



AHEPPP Journal

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About the AHEPPP Journal

The AHEPPP Journal is a twice-yearly journal that publishes scholarly essays, research-based articles, personal essays, and reviews that address important issues related to parent/family services and that make an original contribution to the knowledge base about parent/family programs and services in higher education. The guiding editorial policy is that articles are of high standard, while including practical information of interest to parent/family professionals.

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For this issue of the AHEPPP Journal, two scholars from the department of Human Development and Family Studies at Texas Tech University have authored a peer-reviewed article that examines parent-student communication. Their research considers whether parent input supports or infringes upon student development during the college years. In addition to examining communication patterns, the authors have assessed parents' and students' viewpoints on the appropriateness of parental interventions.

Our second article expands on a study that was published in the Spring 2012 AHEPPP Journal about so-called Boomerang Families. In the previous article, the author reported on parents' expectations and their search for information when their children return home after graduating from college. In this issue, we are presented with the perspective of recent graduates who move back home with their parents and siblings. The article includes suggestions on how we, as parent/family program professionals, can help prepare families for this increasingly common transition that follows the college experience.

Both articles discuss topics that were addressed at the November 2012 AHEPPP Conference in Boulder, Colorado. We hope to publish information in upcoming issues of the Journal that build on the important information that was discussed during the conference this fall and at regional conferences last year. Presenters from the AHEPPP conferences, as well as practitioners and researchers examining parent/family relations, are encouraged to submit articles to the Journal. Submission guidelines are available at www.aheppp.org/aheppp-journal.

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College Students' and Parents' Communication and Views of Proper Assistance with School-Related Matters

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 14th Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, March 2012, Vancouver, BC, Canada. The authors would like to thank Sylvia Niehuis, Sarah Stephens, Brandy Tanner, Eveliz Tomety, and the Texas Tech Human Sciences advising staff for assisting with data collection in the summer-orientation study, and Ken Gassiot and Elizabeth Massengale from Texas Tech University's Office of Parent and Family Relations for facilitating the survey of visiting parents during Family Weekend. Address correspondence to Alan Reifman, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Human Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-1230. E-mail: alan.reifman@ttu.edu. (Phone 806-742-3000).

Abstract

The role of parents in their college students' academic and professional lives has been the subject of a small, but growing, academic literature. We present the results of three surveys conducted at Texas Tech University, in which either parents, students, or both participated. Two main areas of focus were patterns of communication (frequency and modalities) and opinions about whether certain parental actions (e.g., accompanying their students on school- or job-related interviews; checking up on students' academic progress) are proper forms of assistance or overly intrusive acts that hinder students' development. Text and e-mail messages, as well as cell phone calls, were the most commonly used forms of communication, mirroring other studies. Parents openly asking their students about classes and academic progress (as opposed to going online to check covertly) received fairly wide support by all parties. Implications for further research and application by family/parent-relations professionals are discussed.

Introduction

Few would dispute that parents today communicate more frequently with their children in college and have greater involvement in their students' academic and professional lives than was true in earlier generations (Settersten & Ray, 2010). There are several possible reasons for this phenomenon including: the explosion in the variety of personal communications technologies; the steadily rising educational attainment of the U.S. population over time, meaning that increasing percentages of parents are college-educated and thus increasingly familiar with aspects of their students' academic life; and what some observers perceive as recent generations of parents idealizing their children, treating them as "trophy kids" (Alsop, 2008; Settersten & Ray, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Research into parent-college student communication and parental educational involvement is still relatively new, but growing. The present paper seeks to contribute to this literature in two major ways. First, the studies reported herein seek to replicate previous findings on modes and frequency of communication between college students and their parents, but at an institution that has not previously been studied. Second, the studies introduce a novel aspect to parental involvement research by assessing parents' and students' opinions about the appropriateness of different types of parental actions (e.g., accompanying students on academic- or career-related interviews; checking up on students' academic progress). These findings can potentially help university professionals educate parents as to which actions their students may or may not welcome, thus helping parents avoid possible conflict with their students.

Previous Research

Modalities, Frequency, and Content of Communication

The University of Minnesota's Parent Program has been surveying parents of students at the university for many years, with recruitment taking place through outlets such as a parents' listserv and printed parents' newsletter (Savage & Petree, 2010). Three areas from the most recent Minnesota research were of particular interest to the present study. First, the researchers assessed parents' usage of various media (e.g., cell phone, landline phone, e-mail, text messaging, Facebook/social-networking site) to communicate with their students. Second, the researchers asked parents to compare their involvement and communication with their student to that of their own parents with them. Third, the Minnesota survey asked parents about which topics their students had most requested their assistance and advice. Results of the 2010 survey showed cell phone calling, text messaging, and e-mailing as the most commonly used forms of parent-student communication. In 2010, as in the years 2004-2008, more than 75% of respondent parents claimed to be more involved than their parents were with them. Finally, leading topics of parent-student communication included finances and career planning.

Another source of information on communication technologies used within families is the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Many reports in the Pew series have focused on teenagers, some on college students. A report entitled *Teens and Mobile Phones* appears to be one of the more extensive regarding parent-child communication (Lenhart,

Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). The key findings were that spoken conversations and text messaging appeared to be the most common ways teens and parents used mobile phones to communicate with each other. E-mail seemed to be a declining form of communication. Because many teens nationally will be attending college, how they communicate with parents as teenagers may well presage how they do so upon entering college.

Connection of Parental Involvement to Student Outcomes

There is much debate on whether actions intended by parents to assist their college students actually hinder students' development. The term "helicopter parents" has frequently been invoked to characterize parental involvement (Shellenbarger, 2005). Helicopter parents often intervene for their children in scheduling classes, trying to solve issues with their college roommates, reading over class assignments, and helping to write papers. Alsop (2008) quotes one father's view of helping his son thusly: "He can benefit from my mistakes and what I have learned... Obviously, I will use my insider knowledge to steer my son to the right job..." (p. 50). Settersten and Ray (2010) advise parents to help their children appraise their skills and opportunities, but not to act directly on their children's behalf. As reviewed below, some initial studies have examined correlations between various forms of parental intervention and students' academic and developmental outcomes. However, these studies cannot determine direction of causality (i.e., whether parental actions caused student outcomes, or students' level of functioning prompted parents to take actions). The present study did not examine student correlates or outcomes of parental actions. We feel, however, that previous studies in this area provide a useful backdrop for our studies.

Hofer has published extensively on parental involvement and college students' development of autonomy (Hofer, 2008; Hofer & Moore, 2010; Hofer, Souder, Kennedy, Fullman, & Hurd, 2009). Hofer (2008) found that frequency of communication was positively related to parents regulating their children's academics in college. Hofer et al. (2009) also found an inverse relationship between students' reported contact with their parents and students' emotional autonomy. In other words, the more contact students had with their parents, the lower was students' autonomy.

