ABSTRACT

College Women's Perceptions of Role
in the Workforce and the Wage Gap

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The purpose of this study is to look into the career choices women make that lead to the wage gap by exploring how traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce, how identity influences opinions of the wage gap, and how mutedness impacts the wage gap. Data was collected through interviews with women 18-24 years old enrolled in four-year universities or graduate schools in the southern region of the U.S. Using sensemaking theory as an ontological lens, this study qualitatively investigated the gender- and career-related messages these women received, their perceptions of their role in the workforce, and their opinions about the wage gap. This study extends literature on organizational socialization and career choice by exploring the intersections of socialization, mutedness, and the wage gap. This study also provides insight on how to lessen the gap and provides additional insight into the intergenerational reproduction of role identity.

College Women's Perceptions of Role
in the Workforce and the Wage Gap

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

At a women in computing event on October 9, 2014, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella stated, in what has been interpreted by many as an admonition to women to refrain from asking for raises, "It's not really about asking for the raise, but knowing and having faith that the system will actually give you the right raises as you go along" (CBS News, 2014). While Nadella later recanted his statement, it struck a chord with the media and general public, amplifying contested views of the wage gap in American business practices. Though some insist the wage gap is a myth, the debate dates back at least 50 years and persists today. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, which protected women from gender-based wage discrimination and unfair pay and made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sex (Society for Human Resources Management, 2014). When passed into law, women earned 59 cents for every man's dollar. In the last fifty years this gap has shrunk by 24 cents, and women now make 78 cents to every man's dollar. While the gap is improving, it is not expected to disappear until 2058 if the current pace of change continues (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014). Women of color, however, face even steeper gaps as some of whom make as little as 56 cents to the Caucasian man's dollar – a trend consistent over time even when occupation, education, age, skill, and other factors are taken into consideration (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013; White House, 2013).

Differences in negotiation skills, choice of degree and career field, and work-life balance are often cited explanations for the wage gap (Council of Economic Advisers Issue Brief, 2015; Hoff Sommers, 2012; Thompson, 2013), though origins of this inequity are more complex than any one of these factors or even all of them combined. This study seeks to look deeper to understand *why* women make career choices that lead to the wage gap as such insight is critical to fully addressing this persistent imbalance. Communication frameworks and theories including socialization, memorable messages (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981), and muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) as well as literature on work-life balance have offered a clearer picture of how women see their position in the workforce and have helped provide explanations for the choices that may have led to lower pay. For example, research suggests men and women undergo gender and organizational socialization differently. Women are also less able to freely speak out against sexism (e.g., Perriton, 2009), and they often receive different messages about work-life balance.

Nonetheless, literature on how young women make sense of their future roles in the workforce is lacking, and while sociologists have explored the issue of the wage gap (e.g., Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007; Petersen & Morgan, 1995), communication scholars have devoted scant attention to wage gap issues specifically. Though the wage gap is often addressed from an economic or political perspective, it is also important to examine it from a communication vantage point given that many of the dynamics concerning the wage gap are linked with messages young women receive throughout their lives. Buzzanell (1995) made a similar argument about the study of the glass ceiling. She contended that despite the existence of multiple strategies meant to combat the glass

ceiling it would continue to frustrate women, "until we reframe the glass ceiling as a communicative process and consequence" (p. 333). This study seeks to fill the literature gap by qualitatively examining traditionally college-aged women's (i.e., 18-24 years) perceptions of the wage gap and experiences of occupational socialization. Through in-depth narrative interviews, this study provides insight into the gender- and career-related messages women receive throughout their lives, their perceptions of their role in the workforce, and their opinions about the wage gap. Given that previous studies have shown that women of different generations have varying perceptions of workforce responsibilities (e.g., Favero & Heath, 2012), it is important to examine the perspectives of those who have not yet begun their careers as potentially distinct from currently working professionals.

Specifically, this study looks at Millennials which are typically defined as individuals born after 1979, a generation considered to vary greatly from its predecessors on occupational values (Pew Research, 2010). It is possible that generational exceptionalism – believing they are not only different, but better than previous generations, possibly due to their reported "look at me" attitude (Pew Research, 2007) – could have an influence on their perceptions of the wage gap, as they may not view the wage gap as a personally relevant problem. This research offers insight into the degree to which Millennial women view and interpret the wage gap as pertinent to their lives.

Additionally, the current study extends literature on organizational socialization and career choice and explores how muted group theory plays into identity formation. By examining traditionally college-aged women this study provides organizational communication scholars with insight into how gendered and occupational socialization

play into occupational identity formation. Muted group theory is applied to aid understanding of how issues of mutedness factor into topics of promotion and pay raises. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) further informs this study as it suggests individuals retrospectively analyze their experiences and interactions to shape their identity and guide future actions. Not only is it used to interpret data, but it also guides the research questions and methods of inquiry.

Practically, this study helps explain why women make career decisions that lead to the wage gap. Such information may provide insight on how to narrow the gap through localized efforts and may help better explain socialization's relationship with social justice issues. Additionally, this study provides organizations with knowledge of how Millennial women conceptualize their role in the workforce. This information could help organization leaders prepare to manage a new generation of employees and better handle issues of pay and promotion.

The next chapter reviews the extant literature on socialization, memorable messages, muted group theory, and work-life balance messages as they pertain to the formation of women's professional identities. The methodology for the study is then presented with an explanation of sensemaking theory's role as an ontological framework; a findings chapter and a discussion chapter follow.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

From childhood through adulthood women make sense of their occupational

identities through messages and interactions with others. The constructs of organizational

and occupational socialization, including the concept of memorable messages as well as

muted group and sensemaking theories, provide insight into the ways in which women

construct their identities.

Socialization

Socialization is defined as the continuous process through which individuals learn

"the values, norms, and required behaviors that allow them to participate as members of

organizations" (Van Maanen, 1976, p. 27). Socialization, then, is a key way we learn

about work and family (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006).

Medved and her colleagues contended that socialization is not the "inevitable adoption of

socially prescribed roles, but [an] ongoing mutual interplay between agency and

structure…" (p. 163). Thus, the socialization process is a collaborative and interactive

one that involves family, friends, fellow members, and the individual him or herself. As

Giddens (1979) put it, "socialisation [sic] is thus most appropriately regarded not as the

'incorporation of the child into society' but the succession of the generations" (p. 130).

Similarly, Golden (2001) argued, "Conditions of modernity intensify individuals'

experience of self-identity as constructed rather than given, and heighten the constitutive

function of interpersonal communication with respect to the definition and maintenance

of role-identities" (p. 233). By that, it can be inferred that occupational identity is also constructed, heavily influenced, defined, and maintained by interactions with others.

This section summarizes present understandings of how women's occupational socialization is shaped in childhood and continues through adulthood, potentially influencing career choices and occupational identities. Specifically demonstrated is how gender-based socialization leads women to distinctively form career values, construct ideas about work-life balance, and make career choices in ways that differ from men and even older women.

Families serve as children's first point of socialization to gender roles, and as such are critical to the occupational socialization process. For example, Arnston and Turner (1987) found that kindergarten students have gendered role expectations for their parents that allow "fathers to talk more and exert more power than mothers, especially in regulative contexts" (p. 304). More recently, Rittenour, Colaner, and Odenweller (2014) demonstrated that a mother's adherence to feminist ideals influenced how she brought up her daughter – whether with traditional gender norms, reversed gender norms, or neutral gender norms. These studies suggest gendered socialization begins very early and reinforce the importance of familial experiences and beliefs.

Similar to gender role socialization, research has found that occupational socialization begins at a young age. Buzzanell, Berkelaar, and Kisselburgh (2011) found that children as young as four engage in processes of communication, "(a) acting as designers of their own careers; (b) extracting cues to make sense of careers; (c) articulating meaningfulness based on local contexts, and (d) engaging with concerted cultivation and/or natural growth practices" (p.154). These communication processes are

heavily drawn from family communication, demonstrating the salience of early familial influence on occupational socialization.

Occupational and gender socialization and their effects, however, do not stop in childhood. Strom and Boster (2007) showed that educational attainment in the form of high school completion was heavily influenced by supportive family messages. For many industries, especially those in academic disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), decisions made in high school impact a student's ability to enter a prospective career. Jahn and Myers (2014) examined messages adolescents receive that lead to STEM career decisions, as they must take many of the first steps towards these careers in high school. Findings supported the critical role parents, career insiders, and educators play as socializing agents in encouraging students to consider STEM fields.

In a similar study, Kisselburgh, Berkelaar, and Buzzanell (2007), examined the meaning of work associated with STEM careers to better understand why women are still underrepresented in those fields. They contended, "children are not simply socialized in the *how* of a particular career but *whether* a particular career or type of work is acceptable through indirect, direct, absent, and ambient messages" (p. 387). Further, they suggested the discursive construction of STEM fields as masculine and incompatible with family life and social roles leave women with enduring impressions of the inappropriateness of seeking a STEM career. Their findings demonstrate that when choosing a career, women face not only media and family influences from childhood to adolescence but also masculine-dominated college programs and even lingering gender laden career values (i.e., what fields are appropriate for women, the importance of work) (Kisselburgh et al.,

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2007). These studies further the idea that socialization is a lifelong process that influences how women make career decisions, something often cited as an explanation for the wage gap, and potentially even how they conceptualize their occupational identity. If women are socialized to believe these high paying fields are inappropriate for them, they may not perceive the wage gap or lack of women in these fields as troubling or even an issue.

Not only do gender and occupational socialization affect the decisions women make about what careers to enter, they also influence workplace values and behaviors. In a study on the intersections of work and family life, Jorgenson (2000) found that female engineers who were socialized into an organizational culture that promoted gender neutrality often refrained from bringing up issues surrounding work-life balance accommodations in order to "leave gender at the door" and prevent drawing attention to their gender. In contrast to that perspective, Buzzanell (1995) advocated for an awareness of how we "do gender" in everyday organizing through discourse, which she posits sustains power imbalances. She argued the glass ceiling is a social construct and as such reframing it as a communicative process could lead to change. According to Buzzanell, "Men and women maintain gender stereotypic interactions by defining what work is considered valuable, where women's natural talents are most useful for organizational efficiency, and how organization members socially construct work identities" (p. 329). This maintenance of gender stereotypic interactions was supported by Van Putten, Dykstra, and Schippers' (2008) study of intergenerational reproduction of women's paid work, which found that daughters of working mothers worked more hours per week than daughters of non-working mothers. They posit that it's this reproduction of behavior that can help explain why gendered labor-market behavior stereotypes are tough to change.

