisions, and (e) support and encouragement. Family themes included memorable messages about (a) comparing and contrasting, (b) counting on family, and (c) recognizing the importance of family. At least one of these themes, and usually multiple themes, was identified in all 30 interviews. Each theme is discussed in turn.

Memorable Messages about College

In response to RQ1, I identified the memorable messages FGC students received from on-campus mentors about the role a college education should play in their lives. Memorable messages were categorized into the following themes listed in Table 1: (a) pursuing academic success, (b) valuing school, (c) increasing future potential, (d) making decisions, and (e) support and encouragement.

Memorable messages about pursuing academic success. Some FGC students described how memorable messages showed them how to be successful. The first subtheme was *finding appropriate resources.* A 19-year-old sophomore reported this subtheme to me this way:

> [My mentor and I] developed a plan of how I should study (to make more flashcards and draw little diagrams) and since I'm a visual learner . . . he really focused on that with me . . . He told me to go back and . . . practice those problems you already did for homework . . . I ended up getting an A in the class and when I got my A I was just ecstatic because I was just like oh my gosh I just tried for something that was so hard for me and maybe I can actually stay in college. (Participant #6 (#6), lines (ll.) 188–197)

After receiving a failing grade on her first exam as a freshman, this FGC student was emotional and upset because she had never received a failing grade before. She sought

Table 1 College Memorable Message Themes

Theme	Example	N	%
Pursuing Academic Success			
Finding Appropriate Resources	Stay involved and always know what's offered on campus. (#26)	4	13.3
Finding a Balance Between Educational and Social Activities	College is a social experience as well as an educational experience. (#15)	3	10
Making Intelligent Decisions	Don't skip class because you will get behind. (#28)	3	10
Valuing School			
Valuing the Degree	This is one of the top schools in the nation and having that on your degree is a really big deal. (#7)	4	13.3
Valuing the College Experience	College is a time for fun but it's also a bridge to your future so you want to build a strong bridge. (#11)	2	6.7
Increasing Future Potential			
Greater Financial Stability	If you get a good education you'll get more money. You can be at a high level in the society and you can enjoy life. (#27)	3	10
Greater Career Options	If you don't study you will be like your mom working at a meat-packaging plant so you have to study to build your future and help yourself. (#4)	2	6.7
Making Decisions			
Course Selection	Before you make a schedule sit down and think about what you can take that would be a good thing for you. (#1)	2	6.7
Major and/or Minor Selection	My mentors ask me what kind of lifestyle I want and do I want a family and how much money do I want to make. (#23)	1	3.3
Support and Encouragement			
Motivation	You can do this. You have every right to try just like anyone else. No matter what your personal things are you should try. (#19)	4	13.3
Solidarity	My mentor used to live in a town with a lot of gangs and violence and out of his family he's one of the few that went to college. He told us his life story and it impacted us. (#20)	2	6.7

out help from her mentor who helped her draft a plan to help improve her study skills which included resources tailored specifically to visual learners. This FGC student viewed this message as memorable because it helped her find the resources she needed to prove that she could succeed in college.

The second subtheme was *finding a balance between educational and social activities*. A 19-year-old freshman recounted how her mentor encouraged her to take a break from studying.

> I came to college very . . . focused on my studies and I would study a lot . . . [My mentor] encouraged me to . . . open my horizons and . . . explore other areas like get involved in group organizations or do intramurals and . . . take part in the social aspect of college rather than just focusing on studies all the time . . . She's like come play soccer with me . . . You have time . . . I was so hesitant but I went out there. I met so many more new people and I had fun. (#15, ll. 87–91, 98–102)

After hearing her mentor's memorable messages, this FGC student changed her view on college. She realized that she could pursue both social and educational experiences. While this FGC student still viewed her classes as her highest priority, she also worked in weekly study breaks where she would engage in social events with her friends.

The third subtheme was *making intelligent decisions that would pay off in the future.* A 20-year-old sophomore reported this subtheme this way:

> I'm actually doing research with … my mentor … I guess since I'm only a sophomore and already doing research he says that's pretty impressive … I guess that gives me confidence that what I'm doing right now even though it's pretty busy and hectic it's gonna pay off in the long run. It helps me get into graduate school … Overall this experience has been great because … [my program] basically told me it's going to kinda be like graduate school. It's given me an insight on what I'll be doing so I'm getting this experience … so I'll be ahead of most of the people. (#25, ll. 47–56)

To achieve his dream of earning a Ph.D., this FGC student worked with his mentor to design a research project that would prepare him for graduate school. After making the decision to pursue this research project, this FGC student expressed excitement that he was working toward something that was important to him that would pay off as he pursued a graduate degree.