Ramsey, Morey, Gentzler, Oberhauser, and Westerman (2012) examined college students' use of different media in communicating with their parents and looked at associations between students' forms of communication with parents and several aspects of students' social relationships (e.g., students' feelings of loneliness and anxious attachment; social support from parents). Ramsey et al.'s most robust finding (applying to both their 2009 and 2011 cohorts) was that phone communication with parents correlated with more favorable relationship qualities with parents, such as satisfaction, support, intimacy, and instrumental aid.

Shoup, Gonyea, and Kuh (2009), studying data from multiple institutions in the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement, examined the relationship between parental involvement (frequency of communication with their student and of contacting school officials on behalf of their student) and students' self-reported academic engagement and outcomes. Having highly involved parents was associated with better student engagement, but lower grade-point-average, than attained by students with low-involvement parents.

Study Purpose

Building upon these earlier studies, we present three surveys of college students and/or their parents at Texas Tech University. These surveys aimed, like earlier studies, to assess students' and parents' usage of different communications media to stay in touch with each other. In addition, our surveys sought to pursue a more novel aim, namely gauging students' and parents' opinions on the kinds of actions parents should or should not take, in attempting to help their students. We developed a list of possible parental actions (e.g., accompanying students on academic or job interviews; urging them toward particular academic majors). Disagreement between parents and students as to the advisability of the various actions could create parent-student conflict, but might also lead families to engage in productive discussions of parents' roles. Finally, we examined issues on which students had expressed concerns to their parents, and parents' perceived reasons for being involved. Our project was largely exploratory, given the early state of the literature, rather than theory-driven. Therefore, the following sets of research questions (RQ) were addressed:

1. With what frequency do parents report communicating with their students, and through which modalities primarily? Subsidiary to this primary question are two additional ones. Are there differences between mothers' and fathers' patterns of communication with their students (RQ1a)? How do today's parents compare their involvement with their students to their own parents' involvement with them (RQ1b)?
2. Which types of parental actions do students, mothers, and fathers feel are most appropriate in promoting students' academic and psychosocial development? In addition, in which types of actions do parents actually engage, either at students' request or unrequested (RQ2a)? How much consensus is there between students and parents about the ways parents should intervene (RQ2b)?
3. What are students' greatest areas of concern? Regarding which of these areas do students request their parents' assistance and advice (RQ3a), and over what issues do parents actually contact the university (RQ3b)?
4. What reasons do parents report for their involvement? (Possible reasons parents could select included: paying tuition entitles them; safety/danger issues on campus; a desire to help their student; and a desire to keep in touch with their student.)

Method

In order to examine the research questions above, we conducted three brief cross-sectional studies, each employing survey methods. (Copies of the full questionnaires are available on the project website: courses.ttu.edu/hdfs3390-reifman/spring10project.htm). Self-report, rather than behavioral-observational or experimental methods, appeared to be a reasonable approach to learning about the phenomena of interest, given the paucity of research in this area and the exploratory nature of our approach. Most of the measures discussed here were closed-ended. Respondents were also given the opportunity to write open-ended comments regarding their views on the proper role of parents in assisting their students, but virtually no respondents wrote anything. All studies were approved for human-subjects purposes by the Institutional Review Board at Texas Tech University.

Study 1

Data source. The first author's Spring 2010 research methods class first compiled a list of Texas Tech University students who had allowed their e-mail addresses to appear in a public directory (approximately 2,000 students out of 28,000 at the university). These students were then invited to complete an online survey, which was administered via Qualtrics software.

Participants. The obtained sample consisted of 96 students, representing an approximately 5% response rate. Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine (2004) obtained a 21% response rate with university students when they were contacted via an e-mail message containing a link to the survey, with no postcard reminders. Bloom (2010) found response rates from 3-17% in university students, depending on different conditions of administration (e.g., personalization of message). The present response rate thus appears to be at the low end of what has been achieved with e-mail recruitment of college students. The sample was 53% female; 76% White, 12% Hispanic, and small percentages from other racial/ethnic groups.

Measures. The class developed a list of 10 parental actions derived from students' own experiences: (1) go on job or other interview with student; (2) make academic decisions for student (e.g., university to attend, what to major in); (3) make personal decisions for student (e.g., whom to date, jobs to seek); (4) ask student directly about academic progress; (5) covertly monitor student's academic progress; (6) contact student's friends for information on student; (7) check student's phone, financial records, etc.; (8) provide extensive material assistance; (9) request passwords to check finances online (in exchange for parents paying bills); and (10) take over student's problems (beyond normal helping). Survey respondents rated the appropriateness of parents taking each action on a 5-point scale from (1) "extremely inappropriate" to (5) "extremely appropriate." Respondents further indicated whether they had ever requested their parents to perform and whether their parents had actually ever performed each action.

Study 2

Data source. A brief paper-and-pencil survey was administered during New Student Orientation in Summer 2010 within the authors' college at the larger university (College of Human Sciences). Incoming students, along with their fathers and mothers, if available, were approached during a break in orientation activities and asked to complete a brief survey.

Participants. Forty-four students, 24 mothers, and nine fathers participated. Questionnaires from nine additional families were lost after their data had been entered into a computer file; these data were not used, as they lacked a paper back-up. Among the student participants, there were 38 females (86%) and six males. Thirty-one of the students were White (70%) and nine were Hispanic (20%), with small numbers from other racial/ethnic groups.

Measures. The main measure in Study 2 was a list of five parental actions, shortened in length from the previous study to promote participation. The five items were based partly on media sources (Alsop, 2008; Shellenbarger, 2005) and selected to sound familiar to participating students and parents. The following instructions preceded the items: "Some educators feel that, while parents can play an important role in supporting and advising their college-student children, too much intervention may hinder the student's development of skills to become self-sufficient. For each item, please check off whether you feel the parental action falls within the scope of proper support or may take away from the student's development of self-sufficiency." Students and parents

independently rated these five parental actions: (1) going with their child on job- or school-related interviews or appointments; (2) expressing strong preference for what child should major in; (3) checking up on child's course requirements (e.g., via online syllabi/calendar) to remind child about upcoming tests; (4) making calls to set up child's appointments or take care of other errands; and (5) assist with cleaning child's dorm room, doing laundry, etc. In response to each action, the respondent selected either "Proper form of support/beneficial" or "Hinders becoming self-sufficient." As elaborated in the Results, dyadic parent-student agreement rates on the parental actions (combining the numbers of pairs where a parent and his or her student either were both "pro" or both "con," and dividing by the total number of dyads) could be calculated.

Study 3

Data source. Questionnaires were administered to parents participating in the Fall 2010 Family Weekend, at the parents' check-in booth. The event was held one and one-half months after the start of the semester. Parents were recruited into the study in mother-father pairs when possible.