These studies not only demonstrate how gender and occupational socialization impact the decisions women make, but also how younger generations of female workers are influenced by the women before them.

Further research has reified the importance of observing varying generational perspectives when studying women in the workplace. Favero and Heath (2012) found a generational difference between how women see proper work-life balance, which they were able to attribute to differing socialization. Older generations were socialized into the workplace by men who primarily occupied the workforce. Younger generations, and women just entering the workforce, were socialized by the women who paved the way for them, which resulted in a less masculine perception of work-life balance. These findings show the importance of examining the perspectives of traditionally college-aged women's perspectives, since they may have differing views of their roles in the workforce than the women who came before them. This study looks at how college-aged women make sense of their occupational identity specifically because of possible differences from previous generations. To address this contested social issue, this study seeks to understand the potential relationships between how women make sense of their occupational identities and their perceptions of the wage gap.

When forming occupational identities, choosing career paths, and making opinions about social issues such as the wage gap, women may turn to particularly salient messages they received over their lifetime. These *memorable messages* often play a critical role in this sensemaking process and are addressed in turn.

Memorable Messages

Stohl (1986) characterized memorable messages as "heuristic devices people use for understanding and behaving in new situations'' (p. 233). Knapp, Stohl, and Reardon's (1981) seminal work defined memorable messages as those that are delivered in a private setting, briefly and verbally given, personal and important to the receiver, relevant to various contexts, and delivered by a respected source when the recipient is listening. Memorable messages, which may have been stored for a long time and can affect an individual's behavior (Stohl, 1986), might aid women in making career decisions. While previous research has been done on the influence of parental memorable messages on gender role socialization (Heisler, 2000), this study will delve further into this matter, reviewing current literature to explore how gender-related memorable messages may have influenced women's role identities.

Memorable messages are distinguished by their retrospective importance and ability to be accurately recalled when needed (Stohl, 1986). Knapp et al. (1981) found participants could recall the same memorable message months after data collection occurred, and other studies have similarly demonstrated individuals' ability to confidently and accurately recall memorable messages over time (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Holladay, 2002; Stohl, 1986). This literature suggests women may recall the messages they received from childhood to adulthood later in life when making important career-related choices and forming career values and identities. It is possible that women also receive memorable messages pertaining to wage gap related topics, such as hard work and salary, which will influence their reported opinions of the wage gap. These

messages could provide insight into the salience of memorable messages on identity

formation, as well as their impact on opinions of social justice issues.

One major source of memorable messages is family, and more specifically,

parents. Medved et al.'s (2006) study on family and work socializing communication

looked at the various messages about the role family should play in career choices.

Although their work showed some social changes, with boys receiving more messages

about the importance of family, girls still received considerably more messages about

choosing careers that allowed them greater work-life balance and messages about exiting

the workforce for children. These gender-related messages about career choice could

influence the way a young adult woman conceptualizes her occupational identity and

forms opinions about the wage gap.

Messages do not only come early in life and from families, however. Several

studies have demonstrated the importance of memorable messages received in college by

peers, family, and mentors on students' performance and academic behavioral changes

(Nazione et al., 2011; Wang, 2012). Even common questions, such as "What are you

going to do with that major?" have been shown to act as memorable messages and

influence the way students perceive the meaning of work, changing their view of

education to vocational preparation (Lair & Wieland, 2012). If messages can affect

students so heavily while in college it stands to reason that memorable messages will also

influence their beliefs and actions when entering the workforce, ultimately contributing to

possible pay discrepancies between men and women. The salience of memorable

messages received in college also reinforces the importance of studying traditionally

college-aged women, as they may struggle with an influx of new messages that conflict

with previously delivered messages, providing a unique look into the occupational identity formation process.

Not only do memorable messages aid students when making career and family decisions, they also help incoming organization members make sense of their new environment. Studies show memorable messages help individuals better understand situations (Stohl, 1986), and guide self-assessment of behavior to maintain or enhance personal standards when facing expectancy violations (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001). Even after entering the workforce, messages received earlier in life can influence the behaviors of women. It is possible that women who receive these messages early in their career or education will turn to them when forming career goals and plans.

As demonstrated, gendered socialization and memorable messages have the ability to impact occupational identity and opinions of the wage gap. With socialization and memorable messages in mind the following research questions were formed:

RQ1: How do traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce?

RQ2: How does workforce role identity influence perceptions of the wage gap?

The next section will explore muted group theory and how power imbalances may perpetuate the silencing of women, affecting how they make sense of their place in the workforce and how they advocate for themselves in organizational settings.

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory pertains to the imbalance in power between dominant and silenced groups, largely created by language (E. Ardener, 1972). Through extant

literature, this section explores how a power imbalance between men and women may lead to behavior that promotes the wage gap, gendered ideas about work-life balance, and denial of the power imbalance itself. The mutedness of women is a phenomenon Kramarae (1981) partially attributed to the very nature of our language's masculinity. Kramarae said, "Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish when and where they wish, because the words and norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men" (p. 1). This concept infers that women are less able to express themselves due to an inherent gender bias in the very language used to communicate. Shirley Ardener (1975) stressed that mutedness does not mean the group is silent, but rather it is more of an issue of whether or not the group is able to speak how and when they want. Evidence of this phenomenon is present in literature as women are shown to request raises less frequently than men, show less aggression, hedge more often, and be interrupted more in meetings (Aries, 2006; Wood & Dindia, 1998).

Another aspect of muted group theory involves the segregation of issues as women's issues and therefore less important. Ardener (1975) believed mutedness was due to lack of power and affected anyone low in the hierarchy, and supposed that those with little sway would have trouble having their perceptions heard. Perriton's (2009) critical analysis of the business case for diversity, for instance, found women were discouraged from voicing their concerns for more workplace equality in corporate discourse so that the men in charge would not perceive their concerns as women's issues and ignore them. Instead, women were encouraged to speak in a way men would find appealing and speak of the financial benefits they would bring to the company. Similarly,

Jorgenson (2000) found a reluctance of women engineers to cross public and private spheres at work lest they bring attention to their gender. Jorgenson concluded that the women in her study sought to gain acceptance in a male-dominated field by leaving gender out of the workplace and by speaking in a way that did not bring attention to their alternate role as a mother. Wood (2010) spoke to work-life balance as a women's issue in an article criticizing the "can-do" discourse surrounding young women. This discourse tells women they can have both the power career and perfect home, if only they learn to balance them. Wood's criticism falls most squarely on the ingrained notion that the home and childcare are a woman's domain and on the lack of work-life balance discourse targeted to men.

A fear of speaking up or unwillingness to oppose male-dominated discourse may lead to females attributing negative connotations to feminism. Aronson's (2003) study on feminists versus postfeminists found that more than half of her participants approached feminism with more ambiguity than previous research reported. The study also found that views of feminism were qualified by life experiences. For example, women who went to college, had a women's studies course, and were white were most likely to label themselves a feminist without qualification. Those who qualified their adherence to feminism were often college educated, without a course in women's studies, and women of color. Those who did not label themselves feminists still supported feminist goals and did not express antifeminist sentiments.

Similarly, Rittenour et al. (2014) found a mother's commitment to feminist ideals influenced how she would raise her daughter in regards to gender norms, promote education, and teach her about feminism. While most espoused at least some feminist

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ideals, some did report antifeminist beliefs, due to a possible aversion to the label "feminist."

This literature shows how mutedness and views of feminism could impact college-aged women's perceptions of their role in the workforce as well, as their views of the wage gap and their likelihood of asking for a raise. If young women are afraid to speak out, believe that women should not speak out, or hold negative connotations surrounding feminism, their opinions could be impacted. Taking this into account, a third research question is posed:

RQ3: How does mutedness impact how college-aged women make decisions in the workforce?

The nature of this study requires that participants look back at the messages they've received throughout their lives and their experiences to make sense of their occupational identity. The next chapter will present the methodological framework for the present study and examine sensemaking theory's appropriateness as an ontological lens.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology and Theoretical Framing

This chapter addresses the methodological framework used to conduct the present study and introduces sensemaking theory as an ontological lens used to inform data collection from beginning to end.

Participants

Women ages 18-24 who were enrolled in a four-year university or graduate school in the southern region of the U.S. during the time of the study were recruited as participants as they were uniquely positioned as preparing to enter the workforce without having done so. This position gave them a unique perspective as having been socialized for the workforce but not *by* the workforce. Family, peers, and teachers had influenced occupational identity to this point. By looking back at these relationships, participants were able to reflect on how the messages they received throughout their lives shaped their career choices. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Personal networks with individuals at multiple universities were contacted to gain access to prospective participants. To encourage participation extra credit was made available to female students who were interviewed for the study and male students who recruited other females to participate. Pulling from multiple universities helped account for the limitations imposed by primarily sampling among students of a particular university culture. Twenty interviews were conducted and a point of data saturation (i.e., the point at which no new information can be gained) was achieved.

Procedures

To gain insight into how traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce and perceive the wage gap, approximately one-hour long, individual, narrative style interviews were conducted in which participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and interactions with others. Sensemaking theory posits that individuals retrospectively analyze their experiences, drawing from preexisting mental models and continuous interactions to shape their sense of identity and inform future actions (Weick, 1995, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). As such, an interview guide (see Appendix) meant to stimulate but not dictate the interview process was utilized as a framework for discussion and was adapted according to each participant (Tracy, 2013). Narrative interviews are open-ended and fairly unstructured, asking participants to reflect on life experiences and tell stories. This approach facilitated probing toward greater depths of information and exploration of emergent themes. Included in the interview guide were a combination of experience (i.e., Can you tell me about you upbringing and how it may have played a role in your career choice?), factual (i.e., What is your major?), and generative questions (i.e., Tell me about your career ambitions) (Tracy, 2013). Sensemaking theory directed the formation of the interview questions. According to Weick and his colleagues (2005), sensemaking begins with a disruption, the question, "What's the story here?" This question prompts individuals to bracket and label incidents and retrospectively name what happened. Sensemaking isn't necessarily about accuracy but about plausibility and identity rooted in past experiences, meaning for the participants of this study, their perception of their experiences is more critical than what actually happened. Using sensemaking theory and the research

questions as a guide, questions pertained to how participants' families communicate about gender and work, what salient messages regarding gender and career choice they've received, what experiences they have had with mutedness (whether personal or related by a friend), and how participants make sense of their roles in the workforce. Questions were created to spark a moment of sensemaking in which participants would reflect on past experiences and messages, bracket and label the incidents, and then name what happened.

