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Abstract

A large amount of pressure is placed upon young adults to attend college. The goal of this study was to establish where this pressure is stemming from and why. Examining participants through autoethnography and grounded theory helped me to discover that parents are a large external factor that influence this pressure, along with the idea that college is needed for a successful future. After discovering these themes, I was able to conclude that college is not needed to obtain a successful career through the use of data. This is a common misconception that many people may believe. In reality, there are many opportunities for individuals who choose to not attend an institute of higher learning,. This study should bring attention to these opportunities, as well as inform people of the negatives of attending college due to pressure.

Introduction to Study/ Disciplinary

Experience

All my life I was never a kid who enjoyed school. Elementary school and middle school were doable but once I got to high school, I was miserable. Classes got harder and it felt like everyone around me was getting smarter. I hated going to class and almost never did my homework. Not because I was lazy, but because I really struggled. Work that would take my classmates a half hour would probably take me three. I received extra help throughout my younger years through programs like remedial math. In highschool, you are kind of left on your own. Extra help sessions are offered but frustration took over me and left me with no motivation. I just wanted to pass and get it over with.

My senior year was a real eye opener for me. All of my friends were deciding on which colleges they would attend and they all seemed so excited about the process. I felt like such an outsider. I had zero interest in any of it but I felt college was my only option. I went on one campus tour to the College of Staten Island. It was horrible. The campus itself just was not for me, nor did I have a subject in mind to major in. I felt that everyone around me was pressuring me into attending school whether they were aware of it or not. My guidance counselor would ask me about it as well as my parents, making it seem as though college was the only option. School just was not my thing, yet I felt so much pressure to figure out my future and attend college. No one ever talked to me about the options I had aside from college such as working in a trade or going into the military. College was and still is so heavily pushed upon everyone.

After a lot of back and forth with my parents, we decided I should go to community school at Rockland Community College. I dreaded it every day and often asked myself what the

point was of me being there. After my first year, I was forced to pick a major. I decided upon Criminal Justice because it was the easiest course I had taken in my semester prior. I ended up finishing out the two years and decided it would be in my best interest to transfer. The only issue was that I struggled to figure out what I was passionate about. I wondered why all my friends were able to just know what they wanted to do with their lives. At the time my dad had told me I had to make a decision because I was not going to just sit home after my two years at RCC.

I was sent into a panic and came to the consensus that Criminal Justice would be okay. I figured maybe it would be easy because it was not that bad when I took courses over at RCC. I also always had a lot of respect for cops and thought maybe I could see myself being one. I applied to John Jay College of Criminal Justice and got in. At first I was pretty excited because I knew I wanted to be in New York City however, things changed fairly quickly. As soon as I got there, I knew it was a mistake. Taking classes made me realize that field was not for me in the slightest. I wanted just a generic major to have in my back pocket and John Jay was way too specific for me. I went through so many sleepless nights contemplating whether I should transfer or not. I loved being in the city but really did not like the school. I knew if I continued at John Jay, my options for a career would be super limited.

That semester, I applied to SUNY Purchase for the spring. I got in and left John Jay after finishing out my fall semester. This made me really stressed. I wondered if I would ever get it right. Soon after I applied for dorming, I got an email saying there were no dorms available for me. Living in Rockland County, I did not want to commute, especially for a school I was not even sure if I would like. I went back to RCC for the spring and took some of my Purchase courses there. That way, I could easily make my schedule for next semester.

I finally started classes at Purchase in the fall of 2019. I was able to live on campus and gradually become more comfortable with the school. I decided on being a Liberal Studies major because this left me with the most options career wise. However, I am still figuring out what I want to do with my life. Some days I feel really out of place here. Everyone here is super creative and driven. They know what they want to do and are going places. I think this is the best college experience that I have had, yet I still question why college is so heavily pushed on young adults.

Introduction to Study

American society just assumes that you are attending college and that if you do not, you are doing something wrong. Young adults are not able to make their own choices when it comes to what they want to do in the future, yet expected to do well when they are forced into school. There is a misconception that going to school means you will have a successful future. However, if you lack the motivation to be there and are unsure of what you want, that is not always the case. According to speaker Deven Paolo, “Almost fifty percent of those who sign up for college drop out. About one in three adults do make it through college and earn a degree, but forty percent of them find that their degree doesn’t translate into a career and end up under-employed” (TEDx Talks, 2019). Deven and his brother started a metal fabrication business in 2007. Both of them believed in following their own career path without education.

Society also makes having a college degree such a big deal. I believe this is untrue because someone without one may be even more qualified for a job than someone with one, yet the one without a degree will be turned away. College is extremely costly and most students are

unable to pay back the debt they encounter because they do not get a job after college. People like guidance counselors also just assume you are going to college without really talking to you about the other options there are such as trade schools and military options.