Participants. Fifteen mother-father pairs completed the survey, as did 17 additional mothers (32 mothers overall) and three additional fathers (18 fathers overall). Among mothers and fathers, respectively, race was reported predominantly as White (83%, 67%) and Hispanic (10%, 28%), with small percentages from other racial/ethnic groups. The students of most of the attending parents were freshmen.

Measures. The same parental-action list as in Study 2 was administered. Another set of questions, based on the Minnesota research (Savage & Petree, 2010), asked parents: (1) how frequently they communicated with their students overall (7-point scale from (0) "less than once a month" to (6) "more than once a day"); and (2) how they communicated using nine different media (5-point scale from (0) "don't use this method" to (4) "very frequently"). These communication modalities were in-person, cell phone, landline, email, regular mail, text message, instant message, Facebook, and Skype internet-based video calls (we added the final medium, which was not in the Minnesota research).

Also, we asked parents "...since the beginning of the current... semester, has your student requested your assistance or advice on each matter [listed below] AND did you personally contact the university regarding your student on each matter? (Please check off all the topics that apply.)" The first part of the question, about whether students requested assistance, came from the Minnesota research, whereas we added the part about parents contacting the university. The issues listed were: health and safety; finances/financial aid/billing; academics/courses/advising; faculty dispute; time management; campus or community involvement opportunities; career planning; personal relationships; housing/roommate issues; physical health concerns; mental health concerns; and other (please specify).

As another gauge of parental involvement, we asked the following question, based on the Minnesota research: "If you attended college, how would you compare the level of your involvement/communication with your student to the involvement/communication your parents had with you during college?" Options included: "much more involved with my student;" "more involved;" "about the same;" "less involved;" and "much less involved" (with a "not applicable" option). Finally, using items we developed based partly on Shellenbarger (2005), parents indicated whether they endorsed four possible reasons for their own involvement: paying tuition entitles them; dangers facing students; helping students be successful; and staying connected.

Results

Frequency of Communication (RQ1)

As noted, communications data were obtained from parents in the Family Weekend survey (Study 3). An initial communication item assessed overall frequency of parent-student contact without specifying particular modalities. Mean scores on this item were similar for mothers (4.13) and fathers (4.07), corresponding to two-to-three times per week (RQ1a). In terms of specific communications modalities, the most frequently used by both mothers and fathers were text messages, cell phones, and e-mail (Table 1). Mothers also made fairly frequent use of Facebook. Direct mother-father mean comparisons on communication via different modalities were also undertaken. To ensure full comparability between mothers and fathers (e.g., on socioeconomic status), only complete couples ($n = 15$) were analyzed, via paired t tests. Fathers' reported in-person communication with their students (mean = 1.80, corresponding to somewhere between "frequently" and "rarely" on the scale) significantly ($p < .05$) exceeded mothers' reported in-person communication (mean = 1.13, corresponding to "rarely"). One other difference between parents approached statistical significance. Mothers' mean use of Facebook to communicate with their students (2.00) exceeded fathers' (1.00), $p = .06$. Another metric shown in Table 1 involved combining the percentages in the two highest categories of communication frequency for each modality (frequently plus very frequently; Savage & Petree, 2010). These findings amplify on those from the mean comparisons. For example, mothers' greater use of Facebook than fathers' can be seen in the 40% of mothers who communicated with their students through this modality frequently or very frequently, compared to 20% of fathers who did so.

Table 1:
Frequency of Parents' Mode-Specific Communication with Their College Students

Communication Method	Mothers		Fathers		Means
	Mean	Percent (very frequently or frequently)	Mean	Percent (very frequently or frequently)	
In-Person	1.13*	0.0%	1.80*	20.0%	
Cell Phone	2.93	66.7%	3.27	86.7%	
Landline	0.13	0.0%	0.53	13.3%	
Email	2.07	40.0%	1.93	40.0%	
Regular Mail	1.27	13.4%	1.13	13.3%	
Text Message	3.40	93.3%	2.87	73.3%	
Instant Message	0.67	6.7%	1.00	26.7%	
Facebook	2.00**	40.0%	1.00**	20.0%	
Skype	1.20	26.7%	0.80	20.0%	

Two-tailed significance levels on paired- t comparison of means ($n = 15$ pairs):
* $p < .05$, ** $p = .06$.

When asked to compare their involvement with their students to their parents' with them (RQ1b), parents in our Family Weekend survey nearly unanimously claimed greater involvement with their student than their parents had with them. Of the 21 mothers for whom the item was applicable (i.e., who had attended college), 67% said they were more involved with their student than their parents were with them and 29% said they were much more involved (5% said about the same; percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding). Of the 13 fathers for whom the item was applicable, 69% claimed to be more involved, 23% claimed to be much more involved, and 8% said about the same.

Appropriateness of Assistance (RQ2)

In Study 1, students most approved of parents asking them about their academic progress (as opposed to covert monitoring), as reflected in the high mean appropriateness rating (4.40 where the maximum is 5; Table 2). Parents providing material assistance, checking records thereof, and requesting passwords to do so received means of approximately 3.0 (midway between the endpoints of 1 "extremely inappropriate" and 5 "extremely appropriate"). Items alluding to parents completely taking over students' problems, making decisions for them, and engaging in covert monitoring received means around 2.0, close to the "extremely inappropriate" end of the scale.

Table 2:
Parental Behaviors, Student Requests, and Students' Appropriateness Ratings

Parental Actions	Parent did at student's request	Parent did, not requested	Parent did not do, though requested	Parent did not do, and not requested	How appropriate? ^a
					Means
Counts (Percentages)					
Go on interviews	3 (3%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)	87 (91%)	1.84
Make academic choices	5 (5%)	7 (7%)	3 (3%)	80 (84%)	2.17
Make personal choices	8 (8%)	9 (9%)	1 (1%)	78 (81%)	2.16
Ask student directly about academic progress	35 (36%)	53 (55%)	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	4.40
Covertly monitor academic progress	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)	89 (93%)	1.92
Contact student's friends learn about student	0 (0%)	9 (9%)	0 (0%)	87 (91%)	1.77
Check student's phone, financial, etc., records	13 (14%)	34 (35%)	0 (0%)	49 (51%)	2.95
Provide extensive material assistance	37 (39%)	15 (16%)	4 (4%)	40 (42%)	2.92
Request passwords to check finances online	10 (11%)	6 (6%)	3 (3%)	76 (80%)	2.96
Take over student's problems	0 (0%)	7 (7%)	2 (2%)	87 (91%)	1.73

^a $n = 96$ or 95 (due to missing data), as can be seen by summing the counts across each row. The appropriateness scale had endpoints labeled as (1) "extremely inappropriate" and (5) "extremely appropriate."

Table 3 displays results for Studies 2 and 3. In general, students, fathers, and mothers exhibited similar endorsement rates on the advisability of each parental action. Checking on students' academics (e.g., going online to see syllabi) was endorsed by roughly one-third of all groups except mothers at orientation. Nearly half of fathers at Family Weekend were comfortable urging a major to students (although fathers at orientation were much less likely to do so). Other behaviors tended to have low endorsement across all parties.