Data collection occurred over two months and resulted in 22.5 hours of data with the longest interview lasting just over 2 hours and the shortest 40 minutes. Once data collection was complete, interviews were transcribed for analysis. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the participants read and signed an informed consent form before the interviews were conducted. The participants were made aware of their right to opt out of voice recording and stop the interview at any time. No one opted out of recording, stopped the interview or refused a question. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participants' identities, and records were kept in a secure location without public access. One participant requested a specific pseudonym and her request was honored. All identifying information that could compromise anonymity was removed from transcriptions.

Analysis

A grounded theoretical analysis of the findings was employed that is consistent with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative model. This process involved continuously going between the data and literature, searching for meaning and emerging

themes while engaging in memo-writing and coding throughout the analysis (see also,

Charmaz, 2006).

After transcribing the interviews, data analysis began. Throughout the coding

process the researcher sought to understand how participants were retrospectively

analyzing their experiences to make sense of their role in the workforce and their

perceptions of the wage gap. Sensemaking theory influenced the entirety of analysis

process as the researcher used it to form codes and to direct themes. The first round of

coding was conducted through low-tech methods, consisting of printing transcriptions

and manually highlighting and marking the hard copies. Subsequent combinations of high

and low-tech methods were used thereafter, as a low-tech code location book was created

to keep track of the location and frequency of each code, and emerging codes were

entered into a Word document where they were compared and refined. Consistent with a

constant comparative method, existing codes were continuously reviewed and modified,

and emergent codes were generated.

First level codes served as descriptive markers helping the researcher to get a

basic feel of the interviews. This round included codes such as "siblings," "stay-at-home

mom," "passion," and "dual earners." After conducting the first level of coding the

researcher generated a list of the primary codes and logged their locations creating a

codebook that allowed the researcher to easily find codes and compare them. This led to

the production of second level codes. Following grounded theory the researcher revisited

the literature, sensemaking theory, and research questions to direct the second level of

coding. In an inductive approach, the researcher compared primary codes and grouped

them into broader codes that spoke to the research questions. This phase included codes

such as "career values," "family messages," "education value," and "negative perceptions of women." Once again the researcher returned to the literature and research questions while going over the secondary codes and looked for emergent themes. Once the preliminary themes were established the researcher went through each interview to verify that the themes spoke to the participants' experiences. Constant comparison between the themes, data, literature, and research questions led to the refinement of the primary themes and expulsion of some to create the final themes. This process ensured that the researcher did not cherry pick from the data to fit any preconceived ideas. During the final phase of coding themes that did not speak to the research questions were set aside. Two themes, however, were included even though they did not directly address the research question. These themes were included for their insight into traditionally college-aged women's perceptions of the wage gap and for their insight into Millennials.

The described procedures facilitated interpretation of the data and helped form a clearer picture of how traditionally college-aged women make sense of their roles in the workforce. Sensemaking theory was used to guide interpretations as the researcher continuously went back to it to determine how participants analyzed their past experiences. As this study focuses on the experiences women have from childhood to adulthood that may influence their occupational identity formation and ideas about the wage gap, sensemaking theory is suited to shape the research questions and analysis of this study.

Rigorous analysis of the data resulted in seven themes addressing the three research questions posed and two additional emergent themes that speak to how college-aged women conceptualize the wage gap. The next chapter explores the themes

uncovered during the analysis phase. The findings are reported according to the research

question they address and are followed by a discussion chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study according to the research question they address. Themes in this chapter express the experiences and messages received by the women in this study and how they subsequently made sense of their role in the workforce, their perceptions of the wage gap, and their experiences of mutedness (see Table 1).

Occupational Identity

Themes in this section address the first research question which asked how traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce. During the interview process women were asked to recall their mothers' career decisions and their childhood and were then asked how they would make their own choices. Many of the participants had never thought about why their mothers made their choices and had given little thought to how they would make choices regarding work and family. This reflection prompted the women to engage in a sensemaking process in which they retrospectively analyzed their experiences, using accounts of their mothers' experiences as mental models to shape their sense of identity and inform future action.

Three themes emerged through data analysis: *intergenerational reproduction of role identity*, *identity as a choice*, and *just as good as men*. The first subtheme represents the seemingly reproductive nature of role identity in which participants reported that they would emulate their mother's family and career prioritizations, whatever they might be. The second subtheme emerged from participants' recognition of their role as a choice,

and the third formed from their internalization of their value and acceptance of male-dominated work environments.

Intergenerational Reproduction of Role Identity

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed admiration of their parents and a desire to reproduce their upbringing when they started their own families. When questioned about their mother's career choices and how they anticipate making career choices, over half of the participants said they liked what their mothers did and would like to do the same thing. Analysis resulted in a pattern in which mothers who willfully worked full-time produced daughters seeking to work full-time without taking time off for kids; mothers who worked but regretted taking time away from their kids produced daughters who want to stay home with their kids at least part-time; and mothers who left the workforce but then went back once their children started school or they didn't feel as needed in the home produced daughters who wanted to temporarily leave the workforce. This was contingent, however, on whether the mother spoke well of her choice. Exceptions to the pattern were daughters of stay-at-home mothers and daughters who were displeased with their parents' work-life balance. In theses cases women often planned to work half time in order to balance work and family.

Daughters of happily employed mothers often spoke of their mothers' ambition, work ethic, and independence as well as their own ambition and goals. For instance, one participant, Melissa, discussed her adherence to her parents' work ethic and her own desire for independence, "I've never wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. It's never been something that's interested me, never been a thought in my mind. I feel the same way my mom did." She continued,

I'm very independent so I want to make my own money and I want to be able to provide for my kids and provide for my family the same way that my parents provided for me and in order for that to happen I know that I'm going to need to work.

Similarly, Charlotte, the daughter of full-time working mother with three jobs emphasized, "I would want to work and establish a career before I settle down and start a family." Others repeated the same sentiment about mimicking their mothers, working hard, and striving for independence, "Definitely, I would also [continue working]. Yeah, I just don't want to think that I need someone to support me. I want to support myself" (Tracy, a daughter in a long line of working women); "The reason I'm in school right now is because whenever I grow up I want to be able to give, like if I have kids or anything, just a better life than I feel that I had" (Linda, the daughter of a full-time working mom in Ecuador); and "I imagine I wouldn't stop working once I had kids. I mean I'm working really hard to get my degree…" (Rebecca, the daughter of a chemical engineer).

These women not only admired their mothers for their work, but also sought to emulate their role as a career woman. In these cases, the participants prioritized their role in the workforce over their familial role. While they valued their careers they made sure to articulate their "family first" values and insist they would be there for their children whether working full- or part-time.

In contrast, daughters of mothers who resented working or expressed regret for not taking time off often spoke of a desire to stay home at least part-time with their children. While the participants didn't necessarily feel resentful or harmed in anyway by their mothers' choices, they nevertheless wanted to learn from their experiences and make slightly different choices. Abigail, the daughter of a dental hygienist said,

In regards to taking time off I would try to take off as much as is financially and work-related possible…. My mother kind of wishes she could have done that, so just kind of live out a little better of what she did.

Although she planned to work full-time as her mother did, this participant among others, reacted to her mother's messages about work and family and chose to make slightly different choices. Heather, whose mother told her she was forced to go back to work, expressed similar plans saying, "I think I wouldn't work while my kids are little, assuming I do have kids, and then I would probably go back to work because I would get bored."

Similarly, daughters of mothers who temporarily left the workforce to take care of young children reported a wish to replicate this decision. These women spoke of the benefits they reaped from their mothers being around when they were young, their mothers' return to work as a natural occurrence as she was needed less in the home, and the balance that resulted as something they would like to imitate. Ann expressed this sentiment saying,

> Um I actually love what my mother did. I ideally, when I get married and have kids and stuff, if I am financially stable to be a stay-at-home mother I would like to be a stay-at-home mother. Then once, again, once they got older and didn't necessarily need me around as much anymore then I would like to go back to work… I felt like I benefited and my siblings and I that we really benefited from having that sort of dynamic around growing up and so I feel like that's something I would like to do.

Almost every participant with a mother who stayed home at least part-time spoke of the benefits of having a parent at home and reported they would do the same thing if able. Michelle, the daughter of a mother employed part-time, expressed this saying, "I have a personality that I always have to be doing something and so I would love to be a stay-at-home mom for a little while, but I don't see that as a long-term thing if that makes

sense." These women adhered to a "family first" value system but still put value in their role in the workforce. Unlike the women who placed their role in the workforce before their role at home, these participants placed equal weight in their roles seeking to balance them. Exceptions to the overall pattern occurred when women had full-time stay-at-home mothers or felt their parents didn't adequately balance work and family life.

In an exception to the pattern, daughters of stay-at-home mothers were the most inconsistent group. Although a couple said they were worried they would get bored at home and some wanted to be stay-at-home moms, more often than not they were uncertain of what they would do as they expressed excitement for their careers and fear of missing out on their children's lives. Susan remarked,

> I think that's a hard decision because I'm really excited to work and have a career of my own and I guess it depends on my job. I don't know. I feel like as a mother you don't want to miss some things when you have a newborn and I definitely don't think I would just quit. I probably take time off because I feel like, I don't know, I feel like that's the right thing to do, but I definitely think I would go back to work. Then I think about, I was thinking about sticking my child in daycare all day and I don't…I mean my stepmom's gone from like 7a.m. until 5p.m. and she only sees them in the evenings. She puts them to be like two hours later and then does the same thing every day.

Others articulated this saying, "I really love working and I love school – learning and all that – so I could see myself doing maybe part-time work. I don't think I could be a full-time mom like my mom has been…" (Marilyn); "I'd like to be a stay-at-home and have kids, but then a side of me I'm like, well if I find something that I'm really passionate about working-wise…" (Bethany); and "I think at the beginning I would probably do part time if the job that I'm in is something I'm passionate about…but I think at the end I would love to be a full-time mom." (Tiffany). With many of these participants the decision to stay at home was contingent on finding a career they were

passionate about. If they were unable to find a career they felt strongly about they would defer to their role as a mother and stay home. Unlike the previous groups these women placed their role in the home over their role in the workforce. Although some of them expressed interest in having a career, their first priority was their family and role as a mother.