Memorable messages about valuing school. Some FGC students reported that their mentors encouraged them to take school seriously. The first subtheme was *valuing the degree.* A 19-year-old freshman's memorable message captures this subtheme.

> [My mentor said] football and sports can only take you so far. These will be the memorable moments of your life, but a piece of paper and a degree will last you a life time. At first I thought … make money same as all the other football players who want to make money [and] go play ball somewhere and then you start to realize … the realistic version that only so many players get to do that and live the dream … [If I go pro], I want to be one of those people who invest my money properly, … but I know if I get a good degree I'm going to end up having a nice job. (#2, ll. 115–125)

This FGC student-athlete was initially skeptical about the value of his degree because he believed he would have the opportunity to make millions of dollars by leaving college to play football professionally. After hearing from his mentor that not all student-athletes have the opportunity to pursue this opportunity and that many student-athletes pursue careers outside of sports, he began to see the value of earning his degree and pursuing a career related to his major.

The second subtheme was *valuing the college experience and time spent pursuing the degree.* A 19-year-old freshman's memorable message reflects this subtheme.

> [My mentor] said that college is a once in a lifetime experience. You meet a whole bunch of people. You find who you're gonna be later in life … You might not know exactly what you're gonna do when you go in but going out you might have a very positive idea about what you want to start. (#30, ll. 71–74)

This FGC student stated that his mentor showed him that he should make the most of his opportunity to attend college because he would only have one opportunity to

pursue his undergraduate degree. The time spent in college was especially valuable to him because he could form new friendships and develop ideas about what he wanted to pursue following college.

Memorable messages about increasing future potential. Some mentors described the advantages FGC students would have over peers who had not completed a college degree. The first subtheme was *greater financial stability*. A 29-year-old senior's account of her mentor's memorable message illustrates this subtheme.

> [My mentor said] if you get [a] good education . . . you'll get more money. You can be [at a] high level in the society and you can enjoy life . . . The educated people get all the respect and they can go wherever they want and study more . . . You can live however you want . . . My parents . . . can't even go out of [their small village] so it's a big difference . . . You can tell . . . how uneducated people are . . . They're struggling . . . like . . . how my parents . . . are and now my husband he got educated . . . and he can decide his own life. It's so different. (#27, ll. 64–77)

This FGC student stated that her mentor's memorable message showed her the differences between people who pursued an education and flourished, and those who did not and struggled. By pursuing an education, this FGC student believed that she could make a better life for her and her husband than her less educated parents had had. This message was particularly memorable for this student because she used this message as a form of reassurance whenever she got discouraged and wondered why she was working hard to continue her education.

The second subtheme was *greater career options*. A 22-year-old senior elaborated on the difference she saw between four-year- and two-year-degree career options.

> My sister didn't go to . . . college. She went to beauty school so I was the only one in my family that has gone to college and [my mentor] just said that she thought it'd be the right fit for me because I didn't want to go to a two year school and be graduated when I was 19 and start working. (#29, ll. 73–76)

This FGC student considered this message to be a memorable message because it shaped what she had chosen to do with her life. After considering where she would have been today if she had not chosen to pursue a four-year degree, she concluded that she would have probably earned a two-year degree and worked at an entry-level job where she would have struggled to move up. Pursuing a four-year degree allowed her to pursue additional career options.

Memorable messages about making decisions. As FGC students pursued their degrees, mentors often helped students make academic decisions. The first subtheme was *course selection*. This 19-year-old freshman reported her mentor's memorable message this way:

> I'm just starting out college and I don't know much about . . . classes or . . . what class is required . . . and things like that . . . [My mentor] helped me to focus on hey these are the guidelines. Take this class and try your best to get at least a C or a B . . . I think that really helps . . . just to know there's a person in campus to support me and push me on and lead me to the right direction. [Without someone there,] it's kinda like I'm in the

> dark and you don't know what you're doing...just show up and doing what you need to do but you don't know what's gonna benefit you in the future...You don't know that until later on [when] it's too late. (#9, ll. 100–108)

This FGC student credited her mentor with keeping her out of the dark in that she knew what was expected and would not be blindsided her senior year with courses she still needed to take to graduate. Her meetings with her mentor gave her confidence that she was selecting the right courses that would help her complete her degree plan and graduate on time.