Research Question

I question why young adults are pressured into receiving a college education? What is the percentage of people who graduate high school that move on to college? Why is there such a stigma around going undecided? Who influences young adults into thinking school is the only option? Society has created this need for young adults to attend school. When young adults attend school due to the pressure they feel to go, they may suffer mental health issues like anxiety and depression, as well as not do well in schooling.

Review of Literature

Pressure Placed on Students to Attend College

Young adults are not able to make their own choices when it comes to what they want to do in the future, yet expected to do well when they are forced into school (Coles, 2003). There is a misconception that going to school means the individual will have a successful future (Morton, 2018). However, if one lacks the motivation to be there and also lacks a clear vocation, that is not always the case (Moore, 2009). The cost may not be worth the outcome one receives, as college does not guarantee an occupation in the future (Morton, 2018). There are also many jobs available to those who do not attend college (Fertig, 201: Morton, 2018).

Failure to Educate Students of Options Besides College

It is not often that young adults are informed of post-secondary options aside from college. Research has shown that many people end up very successful without attending college (Coles, 2003). However, parents who are supposed to be looked to as support systems, are failing to educate students of options other than college post high school . Guidance counselors are also not informing students of these options (Coles, 2003). Many positive effects are associated with not going to college due to the need for jobs that require vocational school rather than a bachelor's degree (*The Clearing House 2001*). Some schools have made shifts to Competency-Based Education which allows a student to progress at whichever pace they wish (Ordonez, 2014). Outside resources are influencing students into attending college, without informing them of other options that may be beneficial in the long run ((Fertig, Jason. 2011: Moore, 2009: Coles, 2003).

Cost of College

The cost of college is a large expense that may not be worth it if one lacks the desire to attend. The dollar cost of a four year college puts young adults in a tough spot financially post graduation, having to deal with debt and paying back loans (Morton, Patricia Gonce. 2018). Research shows that these high costs have led to mental health concerns in many college

students such as anxiety and depression (G.T.T, 2018). Financial stress is recorded to be a top contributor to suicide attempts (G.T.T, 2018). It is suggested that dropping out of college may relieve stress encountered due to financial worries (Faas, Benson, Kaestle, Savla, Jyoti 2018)

Career Opportunities

It is often thought that if one does not attend college, he or she will not receive a reliable career. Research findings suggest this to be a myth through many examples (Fertig, 2011). There are many job opportunities that do not require a college degree (Coles, 2003 : Schmidt, 2013).

Vocational education sets up students to obtain careers in the future without the degree (*Vocational Education in Cosmetology* 2003). Some of these careers include those of manufacturing, plumbing and cosmetology backgrounds (Schmidt, 2013: *Vocational Education in Cosmetology* 2003). Research shows the growing need for STEM based jobs as well (Schmidt, 2013).

Conclusion

Research shows that too much pressure is put on young adults to attend college. It touches upon how young adults are forced into receiving a degree, as alternatives are not talked about frequently. It was also said that the cost of education may not be worth the end result, and can lead to poor mental health. Studies also show that many careers do not require a college degree of any sort and there is a growing need for blue collar occupations. In previous years,

college was not pushed upon young adults. Nowadays, society just assumes that one is attending college and that if one makes the choice not to, he or she is doing something wrong. For my contribution, I would like to show that college is not the only way to a successful future and break the stigma by using research as well as an autoethnographic method.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were my step mother, father and myself. My father and stepmother played a large role in the decision making process of whether I will be attending college or not. These participants were selected because we had many conversations about the subject.

Materials

Once the participants were selected, I informed them of my study and received permission to share our conversations in my work. The research question I wanted to address was: Why is such an immense amount of pressure placed on young adults to attend college? Along with the conversations we had, I found some of our old text messages concerning college applications and acceptances. I was also able to gather some of my old report cards, which served to show that school is not an area that every individual thrives in.

Design and Procedure

This study was completed through both autoethnography and grounded theory. Through the use of materials and interviews, I was able to conduct an effective conversation with my participants about the pressure placed on individuals to attend college post high school graduation. Autoethnography is a research approach that seeks to analyze and describe personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2011). Grounded theory is a method which uses both qualitative and quantitative data to form a theory (Chun Tie 2019). I spoke with my selected participants while at home and made a list of questions I wanted to ask them.

Results

Pressure From Outside Environment

When speaking with my father, he said that he remembered talking to me about attending Rockland Community College because he felt it was necessary that I go to college. At the same time, he admitted to knowing school was not necessarily an area that I thrived in. After I received my acceptance to John Jay College of Criminal Justice, I texted both my father and stepmother. They were more excited than I was because they were the only reason I applied. I remember thinking to myself “Now what?,” while their responses were more along the lines of “So excited!” or “Awesome this is great bud!!” Parents are pushing children to live their lives differently than themselves because college is way more normalized today. If you do not attend college, you are seen as the outlier.