Another exception to the pattern were participants who were displeased with how their parents negotiated work-life balance and rather than replicating their decisions have decided on a different path. Britney, for instance, said,

> I have thought about it. She has, you know, given me the world and I'm not negative about the choices she made, but I definitely want to like pick my kids up from school and just be home more with them… I definitely want to take more time off. I don't ever see myself as a full time stay-at-home mother, but I definitely want to just give a few more hours in the day.

Similarly, Heather, who also expressed a desire to do things differently because of her mother's experience, said, "I think when my kids were younger I'd want to work less simply because we didn't get a lot of time with our parents, and I'm a little resentful of that, but not really anymore." While these women have chosen to do things differently than their mothers, none reported a radical change. All either planned to take a step back from work or a step back from being a stay-at-home mother. Like the other women who planned to work part-time, these women conceptualized their role in the workforce as equal to their role in the home.

The data supports a pattern of familial repetition as one participant, Whitney, remarked on her family's tradition saying, "…so I would say in my family there's probably been a history of women staying at home or women taking care of children that that's kind of been the norm," while in contrast Tracy said, "Like everyone in our family

the wife always worked also – my extended family too." These patterns represent a theme

of intergenerational transmission of career and motherhood roles. As evidenced by this

section, the women in this study made sense of their role in the workforce by observing

and imitating their mothers' choices, pulling from existing models to inform future

action. The next theme delves further into how college-aged women make sense of their

role in the workforce, looking into how they conceptualize choice.

Identity as a Choice

The women in this study conceptualized their role in the workforce as a choice.

As demonstrated in the previous section participants made sense of their role in the

workforce by reflecting on what their mothers did. While some participants placed their

role at home before their role in the workforce, and others the opposite, all participants

conceptualized their role in the workforce as a choice. Although the participants

recognized their own choice of whether or not to leave the workforce after having kids,

many were either unaware of how or why their mothers made that choice. Ann described

when she realized the choice her mother made in leaving her career,

> It wasn't really until I guess later in life that it actually dawned on me that
> was you know (pause) a choice on her part. You know? It was just kind of
> was like oh yeah mom stays at home, which is kind of the norm I guess, I
> don't know.

For many of these women this choice was based on messages they had received

about motherhood, as well as an adherence to traditional gender norms in the family. This

choice was also met with an abundance of uncertainty. More than any other group, the

daughters of stay-at-home mothers reported the most choice uncertainty as they both

pursued a career and feared missing out on the lives of their future children. This

uncertainty was expressed by Susan as the result of the messages her mother gave her about motherhood,

> I guess I can't speak for everyone but from what my mom told me, you know when you have a newborn you don't want to give them anyone. You're so protective over them you don't want anyone else to hold them. You want to watch over them all the time. I feel like if I have a baby and then just stuck them with someone else that I don't know, it would make me sad if my child was like, "You were never around when I was growing up" because I was working all the time. So I guess it's important to find that balance between home and work.

Overwhelmingly, participants articulated a desire for balance between work and family life and spoke of flexibility as one of the most important factors when considering a career. Participants recognized a woman's choice even when they planned to have high-power careers. This choice, however, belonged solely to women. Through adherence to traditional gender norms women were able to monopolize the role of stay-at-home parent. The women in this study viewed the role of a stay-at-home parent as primarily theirs to accept or reject. The rejection of the role, however, did not automatically mean it became a choice for men. The participants' commitment to traditional family ideals often determined whether they would extend the option to stay home to men. Despite acknowledging societal changes regarding women in the workplace and the acceptance of stay-at-home fathers, many women claimed the role as their own. Bethany used traditional gender norms to frame her opinion of stay-at-home fathers, saying,

> I guess like just the way we are raised in society it's completely normal, like there's nothing wrong with it at all. I don't know, I think my first idea is thinking that, "Well why aren't they working? The man in the relationship is supposed to be driven and want to provide for his family."

Not only did this participant express an adherence to traditional family roles but articulated a man's primary role as the provider for the family. Like others in the study,

she continued saying that while it is becoming more normal for men to stay at home she would rather act as the stay-at-home parent because she would expect the man to work. Tiffany expressed a similar point of view saying, "That's how [I was] raised, that I would see my dad go off to work so that's almost all that I've ever known so it's almost like that's what I want as well." Similarly, even when participants claimed feminist identities and spoke of changing norms they struggled with the idea of a man staying at home as Kaylee described,

> I feel like even for me (pause) like if a guy is like staying home and the wife is working I would think that he had made that choice because he wanted like a sugar momma, essentially. You know? And like I said, it's something I would try to like talk myself out of, but I still think if that's my gut reaction then I imagine that the general public probably also still has like a negative view of that.

When participants were open to a man filling the role of stay-at-home father, it was often with the caveat that she would have to love her career and he would either have to have a strong desire to be a father or be exceptionally nurturing. One participant said in her current relationship she would welcome her partner acting as a stay-at-home father as he has always had a passion for parenthood and is more nurturing than her. Other participants put it differently: "…if he's especially nurturing for a male and really wants to stay home with the kids or feels called to that's what he's supposed to do then I would be open to that," (Marie); "Just because I like have a desire to do that if he had no desire to do it and it was just happening then I would be like, 'No, I don't like this. This isn't okay,'" (Lauren, who would be okay with a stay-at-home father if she had a job she loved); and "…I think if it were the right situation, like if I had the right job and I loved my job and I felt like my husband was willing to do that without his pride being hurt or anything like that I think I would consider it" (Marilyn). These types of conditions for

staying home, however, were never made for women, setting the role of stay-at-home

parent as an inherent choice for women but one extended to men and subject to female

approval.

 Although all of the women interviewed for this study made sense of their role in

the workforce as a choice, some worried women aren't always making a choice but

instead are simply falling into prescribed roles. Kaylee iterated this concept,

> I definitely agree that a woman should be able to choose to stay home just
> as much as she should be able to choose to have a career, but sometimes I
> feel like women aren't like making that choice so much as they're just like
> falling into a prescribed role.

Kaylee not only addresses the traditional gender norms associated with prescribed

roles, but also problematizes choice. While the participants recognized their choice it

doesn't necessarily follow that they are actually making a choice. As found in the

previous theme, women could be simply following a prescribed pattern set by the

generations before them not only in their own choices but in their opinion regarding

whether or not men have a choice.

 By conceptualizing workforce role identity as a choice between two roles that

belong exclusively to them women position themselves as gatekeepers of the home,

deciding whether or not it is appropriate for a man to fill a woman's role. Ownership of

both roles also positions work-life balance as a woman's issue as women balance their

roles. As found in the present study's data, this could be because of an adherence to

traditional gender norms which place the man's role as primarily career-based and the

woman's role as a choice between two options.

Just as Good as Men

Throughout their lives women receive gendered messages about their role in the family and workforce. These messages occur not only in childhood, but continue into college as women prepare to enter the workforce. When asked about their educational experiences, many women spoke of their struggle to be taken seriously as students and of the negative messages and stereotypes they face in college. Despite these negative messages, women made sense of their role in the workforce by dismissing negative messages, internalizing their value, and accepting their reality.

Throughout the interviews women described themselves as just as good as the men in their respective fields, but often said their experiences have taught them that they have to work harder and prove themselves in order to be taken seriously. Whether in male or female dominated majors, almost every woman reported trouble being taken seriously due to the university stereotypes of women seeking an "MRS degree" and "ring by spring." The MRS degree stereotype conveys the idea that the sole purpose of the woman's presence in college is to find a husband. This stereotype is often applied to women in predominantly female majors and women in sororities. Ring by spring, while similar, denotes the idea that women are actively trying to get an engagement ring by the spring of the junior year in college. According to participants, these messages come from peers and professors alike. Rachel recalled her own experience as a computer science major,

> I think probably the biggest problem would be being taken seriously as a student. I had a TA in computer science who would just mock me all the time and being like, "You're not going to be a computer scientist." He turned out to be right, but whatever, and he would just stand over my shoulder and berate me for every mistake I made…

This participant was unable to pass the class, forcing her to withdraw from the major and go into a different field. This was not an isolated incident, however, and she also shared her friends' experience as engineering students,

> In engineering classes I've had friends say that has happened a lot. There's an engineering professor who says at the beginning of every single semester to his class, "The women in here, you're not here because you want to be an engineer, you're here because you want to marry an engineer."

Although she said she didn't believe this was a particularly prevalent phenomenon she said she was sure there are faculty and students who hold that view of women. Other women interviewed told stories of their professors addressing the class at the beginning of the semester to tell women they didn't care if they were there for their MRS degree or to let women know they weren't in college to get their MRS degree – all singling out women and conveying the idea that they don't take their education seriously.

These stereotypes not only question a woman's motivation behind getting an education, but also places focus on her appearance and involvement in extracurricular groups like sororities as well. In line with the MRS degree and ring by spring stereotypes, participants often recalled feeling as though they were not taken seriously because of an assumption that women at their university were just dumb sorority girls out to find a husband. Participants in STEM majors and other male-dominated fields often said people assumed they were in different majors or weren't very intelligent because of their social personalities or their appearance.

Women in historically female fields, however, also experienced these negative stereotypes and often spoke of having to defend their career choices. Abigail recalled her frustration with the stereotype and being taken seriously in her female-dominated major saying,

I know I keep saying that and emphasizing that, but it is (sighs), it's annoying because I have had people say like, "Oh are you just one of those ring by spring girls?" No, I'm not! Pardon me, but I am doing homework right now, I am making big goals and reaching them.

Although they recognized that some women really were there to just find a husband they overwhelmingly spoke of the unfairness of applying the stereotype to all women. Across the board women spoke of the need to prove themselves in their major or career in order to be taken seriously. Some recalled instances of being shrugged off by professors and others reported being ignored by male students until they were able to demonstrate their intelligence, and others talked about having to explain what they want to do with their major before they were taken seriously.