Table 3:
Percentages Saying the Parental Action is a Proper Form of Support

Parental Actions	Summer 2010 New Student Orientation			Fall 2010 Family Weekend	
	Students (n = 44)	Fathers (n = 9)	Mothers (n = 24)	Fathers (n = 17)	Mothers (n = 32)
Accompany on job interviews	2%	22%	12%	6%	12%
Strongly urge major	16% ^a	11%	21%	47%	19%
Check online for academic information (e.g., syllabi)	30%	33%	17% ^b	38% ^c	31%
Set up appointments	11%	0%	17%	6%	6%
Clean student's room	18%	0%	12%	12%	19% ^d

Different *ns* due to missing data: ^an = 43; ^bn = 23; ^cn = 16; ^dn = 31

Student reports on actual instances of parents taking action were also examined (RQ2a). Nearly all parents asked students about their academic progress, in some cases at students' request, but in other cases, unrequested. Slightly over one-third of students reported that their parents checked the students' phone and financial records without being invited by the students to do so. Frequencies on the full set of parental actions are available in Table 2.

A more rigorous way to examine student-parent agreement (RQ2b) is to look at responses within each family-based dyad. We looked only at mother-student pairs, due to the small number of participating fathers. Agreement rates on the parental actions (combining where a mother and her student either were both "pro" or both "con") were high. Regarding parents going on interviews, for example, 20 mother-student pairs agreed that doing so hindered student development and no pairs agreed it was proper, yielding 20 total agreements. In three dyads, students thought parental accompaniment on interviews was a hindrance, but their mothers thought it proper; and in one dyad, the student thought accompaniment was proper, but the mother thought it a hindrance. The 20 agreements divided by 24 total dyads yielded an agreement rate of 83%. Other dyadic agreement rates, listed in descending order, were as follows: cleaning student's room (75%); urging student to adopt a major (74%); setting up appointments (67%); and checking academic information online (65%).

Areas of Student Concern (RQ3)

Regarding areas in which students requested their parents' assistance (RQ3a), the following results were obtained, ranked from most to least frequent (percent of mothers listed first, fathers second). Most common were concerns about finances/billing (44%; 72%), followed by: academics/courses/advising (34%; 44%); health and safety (34%; 39%); physical health (28%; 28%); campus or community involvement opportunities (28%; 22%); housing/roommate issues (25%; 44%); and career planning (22%; 39%). On the remaining issues, less than 25% of mothers or fathers received requests for assistance. Instances of parents contacting the university over the above issues were rare, in general (RQ3b). Two exceptions were over financial (22%; 17%) and health and safety (12%; 11%) issues.

Parents' Reasons for their Involvement (RQ4)

In Study 3, the most highly endorsed reasons for father involvement in their students' collegiate activities were wanting to stay connected (89%) and wanting to help their students be successful (83%). Seventy-two percent of fathers indicated that paying their students' tuition entitled them to see where their money was going. The issue of danger and safety on college campuses was cited less commonly by fathers (44%). Mothers' most highly endorsed reasons for being involved were helping their students succeed and staying connected (72% each). Tuition payment was cited as a reason by 56% of mothers, and danger/safety was cited by 44%.

Discussion

To add to the small, but growing, literature on parents' communication regarding, and involvement with, their college students' academic and personal lives, we conducted three surveys. Of importance to the field, the present research replicated – and thus solidified conclusions from – previous findings at other institutions. In addition, we provided novel findings on students' and parents' agreement regarding the utility of several potential types of parental involvement. As elaborated below in the section on implications, parent-relations professionals will be able to use these findings in advising parents on optimal ways to be involved in their students' lives.

Our findings of most-used communication methods were somewhat similar to those found by Savage and Petree (2010) at Minnesota, with cell phone, text messaging, and e-mail among the most popular media in the present study. Hofer's (2008) study at Middlebury found communication through cell phones as most common, followed by e-mail. Ramsey et al. (2012), who were able to compare 2009 and 2011 data, found text messaging to be rising to the point where it surpassed e-mail use; communication via social networking sites also rose, reaching parity with e-mailing, but still was far behind the use of text messaging.

Overall, parents asking students about how they are doing academically seems fairly common and meets students' and parents' approval. Parental actions that appear more intrusive, such as trying to solve students' problems themselves or engaging in covert monitoring of students' behavior, were not well supported by students. It is also possible, however, that actions frowned upon in the abstract (e.g., parents cleaning students' rooms) may still occur, with students not actually minding that much. Agreement rates were high at the dyadic level between mothers and their students as to whether certain parental actions are helpful or a hindrance.

As in the Minnesota study (Savage & Petree, 2010), finances were a top area of concern voiced by students to parents in the present study. Other leading topics on which students expressed concern to parents in the current study involved academics and health/safety issues. Career planning, which ranked highly in the Minnesota research, was lower down the list in our survey. We administered this set of items in the Family Weekend survey, at which point students were only weeks into their college education; this early on, career planning likely was not very salient in students' minds. The Minnesota survey included parents of freshmen and seniors, and among seniors, career planning was the number one topic about which students requested parents' assistance and advice (even among freshmen, though, career planning was the third most common topic). Shoup et al. (2009), in their national analysis comprising multiple institutions, found finances to rank relatively highly as a topic of communication (especially with fathers) but not stand out in this regard; other issues such as academic performance consistently ranked higher among first-year students, and career plans outranked finances among seniors.

Although parents are sometimes portrayed as nuisances in frequent contact with university officials, we found actual reported instances of parents contacting the school to be rare. Parents reported feeling justified in their involvement, however, based on reasons such as their investment in tuition and desire to help their student succeed. Again, the students of parents in the Family Weekend study had only been in school for a matter of weeks, so it is certainly possible parents could have contacted the school with greater frequency as time went by.

Implications for Future Research

Beyond students' and parents' satisfaction with, and opinions toward, various types and amounts of parental involvement, the effects of different forms of involvement are important to determine. It is possible that parental actions students find unwelcome may nevertheless be good for students in some ways, although the ideal would seem to be parental actions that are welcomed by students and ultimately helpful to them. Whereas the present studies investigated the acceptability to parents and students of certain parental actions, the question of ultimate benefit awaits future research.