The second subtheme was *major and/or minor selection*. A 20-year-old junior's memorable message supports this subtheme.

> We talk a lot about what I'm going to do...and they try and help me to...find the minor that will work best for me...'cause it's really hard. I still don't quite know what I want to do when I graduate 'cause it's such a broad...major...They asked me... what kind of lifestyle I want and...do I want a family [and] how much money do I want to make. It is hard to think about...what am I going to do with the rest of my life...[My minor is] always in the back of my mind and so it's like I...reference back to what they say giving me guidance [about]...where I should go and...what I want to do...It's helpful [because] my advisors and mentors [have] been in the same situation. They know what it's like. (#23, ll. 89–103)

This message was memorable because this FGC student constantly thought back to the advice she had received about her minor selection. Receiving helpful advice from mentors who had experience selecting a minor gave her information she could consider as she made her decision.

Memorable messages that provided support and encouragement. Some FGC students reported memorable messages from mentors who provided support and encouragement rather than advice. The first subtheme was *motivation*. One 19-year-old freshman described her mentor's memorable message as follows:

> [My] friends back in the dorm [are] always saying...you can do it. I have a lot of homework and all that sort of thing so when I'm back in the dorms and when I'm struggling...or when I'm stressing to meet deadlines...they're always like hey you can do it. Don't worry...you'll get through it. [Their memorable message] motivates me and...makes me kinda feel better about [it]. If I'm stressing about a project it really makes me feel better and more comfortable with it. [It's] like knowing that they understand and that they believe in me. (#12, ll. 84–87, 99–101)

This FGC student stated that her mentors' encouragement helped her alleviate the stress she felt about upcoming projects and assignments. She was confident that her friends understood what she was going through and would help her overcome the stressors she was facing. She was especially appreciative of her mentors who chose to encourage her for eight hours while she was studying rather than going out and doing something else.

The second subtheme was *solidarity*. A 64-year-old sophomore described how she found common ground with her mentor who was a similar age.

> I particularly remember the first class I took . . . [The] young lady that taught it . . . had her Ph.D. and was about my age and we . . . often talked in class . . . and privately about . . . the way we women were just not encouraged back in our day to even graduate . . . We were not encouraged strongly to pursue an academic route and . . . so she just really cheered me and encouraged me . . . to go for it . . . I've had a lot of [mentors] like that but she's the one that really sticks out because she was my first. (#21, ll. 73–81)

Although this FGC student experienced some nervousness entering a college classroom, she became more comfortable when she realized that she and her mentor were similar in age and came from similar backgrounds. Having a mentor whom she could identify with helped her relax and realize that she had made the right decision to pursue her degree.

Memorable Messages about Family

In response to RQ2, I identified the memorable messages FGC students received from on-campus mentors about the role family should play in their lives. Memorable messages were categorized into the following themes listed in Table 2: (a) comparing and contrasting, (b) counting on family, and (c) recognizing the importance of family.

Memorable messages about comparing and contrasting. Some FGC students used memorable messages to gauge similarities and differences between their families and their mentors' families. The first subtheme consisted of FGC students who *wanted better family relationships than their mentors had*. A 19-year-old freshman captures this subtheme:

> My mom and I were just having our normal weird conversations probably and . . . [my mentor's] like it's so weird that you talk to your mom like she's your sister, when I can't even talk to my sister like she's my sister. It was weird to think . . . this is . . . a rare thing. It really makes you realize that you . . . take for granted little things like that because . . . if she wanted to go and rant about something like how I would just turn to my mom and . . . she'd [wonder] who do I talk to . . . I kinda take that position in her life . . . I know that if I didn't want to turn to her I could turn to my mom no matter what. (#1, ll. 315–318, 326–331)

After a conversation with her mentor, this FGC student began to value the close relationship she had with her mother when she realized that her mentor had no family member to turn to for support. After comparing and contrasting her family relationship with her mentor's family relationship, she devoted more time to fulfilling the role of sister for her mentor.

The second subtheme consisted of FGC students who *strived to make their family relationships better* so their relationships more closely resembled their mentors' relationships. A 19-year-old freshman's discussion of his mentor's memorable message supports this subtheme.