Vocational Schooling

During my highschool career, I completed Rockland BOCES or Boards of Cooperative Educational Services' (rocklandboces.org) carpentry program. Each day these individuals would leave the regular school day and take a bus over to the BOCES center in Bardonia. Many of the individuals here normalized that school is not for everybody. The instructor was a carpenter outside of teaching who offered many of the individuals positions as well as informed them of who was looking for help. I asked my dad how he felt about me attending BOCES. He said he thought it would be a great opportunity for me because I would meet people who were more similar to my mindset, and hopefully become good at a trade. Since I decided carpentry was not for me, he thought it would be best if I attended college.

Success Without College

Through research, I have found many jobs that require no degree at all. When I asked my step mother why her and my father thought it was necessary that I attend college, she replied with "Education is very important in obtaining a job today. Many jobs require at least an associates degree". After digging up my old report cards, it was surprising to me that she stood by this. It was evident that school was not an area I did particularly well in because I simply was not passionate about it. Attending college without a desire to be there can potentially hurt my future of receiving a job, more than it could help.

Discussion

While interviewing my father and stepmother, I found that my data correlated with what they had said. They reflect the idea that parents are large external factors as to why young adults

feel pressure to attend college. They also vocalized their concerns about young adults finding steady jobs if they do not obtain a college degree, which was reflected in the research spoken about in the literature review. This is a common misconception as the data provided in that portion suggests many jobs that do not require a college degree.

As young adults, many of us feel pressure to attend college even if we are unsure of what we want to do in our futures. Parents and guidance counselors push students to attend college, as well as promote the common misconception that one must complete college to obtain a successful career (Fertig, 2011; Moore, 2009). Being around these outside negative influences may cause mental health issues like depression and anxiety towards the future. In interviewing my father and stepmother, it was evident that they are part of the population of adults who push young adults to attend college

My data suggests that young adults are not often informed of post-secondary options aside from college. In the interview I conducted, it was evident that I was influenced into attending college. The theme that young adults are pressured by the outside environment was found to be supported through my interview. My father and step mother were strong believers that college was the only option, despite knowing how I felt about attending. My data also spoke about how guidance counselors are also not informing students of these options (Coles, 2003). The second theme of vocational school serves as an alternative to regular schooling. This was found in both my literature review and interview. My father thought it would be best for me to attend Rockland BOCES because he knew I struggled with school and did not feel it was serving a large purpose for me. However, my data explains that vocational school is used as an alternative and that it is not often for one to complete both vocational and regular schooling.

Through this study, I have found that many careers do not require a college degree. Some of these careers include those of manufacturing, plumbing and cosmetology backgrounds (Schmidt, 2013: *Vocational Education in Cosmetology* 2003). Research shows the growing need for STEM based jobs as well. These jobs are seen as more hands on or “blue collar jobs.” The need for these types of jobs is quite high. Research shows that many people end up with successful careers in more hands-on fields like manufacturing, which does not require a college degree (Schmidt, 2013). One source spoke about the positives of cosmetology school, which was something BOCES offered as well (*Vocational Education in Cosmetology* 2003).

Success without college was something my father and step mother did not talk much about in our interview, but rather the opposite. They spoke about how they felt a college degree was needed to obtain a steady job in today’s climate. The interview and the data I collected pertaining to this did not match. The success rates of those who attend college and those who do not are measured to be about the same. In some cases those who did not attend college ended up even more successful than those with a degree.

Conclusion

Through the use of the autoethnographic method, journals, past work, conducting ethnographic interviews, using gathered materials, and grounded theory, I was able to gather information concerning the pressure placed on young adults to attend an institute of higher learning. The first theme spoke about the outside environment that influences young adults to attend college. Through both data and the interview process, parents were found to be a large

environmental factor. The second theme was vocational schooling. Through the interviewing and research conducted as well, this was found to be a positive alternative to regular schooling. The third theme was success without college. This was not matched in my data and interview. Parents often feel that success correlates with attending college while research shows success is very possible without obtaining a college degree.

When looking back on the interview I conducted, I find it interesting that my father and step mother were so adamant on me attending college. My father works in an elevator union and my step mother is a retired NYPD officer. My father's job requires no degree and my step mother's requires an associate's degree. My father was very supportive of my decision to attend vocational school during high school but because I did not love carpentry right away, he thought it was necessary that I attend college to figure out what I wanted to do. This way, I would have a degree in my back pocket no matter what. While this may seem like a valid point, parents fail to see all of the work that students put into college. Students do way more than just attend class. They juggle homework, class, activities and friends which may lead to much unneeded stress. There is a lack of motivation to complete these tasks, especially if the individual does not have an idea of what he or she wants to do in the future.

Given the current circumstances, I believe using an autoethnographic approach was successful. If given the chance, it would have been insightful to be able to interview those that I attended Rockland BOCES with as well as other students in vocational schools. In the future, I believe it would be beneficial to measure the number of students who commit to attending a university during their highschool career. I am curious to see if others have had similar experiences to me and are seeking more information about alternative options to college. It is my

hope that individuals who feel similar to myself find a way to become educated on options aside from college. If your counselors and family members are pressuring you into attending college, do your research. It is possible to achieve a successful career and future without a college education.

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