Previous studies (Hofer et al., 2009; Ramsey et al., 2012; Shoup et al., 2009) have suggested several correlates of frequent parent-student communication, in terms of psychological autonomy, relationship quality, and academic engagement and achievement. In some ways, frequent communication with parents may aid student development, but in other ways, it may hinder it. However, with cross-sectional data, it cannot be determined if the communication caused a behavioral change in students or pre-existing student characteristics determined the frequency of communication. Besides cross-sectional data collection, other limits of our studies include small sample sizes, recruitment (in two of the studies) from very specialized groups (attendees at student-orientation sessions and a family weekend), and very brief surveys (intended to promote participation). Future research should involve prospective longitudinal studies with broadly representative samples of college students and their parents. In these studies, the occurrences of parental assistance and monitoring behaviors, and communication frequency, at one time-point would be tested for whether they predict changes in students' autonomy, dependency, work habits, psychosocial maturity, academic performance and other developmental markers over time. By establishing temporal precedence, longitudinal studies yield stronger evidence of causation than cross-sectional studies. Longitudinal

studies would also be able to observe changes in students' and parents' acceptance of parental actions as the students advanced in their collegiate careers.

Implications for Parent Professionals

Our study suggests which types of parental assistance and involvement are seen by students and parents as most appropriate and beneficial. This information can thus be conveyed by professionals to parents, to facilitate smooth and cooperative parental monitoring of their students. Arguably our most consequential finding, at least from students' perspective, is that professionals should advise parents to be up-front with their students. Students appear to approve of (and may well appreciate) having their parents ask them directly about how their classes are going, for example. It is when parents use more covert means of checking on their students, such as contacting academic officials or students' friends, that students object. The present research cannot offer clear advice to professionals on whether parents should provide extensive material assistance to students (if parents have the wherewithal) and how parents should monitor the situation (e.g., asking students for financial records). As we found, students on average tended to see these actions as neither "extremely appropriate" nor "extremely inappropriate."

In addition, and in line with the previous section, we urge parent/family relations offices to conduct surveys at individual institutions to learn about the families they work with and also publish their findings so professionals at other institutions can benefit from the knowledge. Even if parent/family-relations professionals do not have the time or resources to conduct the type of longitudinal investigation described above, they may still be able to conduct brief surveys annually or with some regularity, to monitor parents' and students' attitudes and behaviors. In addition to parent surveys, the University of Minnesota Parent Program also conducts surveys of parent/family-relations offices nationally, regarding their programming. In their most recent program-survey report, Savage and Petree (2011) recommend that programs engage in greater self-assessment and evaluation research to test possible links between parent/family involvement and student success. We concur.

Conclusion

We see our main contributions as: (1) solidifying the knowledge base on parent-college student communication by replicating previous findings; (2) providing parent/family-relations professionals with information to educate parents on forms of involvement their students are likely to be comfortable with; and (3) informing future research to determine which forms of parental assistance and patterns of communication actually benefit students the most. With such information, parent-relations programming can more effectively promote students' successful academic and psychosocial development, and parents' satisfaction with the educational process.

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Parents' and Graduates' Perspectives on the Challenges and Benefits to Boomerang Families

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Young adults, including college graduates, move back to the parental home for a variety of reasons, including cost and availability of other living arrangements, job opportunities, an inability to afford living on one's own, and conditions in the family home (Hartung & Sweeney, 1991; Sassler, Ciambrone, & Benway, 2008). A return home has become increasingly common due to recent national economic conditions, which have led to higher amounts of student debt and a shortage of jobs for college graduates. A study from the Pew Research Center recently found that nearly one-quarter of 18-24 year olds moved home with parents after living on their own (2012).

Information on boomerang families is important, as this move has the potential to impact family relationships. Over time, parents and young adult children have reported satisfaction with their co-resident living situation (Aquilino & Supple, 1991; Ward & Spitzer, 1996). Even parents who felt the living arrangement worked out very well, however, indicated dislike for certain aspects of the return. Previous research has shown that the benefits of a co-resident living situation override the difficulties, particularly when there were social support exchanges between parents and children, such as participating in shared, enjoyable activities (Mitchell, 1998). Further, a more recent study revealed that upon return to the parental home, young adults tried to establish new, adult relationships with parents, but perceived that parents still saw them as children. Even though young adults wanted independence and adult status, they reverted to previous childhood patterns upon moving home (Sassler et al., 2008).

The concern, then, is where do parents receive information when a young adult child returns home? Today's parents have relied on parenting resources since before their child was born, but these resources become scarce as children age into adulthood. Parent/family program professionals at colleges and universities have the advantage of reaching parents before students move home, giving them time to prepare and have appropriate conversations about the move.

In order to respond to this concern, the University of Minnesota Parents Association (UMPA) conducted an initial study of boomerang families in 2011. Findings of this study were reported in the Spring 2012 issue of the AHEPPP Journal, in the article "Boomerang families: Navigating the parent role as students move back home." This study surveyed parents of current students about their perceptions and expectations about their student's potential return home. In order to recruit parents for this study, a request was sent to the member listserv of the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP). Recipients were asked to help recruit parents of college students by presenting an online survey link to parents of the students at their institutions. We suggested that professionals use email listserv, online newsletters, or upcoming events to invite parents and family members to participate. The parent survey contained items that questioned parents about their student's adulthood status, the likelihood that their student would move home, expectations about rules and responsibilities if their student moved home, preferred methods of information delivery, sources of information, and topics, and anticipated challenges and benefits of their student moving home (Petree, 2012).

In addition to collecting information from parents of potential boomerang children, we wanted to gain the perspective of young adults who had recently returned to the parental home. Consequently, a separate study was conducted by the UMPA in 2012. This second study surveyed a national sample of recent college graduates about their lifestyle

following graduation. The study built upon the parent study by questioning alumni that had moved home upon graduation about their experience. Alumni were recruited to participate in an online survey through a national listserv of alumni associations. Alumni associations were asked to identify recent college graduates and submit an invitation to participate through email listserv, online newsletters, or upcoming alumni events. The alumni survey contained items that questioned alumni about job status following graduation and currently; financial status related to student loans; living arrangements following graduation; and, if the alumni had returned to the parental home, challenges and benefits of this return.

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Parents (N=928)		Alumni (N=3,095)	
	n	%	n	%
Relationship to student				
Mother (biological, adoptive, step)	814	87.7%		
Father (biological, adoptive, step)	111	11.9%		
Other	3	0.1%		
Gender				
Female			1809	59.2%
Male			1245	40.7%
Other			2	0.1%
Race				
White or Caucasian	853	91.9%	2685	88.3%
Asian	26	2.5%	116	3.8%
Black or African American	18	1.9%	58	1.9%
Hispanic or Latin American	12	1.3%	43	1.4%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4	0.4%	22	0.7%
Mixed Race	4	0.4%	59	1.9%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2	0.2%	4	0.1%
Other/Don't know	9	1.0%	55	0.7%
Student year				
Freshman	236	25.4%		
Sophomore	179	19.3%		
Junior	186	20.0%		
Senior	255	27.5%		
Other	72	7.8%		