> [My mentor] is part of a big family and he stays in touch with all of his family members and goes to all of his family functions so I guess that . . . rubbed off to me with the fact that someone I'm close to and admire has . . . a big family and he counted it as very important so it's memorable because . . . whereas my parents were saying immediate

Table 2   Family Memorable Message Themes

Theme	Example	N	%
Comparing and Contrasting			
Wanted Better Family Relationship Than Mentors' Family Relationship	It's so weird that you talk to your mom like she's your sister, when I can't even talk to my sister like she's my sister. It really makes you realize that you take for granted little things like that. (#1)	3	13.6
Wanted Family Relationship Like Mentors' Family Relationship	She talks to her mom no matter what, and it wasn't until this semester my mom started talking a lot more, and I just followed habits from her and put more effort to tell my mom what's going on if she calls. (#12)	5	22.7
Viewed Mentor as a Supplement to Family Relationship	She's been like that second mother, so if I'm having trouble with something, I run to her house and talk to her. (#28)	1	4.5
Counting on Family			
Parental Advice	Your parents offer you another insight to college that you might not think about being a freshman in college. (#13)	3	13.6
Parental Support	My mentor said your family's a big support to your education, and he was right because without my family there always pushing me, I wouldn't try my hardest in school or my hardest in anything. (#9)	5	22.7
Recognizing the Importance of Family			
Remember Your Roots	Remember your roots. Remember what your family went through. (#5)	1	4.5
Appreciate and Respect Your Family	Look out for the best for your mom because it's hardest on your mom when you leave. (#29)	3	13.6
Be a Role Model	You gotta be somebody too. You gotta be somebody we're proud of so you can be somebody we look up to. (#5)	1	4.5

family is important he was . . . showing me that . . . while they're a good base you have other family members . . . to connect with. (#13, ll. 198–208)

This FGC student admired how his mentor stayed in touch with his immediate and extended family. When this FGC student compared his mentor's and his family's approach to family, he saw that his mentor valued his immediate and extended family while his parents valued only the immediate family. After hearing this memorable message, he began to view his immediate family as the base from which he could branch off and spend time with his extended family.

The third subtheme consisted of FGC students who admired their mentor's family relationship and *viewed their mentor as an additional family member* who could provide support and information that their family could not. A 23-year-old freshman captures this subtheme:

[My mentor] has two younger daughters and it's just really neat to see how they all are . . . really close like they talk to each other about everything and her and her husband are very supportive of them . . . I sometimes am kinda envious like I wish I would have

had that . . . I've always . . . gone to her with my problems and explained like that whole family situation and she's always . . . been like my what my mother wasn't to me. She's . . . been like that second mother so . . . if I'm having trouble with something I . . . run to her house and talk to her or whatever so . . . she's . . . given me what I needed and she's always been supportive . . . She's been in college. She knows how college works and everything so she . . . has that information that my mother doesn't. (#8, ll. 345–356)

This FGC student valued her mentor because she was older and wiser than she was, yet she had experienced similar situations growing up. Since this mentor had been primarily self-reliant, this FGC student was able to relate to her. As this FGC student became closer to this mentor, she turned to her for the support and help that her family members could not provide.

Memorable messages about counting on family. Some FGC students described how their mentors' messages showed them that they could always count on their family to be there for them and support them. The first subtheme was *parental advice*. One 19-year-old freshman reported her mentor's memorable message this way:

> [My mentor] told me that . . . after I get done enrolling with classes I could always turn to my family for help with what classes I should take for my major or everything and they could always help. She made me realize that . . . in school . . . my parents will always be there and . . . I can turn to them for pretty much anything. (#3, ll. 167–169)

During orientation, this FGC student's mentor assured her that she could still contact her parents for advice. This message brought her closer to her parents because she knew that even though her parents lived six hours away, she would still be able to call them and seek their advice.

The second subtheme was *parental support*. A 19-year-old sophomore captures this subtheme:

> [My mentor is] very close to her family and she said that . . . your parents are gonna be your parents. They shouldn't judge you. They truly love you regardless of what you've done or if you've got an F on your first test . . . You have to understand that you're a freshman and everybody goes through a stage of oh my gosh freak out and so for [her] to say that I was like hmm . . . maybe she's right and . . . she was and my parents definitely were supportive. (#6, ll. 368–373)

After talking to her mentor, this FGC student continued to refer back to this memorable message each time she did not do well on a paper or activity. She was able to remember that the whole world was in front of her and that her parents were going to support her unconditionally even though she was not perfect and was going to make mistakes during college.