Despite the messages these women received throughout college by their peers and professors, they all reported feeling equal to men and often dismissed the messages instead of speaking up about them. For instance, when discussing whether or not she would speak up about poor treatment Britney said,

I think that there's a negative connotation of like feminism and nobody even, there's not like a solid definition or it's always like evolving and so I think there's such a negative connotation, like feeling surrounding that that it's easier to just let it go and just know like, "Okay I am valuable, this is stupid. They're being a stupid guy, they don't know anything." It's hurting them not me.

Similarly, Heather said when it came to men in engineering not taking her seriously she would prove through action and her work that she could do the exact same job just as well. Rather than deriving their value from the negative messages and experiences, participants made sense of their role in the workforce by internalizing their value, dismissing the messages and accepting that they were going to have to work harder than men to accomplish the same goals. While they did not think it was fair, they knew

entering into the workforce that they would have to continue to work harder than men to prove their worth. Charlotte spoke of how she anticipated the messages and treatment she experienced in college to continue into the workplace. Like others, she accepted this role as something she would have to simply deal with. She said,

> So whenever I do get to my career and my workplace I feel like I think I probably will be having to constantly prove myself like I'm not just quote unquote, "A pretty face" I can do the work as well. I think that's kind of…go back to like whenever I would say, "Oh I'm a communication major" like "Oh are you here to just get a quick degree so you can marry rich?" and I think that as a lot to do with like people base their judgments on someone by how they look and how they act, and stuff like that.

Despite viewing themselves as equal to men in their fields the women in this study learned from their experiences and the messages they've received in college that they will have to work harder than men to be accepted and taken seriously in the workforce. Though many thought it was unfair, it was accepted as part of life.

Throughout the occupational identity section it was shown how the women in this study made sense of their role in the workforce in three major ways: 1) by observing and imitating their mothers' choices, 2) by conceptualizing their role as a choice, and 3) by internalizing their value and accepting their position in a masculine workforce. Sensemaking theory was central to interpreting these findings as participants reflected on past experiences and messages, and will be addressed as such in the discussion chapter. In the next section the researcher builds off the findings presented here and works to provide insight into the second research question.

Perceptions of the Wage Gap

This section speaks to the second research question of how occupational identity impacts perceptions of the wage gap. As the previous section demonstrated, women in

this study made sense of their role in the workforce in three main ways. Analysis of the data in comparison with the previous section's findings yielded only one theme: *this is a man's world*.

Whether a woman positioned her career before her family role or not did not influence her perceptions of the wage gap, nor did conceptualizing her role in the workforce as a choice. However, women, as represented in the "just as good as men" theme, who made sense of their role in the workforce by internalizing their value, dismissing negative messages, and accepting they will have to work harder than men for the same recognition shared similar views of the wage gap. Emerging from the previous section, this theme speaks to the inevitability of inequality and unfairness women reported in their interviews when discussing the gender wage gap.

During the interviews not a single woman reported thinking the wage gap is fair. While some were initially unfamiliar with the concept, and others saw some justification for the portion of the wage gap accounted for by the choices women make (i.e., career choice, workforce exit), all believed the segment of the wage gap attributed to discrimination is unfair. The most common perception of the wage gap among participants was that it is unfair but little could be done about it because they live in a man's world. Although they had the same general perception of the wage gap, two sub-groups were found within this theme: those who accepted discrimination as part of life, and those who recognized the constraints of living in a male-dominated world. Charlotte, who anticipated having to continue proving herself in the workforce, reiterated her previous point about a woman's role in the workplace saying of discrimination, "I'm not

okay with it, but I'm more accepting of it because that's just how it is if that makes sense. It goes back to this is a male-dominated world."

Most participants weren't so deterministic about inequality and discrimination and instead recognized the difficulty women face in creating change in a male-dominated world. Susan reacted to the statistics about the wage gap saying,

> I mean, it sounds easy to fix, like just pay they them the same! (Laughs) But I guess with, it's obviously not that simple and I feel like if women wanted to be paid more a lot of their superiors are men and so that also creates a challenge because their boss is a man, I don't know. You can't just be like, "You should pay me more because I'm a woman."

Women who accepted adversity as part of their role in the workforce often perceived the wage gap as just part of living in a man's world and not something that could be easily changed. For women with this perception of their role in the workforce, their past experiences resulted in an attitude of ambivalence about the wage gap as they accepted that's how things had always been and that's how they would mostly likely continue to be. Most commonly, the women represented by this theme thought of the wage gap as something that would simply diminish over time as more women entered the workforce. In line with sensemaking theory, the women in this study used the concept of "a man's world" as a mental model to understand their past experiences and influence future action. The utilization of this mental model led to the assumption that adversity is part of life that would follow them into the workplace.

While the interviews and analysis did not indicate that how a woman made sense of her role in the workforce had much of an influence on her perceptions of the wage gap, awareness and exceptionalism emerged as notable influences on perception of the wage gap. Although these subthemes did not tie to occupational identity or how women make

sense of their role in the workforce, they speak to how women form their perceptions of the wage gap, especially Millennial women.

Awareness

Women in male-dominated fields often reported either being in a women's issues course or in a field-specific women's group that educated its members to the challenges they would face in their respective fields. These women were very aware of the wage gap, believed it to be a problem, and were aware of ways to circumvent inequality/sexism in the workplace. Heather, for instance, recalled how her participation in a women's organization influenced her perception of the wage gap and taught her to work on her confidence and ask for she wants in the workplace. She said that her organization informed her that men were quicker to "pull the trigger" while women often suffered confidence issues that kept them from speaking up, leading to wage gap. Unlike women in the previous theme her experience provided her with ideas for possible solutions for the wage gap. Kaylee recounted her own experience with a women's group throughout her interview. Like Heather, Kaylee's involvement with a women's group provided her with information about life in a male-dominated work environment and taught her how to advocate for herself while minimizing negative repercussions.

Women represented by this subtheme often referred to their education on women's issues throughout the interview and used that knowledge to suggest how change could occur. As part of a solution, they all recommended teaching young women about the workplace and how to navigate male-dominated fields.

Exceptionalism

In contrast to awareness, participants who never experienced discrimination or were not educated about women's work issues did not perceive the wage gap as problematic or did not think it would apply to them. Although many had heard of the wage gap before they lacked information on it and other forms of discrimination that could occur in the workplace. Most commonly, women in this category perceived the wage gap to be of little consequence as they and no one they knew had ever experienced anything like it. Marilyn iterated this when asked if she believed to the wage gap to be problem saying,

> I think it could, yeah, I mean obviously if I'm like making less than a guy why am I making less than a guy, but at the same time I don't know, it doesn't personally bother me a super whole lot. I'm not like super passionate about women's rights. Obviously if I feel like I'm disrespected or anything I think I would feel more passionate, but I guess maybe I'm just not passionate because I haven't personally experienced anything like that.

Despite acknowledging the existence of the wage gap, she said she didn't give it much thought because she never experienced anything like it. The remainder of women represented by this theme simply said they would not fall victim to the wage gap by choosing to work at companies that did not discriminate. Melissa addressed this when she expressed her opinion of the wage gap,

> I guess it's never really bothered me either because I believe you get paid for what you for. So believe that if I find myself in a truthful and lawful firm then they will pay me the same amount as a man if we work the same amount of hours.

These participants not only lacked an idea of how to fix the wage gap, but they also reported not caring about the wage gap often viewing it as unproblematic. Unlike the women who had been educated about adversity in the workplace and the wage gap, these participants didn't put much stock into the wage gap. In line with sensemaking theory these women pulled on mental models and the messages and experiences they had

regarding discrimination and the workplace and were unable to envision a future in which they would have problems with the wage gap or discrimination.

This section demonstrates how women who expect discrimination and adversity to be part of their role in the workforce often have ambivalent attitudes about the wage gap. Although occupational identity and how women make sense of their role in the workforce didn't play into perceptions about the wage gap otherwise, awareness and exceptionalism emerged as alternate factors to consider. The next section explores how the women in this study experienced mutedness and how that may impact their career decisions and behaviors ultimately influencing the wage gap.

Mutedness and the Wage Gap

Themes presented in this section address the third research question which asked how mutedness impacts how women make decisions in the workforce, and in turn, the wage gap. This question sought to understand how the imbalance of power between men and women may impact the decisions women make that the influence the wage gap (e.g. career choice, negotiation, workforce exit). Sensemaking theory acted as a lens for interpretation as participants reflected on their own experiences with discrimination and mutedness. The researcher sought to understand how participants determined whether or not it was appropriate or worth speaking up. In the interview process women engaged in moments of sensemaking where they had to name what happened and try to anticipate how they would act in the future. Analysis of the data resulted in three themes that address the impact of mutedness on women's behaviors, thoughts, and actions that could lead to the continuance of the wage gap: *hesitancy to speak up*, *fear of consequences*, and *justification*.

Hesitancy to Speak Up

This section addresses women's reluctance to speak on their own behalf. This theme is made up of subthemes commonly reported by participants that could impact the wage gap. Although these subthemes do not directly influence the wage gap, they all represent reasons why women may choose not to advocate for themselves in the workplace, which, in turn, may perpetuate the wage gap and the discrimination of women.

Lack of confidence. Throughout the interview process, every woman mentioned confidence issues as a possible reason women would choose not to bring up sexism or discrimination in school or the workplace. They also noted it as a reason why they may not negotiate their salary and benefits. Bethany extrapolated her own difficulty speaking up for herself to other women saying,

> Women are seen as the weaker sex. Yeah, I think women are kind of in the same shoes as me – too afraid to speak up to a male boss, even if it's a female boss, are more timid and not as bold as some men are.

Keying in on differences in gender socialization, some women attributed this characteristic to how they were raised. They claimed women are taught to be less assertive than men and just go along with what they're told. Kaylee discussed how this places women in law school at a disadvantage saying, "…and so you go through your whole life and even if you're successful like as women we're not conditioned to be assertive in class and the men who are more assertive end up doing better." A lack of confidence and assertiveness, however, may impact the wage gap as women express reluctance to negotiate salary and put themselves up for raises and promotions.