Table 1 (cont'd):
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Parents (N=928)		Alumni (N=3,095)	
	n	%	n	%
Graduation year				
2011-2012			793	25.6%
2010			725	23.4%
2009			632	20.4%
2008			595	19.2%
2007			350	11.3%
Household Income				
Less than \$30,000	18	1.9%		
\$30,000-under \$50,000	37	4.0%		
\$50,000-under \$80,000	118	12.7%		
\$80,000-under \$100,000	331	25.7%		
\$100,000-under \$150,000	313	33.7%		
\$150,000-under \$200,000	111	12.0%		
Highest level of parent education				
Less than a high school diploma	1	0.1%		
High school graduate	60	6.5%		
Associate's degree	99	10.7%		
Bachelor's degree	421	45.4%		
Master's degree	229	24.7%		
Doctorate or equivalent	78	8.4%		
Other	40	4.3%		
Institution type				
Public college/university	758	81.7%	2964	96.9%
Private college/university	162	17.5%	79	1.5%
Other	8	0.9%	17	0.6%
Institution scope				
4-year college/university	907	97.7%	3020	99.2%
2-year college/university	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
Other	21	2.3%	21	0.7%

Among recent graduates that responded to the alumni survey, nearly 40% said they had moved back home with family for at least a short time after graduation. Findings from both the parent and the alumni surveys revealed that, while both parents and young adults anticipated and experienced difficulties in co-residence after college, there were many positive aspects as well. Responses on the challenges and benefits of co-residence from both surveys are reported in this article. By combining information from the two surveys, we can identify ways that colleges and universities can provide information and support to college students and their families as students prepare to graduate and make decisions about post-graduate careers, living situations, and lifestyles.

Challenges and Benefits

Parents predicted the challenges and benefits they personally may experience in two open-ended questions: 1) “What do you think will be the biggest challenge for you if your child moves home?” and 2) “What do you most look forward to about the possibility of your child moving home?” Parents suggested challenges their students may experience in one open-ended question: “What do you think will be the biggest challenge for your child if he or she moves home?” The parent survey did not include a question about the potential benefits their student might experience upon returning home.

Alumni reported the challenges and benefits they had personally experienced in two open-ended questions: 1) “What is the biggest challenge of living at home after graduation?” and 2) “What is the biggest benefit of living at home after graduation?” Alumni further responded on the challenges and benefits they perceived their parents experienced in two open-ended questions: 1) “What do you think is/was the biggest challenge for your parents/guardians when you moved back home;” and 2) “What do you think your parents/guardians enjoy/enjoyed most about you being back home?” Alumni were given a definition of ‘home’ at the beginning of the survey that stated, “Any time the survey refers to ‘home,’ we are referring to your parents’ or guardians’ home; a grandparent’s, sibling’s, or other immediate relative’s home; a home that you may or may not pay rent in, but it is not your own.”

Parents were surveyed while their children were still in college and reported on what they thought might happen if their students moved home; alumni were surveyed after graduation and reported on what actually happened when they returned home. Even though responses from the two surveys reflect different perspectives on a return home, both viewpoints provide valuable information about boomerang families.

Table 2.
Challenges and benefits for parents and young adults

Reporter	Challenges for parents	Challenges for young adults	Benefits for parents	Benefits for young adults
Parents	Negotiating household expectations	Negotiating household expectations	Spending time together	
	Recognizing adulthood status	Loss of independence and privacy	Getting to know child as an adult	
	Establishing boundaries	Loss of adulthood status	Developing a friendship	
	Encouraging young adult’s job search	Feeling like a failure	Increased communication	
	Additional cost		Supporting young adult	
	Providing support and motivation			
Alumni	No challenges	Loss of independence and privacy	Spending time together	Saving money
	Additional cost	Feeling like less of an adult	Helping around the house	Low pressure job search
	Negotiating household expectations	Feeling embarrassed; negative stigma	Increased communication	Comforts of home
	Recognizing adulthood status	Decline in social and dating lives	Supporting young adult	Reconnect with family members

Parent Challenges

Reported by parents. The number one challenge named by parents regarding their student’s potential move home was expectations/rules about household responsibilities. This included specific expectations about chores, meals, curfews, and guests, as well as learning how to set expectations. Some parents reported the challenge as getting children to respect rules, while others wished to find a compromise between differing rules and expectations. For example, one parent wanted to have “equitable responsibilities that reflect respect and trust for all of us.” Negotiation seemed to be the key for families, as was communication. With many families, some level of conflict regarding household rules and responsibilities was expected: “the conflicts that will arise because our daughter has lived on her own for five years and now must share family and household responsibilities.”

Another big challenge reported by parents was learning to treat students as the adults they had become, rather than as children. This included not reverting back to parent-child roles from high school and not “micromanaging” their children’s lives. Respondents understood that the people returning home were not the same children that left four years ago, and interactions would be different. One parent, for example, noted she would “remember that he is an adult now, and not fall back into the type of parenting that was required in the growing up years.”

Closely related to recognizing their children’s adulthood status was further recognizing and encouraging their son’s or daughter’s independence. For many parents, this issue required a balance between giving instruction, having expectations, and allowing children to make decisions on their own, or as one parent explained: “accepting the fact that my job may not be finished, but also that fact she will need the space to make her own decisions.”

Finally, parents further saw potential difficulties in providing support and motivation for their children. Understanding that a move home wouldn’t be a student’s first choice, parents wanted to keep children from feeling discouraged and minimize feelings of guilt or failure. Additionally, parents wished to guide their children in finding a way to become independent. One parent, for example, noted that a challenge would be “doing and saying the right things that will be supportive as she starts out on her own as an adult.”

Many parents specifically noted the challenge of providing support and motivation related to a job search. Parents wanted to be patient with their children’s job search, remain positive, and keep from “nagging.” There was recognition that the process might take time and that graduates would be looking for careers rather than jobs. As this parent wrote, providing job-related support was multifaceted: “the biggest challenge will be to support her both emotionally and financially while she is looking for a job.”

Reported by alumni. A large number of alumni reported that there were no challenges for their parents when they returned home. Some noted that this was because parents knew the move was temporary, or because other siblings still lived at home and the adjustment wasn’t large. Many mentioned that parents preferred this arrangement: “I don’t think there were any big challenges. They were happy to have me and I was happy to be paying such cheap rent.”

When alumni did specify a challenge, most mentioned it was parents getting used to the idea that they were back, including additional costs and household tasks. In some cases, alumni felt that parents had to adjust to a full house after being “empty nesters” after a time without children in the house. This adjustment of having another person back at home impacted more than just parents, as one respondent noted:

Having another person in the house was the most difficult I think. Also, I think it was more of a challenge for my brother, who for the 4 years I was in college, was the only child at our house.