Memorable messages about recognizing the importance of family. As FGC students began to carve out a new identity in college, mentors encouraged them to continue to recognize the importance of their family. The first subtheme consisted of FGC students who were instructed to *remember their roots*. A 21-year-old sophomore captures this subtheme:

> [My mentor said] remember your roots . . . Remember what your family went through . . . so . . . the day you graduate you're not gonna forget . . . what your mom suffered through . . . what everybody helped you do . . . so basically remember that while you're in school. . . . I have some friends who graduated too. . . . They're Hispanic too. They just leave and do their own thing like their parents are left behind like I've seen . . . some of their families work really hard . . . Their parents lose a lot for their kids and once they're grown up, they just abuse them. (#5, ll. 310–317)

This FGC student began to see the importance of family. This message encouraged him to put his family before himself by earning his degree so he could support his family by paying off the family home. Although this FGC student had dreams of moving out of state, he expressed a commitment to helping his family until they were steady enough that he could move away.

The second subtheme consisted of FGC students who learned to *appreciate and respect their family*. A 21-year-old junior captures this subtheme:

> [My mentor says be] respectful of your parents so that does play a role like [I'm] constantly reminded to be respectful. He's driven also by faith as I am and so he's a good reminder [to] be . . . respectful of your parents be true to your faith . . . because a lot of times I get lost in doing all this on my own and . . . I do need to have an appreciation for my parents more often than I do because . . . they still got me here and . . . so the biggest thing though for me is appreciation for my entire family more than anything . . . 'cause it's by all of them that I got here 'cause if it was just my two parents or my four parents . . . I don't know if I'd be here per se . . . so I have no idea where I'd be. (#24, ll. 261–268)

This FGC student said that this message helped him see that he could relate to his mentor. After hearing this message, he worked to respect his parents even when he had conflicts with them.

The third subtheme consisted of FGC students who began to see the *importance of being role models* their families could be proud of. A 21-year-old sophomore captures this subtheme:

> [My mentor] always told me . . . when you grow up . . . it's not always about the money. It's not always about . . . the way of living. Just . . . be somebody that your family can be proud of . . . somebody your family can happily say . . . that's my nephew or that's my son or that's my brother. You gotta be somebody too. You gotta be somebody we're proud of so [you] can be somebody we look up to. (#5, ll. 211–214, 222–223)

This FGC student saw that he had the opportunity to point his family in the right direction and that he could differentiate himself from his friends who had gotten in trouble with the law. By setting a good example for his family and avoiding the mistakes his friends had made, he aspired to live a life beyond staying with his parents and carrying out the life he had had in high school.

Discussion

In summary, this study allowed me to identify five memorable messages about college and three memorable messages about family. FGC students discussed how both types of memorable messages influenced their approach to college. Though college and

family memorable messages were often encouraging and supportive, they could also prove to be competing and contradictory. For example, FGC students received a mix of messages that encouraged them to focus on both college (e.g., do not be satisfied with a 2.5 GPA) and family (e.g., do not draw a line between college and family). Not surprisingly, FGC students experienced some challenges as mentors' messages about college and family led them in competing and often opposing directions.

The competing discourses in the present study reflect the contradictions that have emerged in other memorable messages studies (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Medved et al., 2006) as well as FGC student studies (Orbe, 2004, 2008). Thus, the most salient contribution was not the existence of these discourses, but how FGC students managed and negotiated the interplay of these discourses. FGC students experienced competing discourses when their mentors' memorable messages discussed the importance of focusing on school alone but also included finding balance with friends and family. FGC students who experienced this contradiction discussed how difficult this choice was for them. They chose to manage these competing discourses by countering which occurred when a "discursive position replace[d] or supplant[ed] an alternative discursive position that would normally have been expected in its place" (Baxter, 2011, p. 167). Some FGC students countered the family discursive position with the college discursive position while others countered the college discursive position with the family discursive position.

In addition to the competing discourses of college and family, FGC students experienced competing discourses of self-reliance and seeking help. They chose to manage these competing discourses by negating which occurred when they acknowledged "an alternative, competing discourse for purposes of rejecting it" (Baxter, 2011, p. 167). FGC students who negated this competing discourse struggled to seek out the help they needed because they were determined to prove others wrong and succeed on their own. Many FGC students were willing to talk to their mentors about academic subjects but were reluctant to talk to their mentors about problems they were having outside the classroom. Several FGC students expressed regret that they had not yet found a mentor with whom they could talk about other stressors in their lives such as their job or missing their family. They hoped that they would eventually find such a mentor, but their desire to succeed on their own often inhibited this search.