Dismissive messages. Women represented in this category often believed if they were to speak up about an inequality or instance of unfairness they would be dismissed or their department/company would do nothing about it. When asked about how she thought a woman's concerns would be responded to at her university Heather said,

> I think there are some people who would just kind of laugh at her and tell her to toughen up because that's how it's going to be for the rest of her life. That's just kind of part of engineering I think is having to push past that…

While she believed some professors would advocate for the student and try to address the situation, she ultimately believed they would be told to grow thicker skin. Similarly, Kaylee described what she believed would happen if a woman were to speak up about discrimination in her program, "…honestly what I think would happen is there would be an investigation or an inquiry and then like nothing would happen." Although these women did not believe they would be berated or experience any consequences for speaking up they often didn't think it would do any good. Those who believed something would come of speaking up thought action would only occur if something egregious had taken place. If women believe nothing will come of speaking up or that their concerns will be dismissed they may choose to remain silent. The potential effect of silence will be addressed in the discussion chapter.

Choose battles and speak carefully. When it comes to speaking up, another common motif was choosing one's battles. Nearly every participant believed women should speak up in the face of an inequality, but they urged discretion in what issue they chose to take up as well as the language they used. Charlotte, among others, discussed how it's sometimes wiser to wait for bigger issues to come up,

I don't know I can't really say how I feel about it but I've seen where I was just like, "Why did you say something?" Because then I've seen where afterwards they got treated even worse I guess then what they were being treated, which even then I didn't think they were being treated unfairly at all. It's just like I'm like, pick and choose your battles and then go from there.

While Charlotte addressed the consequences that can occur when a woman chooses to take on a small issue, Tiffany brought to attention the tightrope women must walk when bringing up an issue saying,

I think I, you now, it's like when women don't say anything they're seen as passive and submissive but when you do say something it's like they're overstepping their boundaries. So it's like where is the common ground in between?

Tiffany's comment mimicked others who also lamented over the seemingly lose-lose situation a woman can end up in when deciding whether or not to take on an instance of inequality or unfairness. Not only does this concept apply to muted group theory but it also provides a look into how mutedness can impact the wage gap. As women gain confidence to approach their employers and advocate for themselves they must be cautious. Unlike men, if they are not careful in their verbiage they could be denied their request and experience other negative consequences. Kaylee described this phenomenon saying,

You know I might have thought that as long as I did it the right way it could be okay, and so like in the class we talked about one way to get around that is if you suggest that it wasn't your idea, essentially…So on the one hand I think it's annoying that you can't be your own authority whereas a man can, but on the other hand, you know, it's like some of this stuff is so ingrained that I don't want to not get the raise because I'm standing on a principle, you know what I mean?

Kaylee's statement is an exemplar of mutedness and how women are unable to say what they want when they want. The presence of messages surrounding choosing

battles and speaking carefully suggests college-aged women receive both direct and indirect messages regarding their ability to freely speak up in the workplace, a traditionally masculine environment.

These messages along with a lack of confidence play into college-aged women's hesitancy to speak up on their own behalf. This behavior impacts the wage gap not only through negotiation, but also through discrimination, as women were unsure if they would speak up about sexism and inequality.

Fear of Judgment/Consequences

While a hesitancy to speak up addressed why women are often reluctant to speak up on their own behalf, this theme encompasses the judgment and consequences participants feared would occur if they were to speak up about their views or experiences with discrimination. Once again, these subthemes do not directly impact the wage gap, but instead speak to how mutedness may influence behaviors that could lead to the wage gap.

I'm not a psychopath. When asked about their feminist identity the majority of participants qualified their response, accepting the definition of equality but making sure to distance themselves from radical feminists. Michelle, for instance, who identified as feminist in every way and said she would never deny being a feminist, made sure to add, "I wouldn't say I'm some psychopath that…you know what I mean? But I would say that I'm all about women's rights, but not in a crazy way." As with the others who qualified their responses, Michelle talked about the negative connotations associated with the term. Some participants even refused the label altogether choosing to only own its fundamental

belief in equality. Others, like Britney, put it differently saying, "I'm not going to man-hate or man-bash my way to [equality] and I think I've seen a lot of that, which is why I'm hesitant to say, 'Yes, I'm a feminist."

Many participants often qualified their feminist identity out of concern for how others would perceive them. Even those who did claim a feminist identity without hesitation occasionally spoke of concern of what others would think. In response to being asked if there were any situations in which she would keep quiet about her feminist identity, Susan said, "Maybe in my job depending on where I'm working. I don't know, maybe they'd think I'd cause problems if they hired me." Susan, among others, feared she would be negatively judged for identifying as a feminist and potentially face consequences.

Reluctance to identify as a feminist because of the negative connotations surrounding the term could indicate that college-aged women are ambiguous about the meaning of feminism. This was represented in the data as women struggled to define feminism and often used their own life experience and existing mental models to make sense of their identity. After mulling over whether or not she would identify herself as feminist for 10 minutes, going back and forth numerous times and bring up past experiences, Krista came into her identity saying, "So I guess in a way, I am. I'm just discovering what it looks like for me."

During analysis a surprising finding emerged: women who rejected feminism because of the negative connotations surrounding the word were more likely to believe inequality is inevitable or not a problem. The fear of judgment found in the data contributes to mutedness, as women are reluctant to talk about their beliefs or claim a

feminist identity in case they receive pushback or experience negative consequences. As noted earlier, the possible repercussions of silence and its potential influence on the wage gap will be addressed in the next chapter.

Troublemaker. Another element of mutedness that emerged was a fear of being labeled a troublemaker. Many women voiced concern for how others would perceive them if they spoke up about inequality or sexism. Although some didn't care what other people thought more often than not women voice concern over coming across as a boat rocker. Ann articulated this phenomenon saying,

> I feel like a lot of times when women try to say that, "oh that was unfair," "that's unequal," "that's sexist," that's whatever, especially if you're saying it to a guy, the guy is going to say, "Ugh" and roll his eyes at you and tell you that you don't have sense of humor. Like, "I was just kidding." Like, no but you're really not. You know? So then because you complained about they'll see you as just not necessarily as someone who's trying to rock the boat but somebody who's just going to complain about stuff and is just trying to, I don't know, seek attention maybe. Make a fuss out of nothing.

Rather than feeling comfortable to voice their concerns and speak up when they felt discriminated against, many women instead felt as though if they spoke up they would be looked down on or dismissed. Given that experts believe a portion the wage gap is caused by discrimination, it follows that mutedness could impact the wage gap, as women are afraid to speak up about issues of inequality and discrimination.

If I really need the job. In a similar vein, participants often discussed fear of consequences as a primary reason for staying quiet about discrimination and mistreatment in the workplace. Predominantly, they expressed need as the main reason they would stay silent. Krista summed up this thought process saying,

Well, sometimes I feel like women don't say anything out of intimidation. Really it's like, "Okay this is the job that I have so I have to hold on to it and there's nothing I can say about it because if I do then I'll lose this job and I'll have to go find another one." I'm going to lose a good reference, or something like that.

Overwhelmingly, participants said if they needed their job and they felt as if speaking up would jeopardize their livelihood in any way, they would remain silent and endure it until they could leave. Remaining silent could impact the wage gap as women are forced to leave the workforce continuing the unequal distribution of power rather than effecting change that could lessen discrimination in the workplace; this is discussed in the following chapter.

Justifications

When talking about whether or not they would make the decision to speak up about discrimination or sexism in the workplace, many participants turned to justifications for the inequalities, seeking to lessen importance of the injustice into an issue that didn't need to be addressed. They did this primarily by framing the incident as humor.

From peers to professors to colleagues, women interviewed in this study often framed seemingly derogatory or sexist remarks as jokes not meant to be taken seriously or as offensive. The content of these jokes encapsulated a woman's motivation for attending college, her ability to perform in a program, her ability to make money, and her menstrual cycle. In her interview Britney spoke of her experience as an intern at a bank. During her time at the company Britney said she was the only woman in the organization and was never able to forget that. In spite of this however, Britney expressed a reluctance to bring up instances of inequality,

I think it was perceived as humor. So I have been the butt of many jokes being a girl in the bank over the summer. It was taken in good humor and I think I have a good sense of humor and I definitely didn't bring it up.

Despite choosing to take the jokes in good humor not all women were certain about the seriousness behind the comments. Heather said as a woman she's received messages about her ability to keep up in engineering saying, "They're like, 'Oh she couldn't do it that well,' but I'm also one of the higher up people in my class so I think it's more joking, I'm not sure. It might be serious (laughs)." The ambiguity of these comments often led women to dismiss them as humor and not something requiring acting. As noted earlier, sometimes women fear that if they speak up about these jokes, they will be perceived as boat rocker who can't take a joke. By using humor to justify sexist or discriminatory remarks women are continuing a pattern of mutedness in which men are told it's okay to make such comments and women are expected to take the jokes in good humor but are left wondering if their peers really feel that way.

As demonstrated by this section, the women in this study often experienced elements of mutedness that they believed would prevent them from speaking up about discrimination or inequality in the workplace in the future. Although mutedness does not directly impact the wage gap, this section showed how it could potentially impact the behavior, thoughts, and actions of women in the workplace, leading to the perpetuation of the wage gap. The next chapter provides a summary of the findings reported here and delves deeper into the themes, exploring extant literature and possible explanations for the phenomena observed by the researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications

This study suggests multiple ways traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce, provides a framework to understand how occupational identity may influence perceptions of the wage gap, and how issues of mutedness impact the wage gap. Interviews provided an opportunity to observe how young women retroactively make sense of their role in the workforce, drawing from past messages and experiences to shape their identity. To best facilitate a thorough examination of the findings the discussion will be broken down in the same manner as the previous chapter, by research question. The discussion chapter will include interpretations of the findings using extant literature, possible implications, practical suggestions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Occupational Identity

As revealed in the analysis, college-aged women often drew upon their mothers' choices and their childhood experiences when making decisions regarding home and work. Although participants reported changing societal norms regarding stay-at-home fathers, they framed the role of stay-at-home parent as a woman's intrinsic choice, not a man's. Further, though participants espoused ideas of equality in the workplace they expressed a need to internalize their value, as they perceived they would have to work harder than a man for the same recognition. Through ideas of intergenerational reproduction of work (Van Putten, Dykstra, & Schippers, 2008) and staying at home as

only a woman's choice (Tracy & Rivera, 2010; Machung, 1989), it can be posited that the wage gap will be slow to change. Their studies suggest women will continue to reproduce their mothers' career decisions regarding whether or not to stay home and continue to hold the same values that reserve choice exclusively for women.