Alumni also noted financial difficulties for parents; moving home impacted the costs and tasks associated with the home. Alumni mentioned increased utility and food bills upon their return home, as well as issues with chores, messes, and household expectations. Household challenges occurred because alumni were coming from a time of independence while in college. For example, one respondent mentioned that parents struggled with “understanding that ‘chores’ do not need to be assigned in a manner similar to the way they were when I was younger.” Similarly, alumni noted that parents struggled getting used to lifestyle changes of having college graduates return home, such as how alumni spent their time and getting used to differing schedules. This was another adjustment that was particularly difficult because the alumni were just coming from a time of independence: “they had to get used to me being out late, etc. They grew more nervous about worrying I was safe, rather than just assuming and hoping I was when I was 3 hours away.”

Additional challenges came from parents accepting children’s adulthood status. There was readjustment in the parent-child relationship upon moving home because of the changing adulthood status, and that parents frequently struggled seeing children as independent adults while children lived at home. For example, one respondent mentioned that it was necessary to find “the balance between the fact that it is their house with their rules but their child is also an adult making his/her own decision; finding ways to respect both of those things.” For some parents, challenges came in watching their child struggle upon graduation: “I think they felt equally as frustrated that I did not have a job in my field and they felt I should have gone to a cheaper school if the results of getting a job were still so limited.”

Alumni Challenges

Reported by alumni. Common challenges of returning home for alumni were a lack of independence and a loss of privacy. Former students felt like they lost some of the freedom or independence they once enjoyed when living independently and now lacked the space they had while in college. To many respondents, lack of independence and loss of privacy went hand in hand: “going from living on campus with all the freedom it provides to moving in with parents was odd, they didn’t care what I did as long as they knew when to expect me, I wasn’t used to that.” In some cases, the loss of independence and freedom was related to a loss of feelings of adulthood; alumni mentioned that moving home resulted in parents treating them as children, including enforcing curfews or wanting to be informed of their children’s whereabouts. Alumni felt that they were reverting to past roles:

It is difficult not to fall into the old roles you had when you were at home in high school. My mom saw me as a needy high schooler, and I sometimes acted like one. I felt like all that growing both of us had done since I left for school was erased.

A good number of respondents further identified the stigma associated with living at home as a challenge. This included feeling embarrassed or unaccomplished and receiving a bad reputation from society. Moving home was a shock for alumni after paying so much for their education. They also felt like they were in a different place than some of their peers: “it is humiliating, to see your more successful friends buy homes and get married while you live at home.” Even though alumni frequently recognized that moving home was the

right decision, telling people that they live with parents was a common challenge in itself. One respondent found the greatest challenge to be:

Having to admit that I was living at home with my parents again! While it saved me money, I had been supporting myself and paying my own expenses since I began college, so I didn't like living off of my parents again and "using" them for free rent.

Finally, many respondents struggled with a decline in social and dating lives while living at home. Most identified being far from college friends, the college environment, the city setting, and entertainment spots as the reason for this. Some felt it was difficult finding or bringing dating partners or friends home. Alumni, for example, mentioned challenges in "explaining to a date that you live with your mom" and "living far from friends and nightlife."

Reported by parents. Similar to what they named as their own biggest challenge, parents reported that household rules and responsibilities would be the biggest issue for students upon moving home. Parents largely had the expectation that students would share household responsibilities and abide by "house rules." While many parents named specific rules for children, (such as cleaning up after themselves, laundry, sharing the car, letting parents know of comings and goings, or contribution to chores), others discussed this challenge more generally, frequently noting that it would be a "readjustment" or "return" to household rules after students have lived on their own. Parents noted that the expectation would be that their children contribute as they did with roommates while at college: "[he should] accept that there will be responsibilities similar to what he has when sharing a house/apartment with roommates."

Parents anticipated a lack of independence and privacy to be another challenge for their returning students. Parents recognized that students had many freedoms at college that they will not have while sharing space with parents, which might result in a regression of feelings of independence. There was also an acknowledgement of a balance, or that it will be a challenge as students try "to be independent when you are still somewhat dependent on mom and dad."

This loss of independence can also lead to a loss of adulthood status. Just as parents were concerned about their own ability to think of their children as adults, they were concerned with their students' ability to feel and act like adults; not reverting to a child status because they moved home. Parents wanted their students to maintain the independence they had learned at college and continue to develop as an adult.

Many parents had concerns about children feeling like failures if they were to return home. Parents expressed that their students would be disappointed, not necessarily by the move itself, but by the fact that the move likely meant that the students had not found jobs. There was an emphasis on societal expectations as parents reported children would feel like failures, as home returners hadn't taken society's "next step," because "age-group seems to place an emphasis on independence as a measure of success," or because "society may think kids shouldn't return home after college."

Parent Benefits

Reported by parents. Overwhelmingly, parents looked most forward to spending time with their students, including conversations, family meals, and simply having the company. Parents looked forward to seeing their children on a daily basis and sharing

everyday experiences, such as discussing the day's events and meeting their children's friends. Many parents recognized that this was likely a temporary move, and one to take advantage of, as this parent explained:

He'll be home and I can see him every day. I know that sooner or later he will get a job and could possibly live out of town or state or even country. So I will enjoy having him home for the time being.

Additionally, parents anticipated having conversations with their children. Many parents named specific things they looked forward to discussing, such as current events, lifestyles, careers, and goals, while many just wanted the "talks that 'just happen' because you live together again." Further, respondents were excited about face-to-face conversations, as opposed to communicating via text message, phone, or email.

Parents not only looked forward to the companionship or company of having their children home, but also establishing friendships: "I love her company- she is an amazing adult and I completely enjoy her as a friend." Parents overall reported enjoying their children as the people they have become, referring to children as "a terrific person," "an amazing young lady," or "a delight." Parents' desire to reconnect to and spend time with their children was amplified by the knowledge that students are now adults. Parents looked forward to transitioning from a parent-child relationship to one of friendship between two adults. One respondent, for example, replied, "my daughter has grown into a mature young woman and we have started moving to a new stage in our relationship--friends rather than parent/child relationship."

Reported by alumni. Alumni overwhelmingly responded that parents most enjoyed spending time with children and seeing children every day when they returned home. Some respondents noted specific activities that they were able to do together again. For example, one respondent noted that parents most enjoyed "spending time with me. Going shopping, out to eat, watching movies, living like we did when I was in high school." Alumni felt that parents enjoyed family dinners, as well as having the whole family together again, particularly when siblings were home as well.

Alumni further responded that parents simply enjoyed having their children around or back at home. Many responded that parents liked having children around to delay the "empty nest" that comes when no children are at home, or to have children around one more time before they move out completely: "During my undergraduate degree, I had never moved home during the summers, and I think my parents enjoyed having someone in the nest again for a spell."

A large number of respondents mentioned having help around the house as something parents enjoyed. This included help with chores, pets, and financial contributions. "My mother enjoyed having me take care of responsibilities around the home, such as cooking, cleaning, paying the bills, etc." Further, many alumni felt that their parents most enjoyed the company and companionship of having their children back home. Additionally, being at home increased communication between family members. One respondent remarked that parents enjoyed "being able to have the casual day-to-day conversations that we couldn't have while I was away at college; feeling closer and more connected to me simply because we saw more of each other."