Some FGC students who struggled to manage the competing discourses of self-reliance and seeking help also struggled with competing discourses related to home and college. Similar to Orbe's findings (2003, 2004, 2008), they described competing discourses of past, present, and future. Some FGC students successfully merged their past with their present and future by incorporating their family into their new life. This hybridization was "a process of mixing two or more distinct discourses to create a new meaning" (Baxter, 2011, p. 139). Thus although the discourses of past, present, and future remained distinct, they were no longer framed as oppositional. Others reported that they consistently chose to prioritize one life over the other and countered one competing discursive position over the other discursive position. Although mentors often provided competing memorable messages, most students

indicated that they would not change the content of the memorable messages they received.

I was also successful in illuminating the mentoring process and applying previous organizational socialization and memorable messages research to the instructional context. As in previous organizational socialization work (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Bullis, 1993; Kassing & Pappas, 2007; Stohl, 1986), FGC students recounted that their mentors shared memorable messages with them early on in college. They remembered vividly what their mentors had said and credited these messages with influencing their present and future decisions. FGC students also made sense of the memorable messages they had received from their mentors about college and family. They described what the memorable message meant to them, speculated about why their mentors had told them that message, and even discussed how they would share the messages they had received with others. These findings suggest that memorable messages continue to be a powerful linguistic tool that can be used to interpret meaning in future experiences. This particular function is especially important in this study because many of the memorable messages discussed how to succeed in future classes and what to do with the degree after graduation. Finally, I showed that memorable messages are coconstructed and shaped by the mentoring relationship.

These findings may now be added to the FGC student and memorable messages literature. Talking to students about college and family memorable messages provided more detailed explanations about why some students privilege the college discursive position, while other students privilege the family discursive position (Orbe, 2008). These findings also showed how mentors can help FGC students overcome academic challenges (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Nichols & Lucas, 2010) and reaffirmed that strong mentorship relationships can close the performance gap (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Finding a strong supportive mentorship relationship did influence students' academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993). FGC students who had mentors spoke positively about their academic success, while FGC students who were still looking for mentors mentioned how a mentor could have helped them succeed in the future (Cabrera et al., 1993; Elkins et al., 2000; Pollard, 1990).

Strengths, Implications, and Limitations

In summary, these results provided a more detailed understanding of how mentors communicate memorable messages about college and family to FGC students from the FGC student's point of view. While many researchers have studied FGC students, fewer researchers have used the interpretive paradigm to explore the messages FGC students receive while on campus. As colleges work to find ways to mentor FGC students throughout their college experience, this line of research can contribute to the understanding of what messages FGC students are receiving and need to be receiving from their mentors. These results have three potential implications. First, knowing what messages students are receiving and need to be receiving could help teachers understand how they can better teach and advise FGC students. Second, knowing why FGC students struggle to find mentors could help teachers reach out to

FGC students in supportive ways that allow FGC students to find the help they need without giving up the autonomy they strive for. Third, departments could encourage successful established FGC majors to mentor and pass on memorable messages to future FGC majors.

While the memorable messages and RDT 2.0 frameworks provide two ways to understand mentoring communication, there are several other influential factors to consider. One limitation of the present study is that it considers just the FGC student's relational perspective. Because the transition to college is often coconstructed within the mentoring relationship, the mentor's perspective should be considered as well. Additionally, while this study is useful in understanding a retrospective view of memorable messages, longitudinal and relational turning point studies could better capture how the mentoring relationship is built over time, and diary and narrative studies could illuminate the everyday talk and larger narratives that frame memorable messages. A third limitation of the present study is its focus on on-campus mentors. Since FGC students are influenced by informal on-campus and off-campus mentors, asking students to talk about off-campus mentors could enrich this line of inquiry.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although the present study contributes to the extant literature, there are still several underexplored areas that should be addressed in future research. First, researchers could focus on the sender as well as the recipient. Including the sender would provide more insight into how and why specific memorable messages were communicated. Second, researchers could study how formal assigned mentors influence FGC students. Finally, future researchers could seek out struggling FGC students who are considering dropping out or who have already dropped out. Talking to these students about the memorable messages they wish they had received could help teachers find ways to increase retention.

In conclusion, the perceptions of FGC students in the present study suggest that strong mentoring relationships might be able to reduce the gap between FGC and CGC students. A better understanding of mentors' college and family messages equips teachers to communicate in ways that help FGC students find a learning community that provides them with what they need to succeed, integrate, and persist.

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