Intergenerational Reproduction of Role Identity

As noted in the findings and above, analysis of the data revealed that with a couple of exceptions, the women in this study planned to reproduce their mothers' decisions regarding work and family roles. Daughters of career mothers made sense of their role in the workforce by placing their careers before their familial role, daughters of mothers who worked but regretted not spending time with their children reported plans to stay home part-time with their children but still placed a high value on their career, and daughters of mothers who stayed home part-time with their children expressed a desire to do the same and placed equal importance in their career and family roles, but adhered to a "family first" value system.

Exceptions to the pattern occurred when women didn't like the way their parents negotiated work-life balance and among daughters of stay-at-home mothers. Daughters of parents with poor work-life balance often reported a desire to work part-time in order to balance their work and family roles but still placed value in their role in the workforce. Daughters of stay-at-home mothers were the most inconsistent group often expressing excitement for their careers but fear of missing out with their children.

Participants' emulation of their mothers' decisions represents an intergenerational reproduction of role identity. This finding is supported by Van Putten, Dykstra, and Schippers' (2008) study on the intergenerational reproduction of women's paid work,

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which found a similar pattern as daughters of working mothers worked more hours per week than daughters of non-working mothers. Their study along with the present study suggests the wage gap will be slow to change. Like the labor habits exhibited in Van Putten and colleagues' study, how women make sense of their role in the workforce seems to be passed intergenerationally, meaning daughters will likely continue to make the same choices as their mothers. As the wage gap is largely thought to be caused by the choices women make (i.e., career choice, workforce exit), it is reasonable to assume that if they continue to make the same choices as their mothers and replicate their behaviors in the workforce that the wage gap will persist and take time to diminish.

As previously mentioned, every participant articulated a "family first" value system, whether planning to be a career mother or a stay-at-home mother. In their study of work-life balance and fatherhood, Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) found men often engaged in family work, which they conceptualized as "the effort exerted to display family prioritization to an appropriate degree within men's life circumstances" (p. 569). Although their findings pertained to how men negotiate their role as a father and work-life balance, the women in this study demonstrated a similar idea of family work as they articulated their plans for the future. This could be interpreted as an effort to adhere to traditional gender norms and definitions of femininity.

Socialization offers a suitable construct to understand why women hold these gender norms and why they may choose to make the same career choices as their mothers. Socialization is defined as the process in which individuals learn how to participate as members of organizations (Van Maanen, 1976, p. 27) and is a key way we learn about work and family (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006).

Through this process, which involves family, friends, peers and the individual themselves, individuals construct their identity. Participants frequently spoke of the family and career messages they received growing up. Often participants were inundated with messages regarding the meaning of family and work. Abigail, for example, recalled that from an early age her mother made her priorities regarding work and family known, "She's always emphasized – since I was an age that I was old enough to understand – that her first job is being my mother and her second job is being a hygienist…" Through messages like these and by observing their mothers the women in this study were socialized into their career values and to whether or not a particular field was appropriate for them. For instance, participants who reported plans to be a career woman often spoke of female role models, namely their mothers, who acted as successful examples of working women. When asked who she believed influenced her career choice the most, Rebecca, who is studying to be a mechanical engineer, stated,

> I would have to say my mom because she was a STEM major which is something that allowed me…it didn't seem like an odd idea for me to look at STEM. I feel like if my mom had been something else it would've definitely been like different options for careers.

These participants' experiences and their resulting ideas about their role in the workforce are supported by Jahn and Myers (2014) and Kisselburgh et al. (2007), whose studies examined women's entrance into STEM fields. While Jahn and Myers found parents and school officials are crucial to socializing students to STEM careers, Kisselburgh and her colleagues discovered that women are socialized not only in the *how* of a particular career but *whether* a particular career or type of work is acceptable through indirect, direct, absent, and ambient messages" (p. 387).

The findings of the present study support Kisselburgh et al.'s findings as the women in this study who expressed a desire to be a working mother often had mothers who socialized them not only into the how of being a working mom but whether high power fields were acceptable/doable. Participants learned by observing their mothers and through the messages they received from their mothers how to prioritize their roles. Women with working mothers learned balancing techniques and that a full-time career is an option for women who want a family. Specifically, daughters of mothers in masculine fields articulated confidence in choosing similar fields because of the examples their mothers set. Similarly, daughters of part-time working mothers were socialized into ideas about appropriate roles and work-life balance. Daughters of stay-at-home mothers, however, face more difficulties as they enter the workforce. Unlike their counterparts, they have no experience or examples to draw from to inform future action. While the other participants had examples of how to balance work and home, daughters of stay-at-home mothers reported the most uncertainty about their roles due to concerns about missing out on raising their children. Although many reported excitement about their future careers, almost all said they would give them up to be stay-at-home mothers.

Given that two of the main contributors to the wage gap are thought to be workforce exit and career choice, the present study provides insight into why the phenomena has endured for the last 50 years. Despite legislation aimed at correcting the wage gap and more women entering the workforce, the findings of this study suggest many women choose to follow the path set by their mothers and replicate their decisions. This intergenerational reproduction of role identity helps explain why change is slow to come. This finding extends both family and organizational socialization literature as it a)

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reinforces the importance of family in the occupation socialization process, b) supports the impact of socialization on the entrance of women into male-dominated fields, c) extends the intergenerational aspect of career choice, and d) extends socialization to the wage gap. The next section will further explore through socialization and sensemaking theory how women conceptualize their occupational identity, possible reasons behind those beliefs, and potential implications.

Identity as a Choice

During data analysis, it was revealed that the women in this study conceptualized their occupational identity as a choice between two roles (familial and workforce) that belongs exclusively to women. Although some women placed greater value in their role in the workforce, and others in their familial role, all participants articulated their occupational identity as a choice. Through an adherence to traditional gender norms women were able to claim ownership of the choice of whether or not to work or stay home. Even when women claimed a progressive attitude or supported the idea of stay-at-home fathers, they viewed the role of stay-at-home parent as primarily theirs to accept or reject. Women did not necessarily extend this role to men, however, in instances of rejection. Participants spoke of "allowing" men to stay home and placed conditions on the circumstances of such an arrangement. No such conditions were placed on a woman's choice to stay home, which was often based on the messages the participants had received about motherhood, an adherence to traditional gender norms, and what their own mothers chose.

By claiming ownership of the stay-at-home parent role and making sense of their role in the workforce as a choice that belongs exclusively women, the participants of this

study were able to place themselves in a position of power over the home. This ownership of choice articulated by the women in this study gave women the power to decide whether it's appropriate for a man to stay home and also positioned work-life balance as a woman's issue as participants expressed a man's role as primarily career-based. This finding supports extant literature (Machung, 1989; Tracy & Rivera, 2010), which has also demonstrated the presence of choice for women and the denial of choice for men. In both Tracy and Rivera's and Machung's studies only women were perceived as having the choice to stay home or work, while participants expected men to work.

As previously stated, this assignment of work and home domains could be due to an adherence to traditional gender norms, which generally designate the home as a woman's domain. Balance emerged as a major concern for the women in this study who desired a career. One of the main criteria for these women as they considered future employers was flexibility. Participants articulated a desire to have both a career and family life, though they did not always know what this balance would look like. Wood (2010) criticized the concept of the home as a woman's domain and the notion that women can have it all if they simply learn to balance both roles. The present study supports her claim that such discourse leaves men out of the conversation regarding work-life balance. These findings also support the importance of observing different generational perspectives. As noted earlier, Favero and Heath (2012) discovered a generational difference in how women see proper work-life balance, which they attributed to differing socialization. They stated that older generations of women were socialized by men into a more masculine perception of the workforce while younger generations were socialized by women and have a different perspective on work-life

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balance. The present study offers a glimpse at what Millennial women want from their employers: flexibility.

Similar to the previous theme, sensemaking theory and socialization offer frameworks to understand this finding. As previous stated sensemaking theory deals with how individuals retroactively analyze experiences to shape their sense of identity and inform future actions (Weick, 1995, 2001; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). As the participants in this study looked back at their own childhoods and their parents' choices they engaged in moments of sensemaking where they were able to name what happened. In this section participants reflected on their mothers' career decisions – whether to work, stay home, or do both – and determined it was a choice between two roles. From there, the participants applied this schema in their own lives as they determined what decisions they would make.

As previously noted, family act as one of the first sources of socialization in a child's life. Participants frequently spoke of gender norms when discussing roles and careers, and often attributed these ideas to how they were raised. These messages are in line with Arnston and Turner (1987) who found that kindergarten students have gendered role expectations for their parents that allowed the father to exert more power and authority than the mother. The present study's findings extend literature on the intersection of gender and career choice by demonstrating that gender socialization has an impact on how women make sense of their role in the workforce and the influence of gender norms on what roles women view as appropriate for men and women. Although the women in this study made sense of their role in the workforce as a choice, some were concerned women just fall into the prescribed roles mentioned rather than make a choice.

As one of the major factors that play into the wage gap is workforce exit, whether temporary or permanent, this study's findings are particularly relevant to understanding the wage gap. Further, the designation of work-life balance as a woman's issue impacts the wage gap as women may refrain from asking employers for assistance as demonstrated by Jorgenson (2000). While refusing to advocate for themselves and call attention to their gender allows them to blend into a masculine work environment it does nothing to advance progress for women and lessen the wage gap. By adhering to traditional gender norms and maintaining sole ownership over the role of stay-at-home parent the women in this study provide insight into why so many women still choose to leave the workforce to raise children while men do not. This finding extends scholarship by a) providing scholars with additional information regarding the reasons behind the decisions women make that impact the wage gap, b) further exploring the intersection of gender socialization and career choice, c) adding support for the denial of role choice for men, and d) supporting literature on gender norms and work-life balance.

The next section delves into the final theme addressing occupational identity. Utilizing socialization as a lens, possible explanations for the finding will be presented, as well as relevant literature and implications.

Just as Good as Men

This theme illustrated how the women in this study viewed themselves as equal to men, internalized their value in the face of sexism, and accepted that they would have to work harder than men to be taken seriously in the workplace. This perception of their role in the workforce came from the messages the women in this study received throughout their lives and their educational experiences with peers and professors. Many participants

reported issues being taken seriously and negative stereotypes and messages they faced in college. Participants viewed themselves as just as good as men in their respective fields but knew from their experiences that they would have to work harder than men to receive the same acknowledgment and respect. As stated in the previous chapter, the women in this study made sense of their role in the workforce by dismissing negative messages, internalizing their value, and accepting their reality.