Finally, alumni thought that their parents enjoyed being able to help them out and be more involved in their lives. For example, one respondent said that parents "liked knowing that

I needed them.” Others responded that parents liked knowing they were helping out and enjoyed being a part of their children’s everyday lives.

Alumni benefits

Reported by alumni. Overwhelmingly, the biggest benefit recent alumni saw in returning home was financial. This included the ability to save money, not pay rent, and begin to pay back student loans. As one respondent stated, “I was able to pay off my undergraduate loans in two years and save enough money to begin my current Master’s degree program.” Similarly, alumni appreciated searching for a job without financial strain or the pressure to choose any job just to pay the bills, and hold out for a job in their field. One respondent, for example, stated that living at home provided the “freedom to explore career options/further education without burden of too many bills.” Another commented, “it would have been very difficult to become financially stable if I were living on my own while trying to adjust to the ‘real world.’”

Alumni saw benefits beyond financial; many responded that returning home not only gave them comforts of home, but also the company and support of their family. Home comforts included familiarity and security, but often referred to home-cooked meals and having parents cook. Alumni enjoyed the opportunity to spend quality time with and reconnect with parents and siblings upon graduation. In some cases, alumni mentioned feeling closer to parents now than before college: “I wasn’t very close to my parents growing up but am much more so now after living with them again.”

Finally, the time after graduation was seen as a transition; alumni felt like moving home allowed them to work through this transition comfortably and think about their next steps. Living with and being able to get advice from parents seemed to enhance this experience: “[it was] nice to reconnect with parents post-college. Get some real world input from them when experiencing it and facing it head on.”

Recommendations for Boomerang Families

As reported in the previous publication (Petree, 2012), parents want information from “voices of experience,” particularly parent/family program professionals. The preferred way to receive information, parents reported, was through electronic sources, such as email and websites. Professionals not only can provide specific information about top concerns (for example, resources to assist with a job search), but also can provide talking points that address the challenges identified by parents and alumni. The following talking points focus on these concerns, and can be provided to parents.

Negotiating Adulthood Status

Both parents and alumni recognized that young adults had changed and grown while away at college, but that this would be hard to negotiate while back under parents’ roofs. Although the young adults were coming out of an independent living situation, families found it easy to fall back into pre-college roles when children returned to the parental home, further blurring the lines between childhood and adulthood.

Professionals can remind parents that even though their children are living under the family’s roof, their son or daughter has experienced a lot in the past few years and has changed significantly since high school. It is important that parents recognize their children’s new status as an adult and treat children as such. Families can take advantage of the boomerang period to get to know students as the adults they have become, and enjoy children as friends.

Loss of Independence and Privacy

Young adults may experience a loss of independence upon moving home, as parents may want to know where their children are and might have rules and expectations that young adults did not have while away at college. Both young adults and parents may lose privacy. Further, siblings who live at home and who have grown used to additional space and attention must adjust to living with their brother or sister again.

The whole family needs to keep in mind that everybody needs some independence and privacy. Parents can set boundaries for themselves and young adult children, not forgetting about the privacy needs of other children living at home. All family members should remember that it is important to balance boundaries with mutual respect and independence.

Balancing Household Responsibilities

Participation in household chores was considered a major challenge for both parents and young adults. Parents were concerned that their young adults would not help around the house or would fall back into old routines from high school. Alumni further recognized that household negotiations would be a challenge for the family. Parents should set expectations about household rules and responsibilities early and stick to them. Family members need to negotiate so everyone plays a role in the household. Compromising about these responsibilities may be necessary so that everyone is satisfied with the arrangement.

Cost

With another adult in the house, costs will increase. Some parents were concerned about higher food and utility bills, but many also wanted to emphasize financial responsibility to their young adult. Part of helping a son or daughter financially is teaching about financial responsibility; if parents are going to expect contributions to bills, they should be very clear about the amount, the due date, and consequences if the payment is not made.

Parents should specifically consider how to handle charging their children rent. Asking children to pay low amounts of rent can be a successful way to encourage financial responsibility while allowing children to save money. If parents do not need this money to cover expenses, it can be saved and returned to be used for a security deposit and moving expenses when children move out again.

Dealing with Feelings of Disappointment or Embarrassment

Even though returning home is increasingly common, many alumni felt that there was a negative stigma attached and felt embarrassed about the move. What would friends and other family members think? On the other hand, parents were concerned about how to motivate their young adults and keep positive about the situation. Parents can provide support and encouragement in order to minimize these feelings by reminding their children that it is common for college students to return home for a time upon graduation. In most cases, it is a responsible choice and a rational decision for the entire family and is nothing to be embarrassed about. Parents should also continue to encourage a job search and independence.

Other Children at Home

If other siblings were also at home, parents looked forward to having the entire family back together under one roof. Similarly, alumni appreciated being able to reconnect and spend more time with siblings at home. It is important that parents don’t forget about their other children while negotiating their graduate’s move home. Similar to parents and returning

young adults, other children will likely feel a sudden loss of privacy and will have to adjust to this return. Additionally, they may have concerns of their own about sharing space and defining household chores. Parents should remember to include all family members in discussions about a graduate's return, including negotiations about household rules, responsibilities, and boundaries.

Conclusion

Overall, there was consensus between parents and alumni regarding the major challenges and benefits of graduates returning to the parental home. The transition from an empty nest to a full one is not trouble-free; parents and graduates alike noted a loss of privacy when the family was reunited, as well as concerns regarding children's adulthood status. Further, recent graduates resented having to report whereabouts and explain their routines, while parents anticipated that a full house required a traditional family relationship with shared chores and some information about where young adults were going and when they expected to be home.

Alumni appeared to anticipate fewer challenges than parents. In fact, most alumni reported that there would be no challenges for their parents when they returned home; few parents reported the same for themselves. When parents did say they anticipated no problems, it was often because parents saw this as a temporary move, or because they saw it as a time for graduates to reach career and lifestyle goals. It is possible, then, that issues in boomerang families may increase over the young adults' time at home, particularly if the graduates are home for longer than expected or if they are not making steps towards independence or future goals.

Despite challenges, parents looked forward to getting to know their children as adults, and recent graduates indicated that a benefit of living at home again was having more equal, adult relationships with parents. Both felt a benefit of co-residence was to spend time together and enjoy one another's company and conversations. Alumni reported that moving home allowed the time and flexibility they needed in thinking about their next steps. Moving home might not just be necessary for financial reasons, but also valuable as young adults work through the post-graduation transition and plan their future. The key to working through challenges and taking advantage of the benefits appeared to be negotiation and communication. While the boomerang family has several challenges to overcome, living together as adults can give families the opportunity to grow closer and get to know and appreciate one another in new ways.

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