Cohen and Avanzino (2010) uncovered a similar phenomenon in their study of the organizational assimilation experiences of disabled individuals. Using co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998) as a lens, the authors sought to gain a better understanding of how marginalized group members interact with dominant members. Similar to the present study, their analysis found that disabled individuals often manage their disability by accepting they will have to work harder than their non-disabled co-workers to prove their ability and dispel negative stereotypes. Like the women in this study, the disabled individuals in Cohen and Avanzino's study engaged in assimilation to gain acceptance from the dominant culture, often by self-censoring and remaining silent about inappropriate or discriminatory comments.

Like the other themes presented thus far, sensemaking theory and socialization provide insight for the interpretation of the findings. In this theme, participants reflected on their experiences in school and the messages they received and drew from mental models to conclude that discrimination and inequality are inevitable. This led them to make sense of their role in the workforce by internalizing their value, accepting their reality, and choosing inaction. Socialization, as defined by Van Maanen (1976) is a continuous process. Unlike the previous themes, this finding primarily addresses the

socialization processes that occurred later in life by individuals outside the family; in this case, by peers and superiors. As noted earlier, several studies have demonstrated the impact of memorable messages on students' performance and academic behavioral changes (Nazione et al., 2011; Wang, 2012). Although the messages the participants described would not be considered memorable messages, the messages women reported receiving throughout their educational experience helped them make sense of what to expect in the workforce. After entering the workforce these messages and experiences can influence the behaviors of women. By that, it can be said that women who receive such messages early in their careers or education may turn to them when forming career goals and plans.

As previously stated, participants predominately expressed acceptance of "the way things are" and dismissed negative messages and stereotypes instead of speaking up about them, possibly to gain acceptance by the dominate culture as suggested by Cohen and Avanzino (2010). This behavior brings into question women's hegemonic participation in these stereotypes and whether it is a woman's responsibility to address such matters in public discourse instead of dismissing them internally. In her study of the use of framing devices to sequester stories of sexual harassment in organizations, Clair (1993) explored women's hegemonic participation in maintaining the status quo. In her study, Clair described hegemony as an interactive process in which the dominant group leads the subordinate group into accepting subordination as the norm. The present findings suggest the presence of organizational hegemony as the women in this study had already accepted discrimination and sexism as part of life, especially in the workplace. According to Gramsci (1971), while coercion and passive acceptance are factors in

domination, active participation of the subjugated group is more prevalent. Similarly, Smith (1987) supported the notion that women are active participants in their subjugation saying, "Women are complicit in the social practices of their silence" (p. 170). Clair's study demonstrated multiple frames employed by women to interpret their experiences. These frames often resulted in the women's hegemonic participation in the sequestering of sexual harassment stories.

While the present study does not speak to sexual harassment, the acceptance of male domination in the workplace and dismissal of negative messages and stereotypes as just the way things are represents participation in the subjugation of women in the workforce. Although the women in this study occasionally expressed ways they would work within the system to achieve their goals, Clair denounced this type of activity as perpetuating the status quo. Jorgenson spoke to these tactics saying, "Such strategies are not necessarily conducive to transformational change. 'Stealing time' and the management of emotions, for example, may have helped women to distance themselves from the problem, but these responses tend to defuse collective action and prevent progress toward broad-based solutions" (para. 49). By remaining silent and not addressing discrimination in school or the workplace and instead accepting it as part of reality, the women in this study engage in the hegemonic participation of the negative stereotypes and messages they recalled struggling with.

Perceptions of the Wage Gap

As addressed in the analysis, how a woman made sense of her role in the workforce and her occupational identity had little to do with her perceptions of the wage gap. The women represented by this theme, however, emerged as an exception. This

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section explores these women's perception of the wage gap, possible explanations, and implications. Further, it addresses the two emergent themes of awareness and exceptionalism.

A Man's World

Analysis of the data demonstrated that the women in this study who believed they live in "a man's world" perceived discrimination as part of life and were generally ambivalent about the wage gap. As noted in the previous theme, the participants espoused equality but from their experiences concluded that they would have to work harder than men and prove themselves and be taken seriously. Women in this theme spoke to the inevitability of inequality and unfairness when discussing the gender wage gap. Overwhelmingly, participants denounced the wage gap as unfair but believed there was little that could be done about it as it was just part of living in a man's world. While some accepted discrimination as part of life others simply recognized the constraints of living in a male-dominated world. Though many believed the wage gap to be an enduring phenomenon created by the power imbalance between men and women in the workplace, most women represented by this theme thought of the wage gap as something that would just gradually diminish over time.

This section ties heavily into the previous theme in its possible explanations. Apart from the socialization and sensemaking processes that occurred to get women to this point, as well as the issue of hegemonic participation (Clair, 1993), women in this study reflected a deterministic attitude in which they believed nothing could be done to facilitate change. This deterministic outlook on discrimination could lead women to remain silent about any incidents they experience or to refrain from speaking up on their

own behalf. Rather than speak up about the perceived inequalities, they accepted they would have to work harder than men to achieve the same respect and accomplishments, similar to the disabled participants in Cohen and Avanzino's (2010) work. While much of the wage gap is constituted by choices women make in the workforce, discrimination is thought to cause a portion of the wage gap. By simply accepting their perceived role and the existence of discrimination as part of life and refusing to speak up about their experiences participants take part in the continuation of discrimination and sexism in the workplace.

In an article on the paradoxes in the experiences of woman professionals, Wood and Conrad (1983) discuss the stereotypes of women and professionals that often lead to no-win situations for women in the workplace. According their work, if a woman acts according to standards for a professional she cannot fill her role as a woman and vice versa. While their article mainly deals with these paradoxes and how responses can either seal or circumvent a double-bind, they touch on how a woman can either reinforce the situation or instigate social change by redefining the situation and transcending it. Wood and Conrad posit that how a woman responds in the face of paradoxical situations can either reinforce the stereotypes binding her or help to dispel them. In the present study, the women chose to respond to the negative stereotypes by ignoring them and accepting their role in a man's world. Wood and Conrad contended that women who respond to paradoxes by seeking to assimilate into male-dominated structures might adopt anti-female attitudes and "participate in the perpetuation of sexist stereotypes" (p. 313). Conversely, those who step out of the stereotypes and redefine their roles or transcend the stereotypes by enlarging the content in which the stereotype is understood (e.g.,

redefining the concept of womanhood in order to avoid violation of roles) can affect change. By refusing to play into the system binding them women are able to break free of the stereotypes and roles that cast them in an inferior position in the workplace.

The next section addresses awareness and exceptionalism, which were found to be related to perceptions of the wage gap. These findings are particularly relevant to organizations as they encompass possible solutions for the wage gap and speak to how Millennial women conceptualize the wage gap.

Awareness

This theme was represented by women in male-dominated fields who participated in field-specific women's interest groups. These groups prepared women for the workforce by informing women of possible adversity they would face in the workplace, telling them about the wage gap, and teaching them how to navigate a male-dominated work environment. Women in these organizations were aware of the wage gap, believed it was a problem, and had ideas about how to fix it.

This finding is particularly valuable for educators and male-dominant fields with national women's groups and points to the value of educating young women about the environment they are about to enter. These programs impact the wage gap by providing women with ways to circumvent discrimination and pointers on how to act and get what they want in a masculine workplace.

While beneficial, teaching women to speak and behave in a manner that suits men in order to get what they want speaks to issues of mutedness, which will be addressed in the next section. The next theme represents the opposite of educated women – women who know nothing of the wage gap or discrimination.

Exceptionalism

Acting as a contrast to awareness, analysis of the data resulted in exceptionalism. Participants in this theme never experienced discrimination, were not educated about women's work issues, and did not perceive the wage gap as a problem or something they would fall victim to. Although they were aware of the wage gap as a concept they either had no experience with it themselves or knew no one that did, and as a result believed it to be a non-issue. Many believed they could just avoid the wage gap and discrimination by finding the right company. Unlike the women represented by awareness, the women in this theme not only had no idea about how to fix the wage gap, but they were generally ambivalent about it.

Sensemaking theory provided an interpretive lens for this theme as women reflected on their experiences and without any mental model for discrimination were unable or unwilling to label them as such. This could inform their future action as none of these women believed the wage gap to be a problem and would likely not speak up about it or label any incidents they experience as discrimination. This is particularly meaningful for the wage gap due to the ongoing debate regarding its existence.

According to Pew Research (2007), Millennials are prone to generational exceptionalism, meaning they believe their generation is better or exceptionally different from previous generations. This belief leaves them open to assuming that long-standing issues such as racism or gender discrimination do not apply to them. This study supports the idea that Millennials may adhere to exceptionalism, as many women believed that because they had not experienced discrimination it did not exist. Additionally, this may help explain why many Millennials, as demonstrated by this study, are hesitant to identify as feminists. If they do not perceive gender discrimination to be an issue they may see no need for feminism.

This section demonstrated the ways in which college-aged women form their perceptions of the wage gap and the implications of those perceptions. These findings contribute to scholarship, as there are currently no other communication studies on women's perceptions and opinions about the wage gap. These findings also extend identity, education, and exceptionalism to the wage gap. The next section addresses mutedness, its impact on women's behavior in the workforce, and its potential influence on the wage gap. To help explore the findings, relevant literature is presented and potential implications are discussed.

Mutedness and the Wage Gap

As presented in the findings chapter, every woman in this study articulated at least one instance of mutedness. Analysis resulted in three main themes of mutedness: hesitancy to speak up, fear of consequences, and justifications. This section first reviews the findings presented for each theme, then discusses possible explanations using muted group theory and relevant literature, and then explores potential implications.

Hesitancy to Speak Up

This theme encompasses issues of mutedness such as lack of confidence, dismissive message, and choosing one's battles. As demonstrated in the findings, the participants frequently reported difficulty speaking up on their own behalf. These difficulties ranged from being afraid to approach male professors or bosses with requests, to believing nothing would come of voiced concerns, to choosing the right issue to take up in order to stand the best chance of success.

Participants in this study noted socialization as a possible reason they are hesitant to speak up, claiming they were conditioned to be less assertive than males and as such

are at a disadvantage. Others learned from the messages they received in school whether or not it mattered if they voiced their concerns. Finally, those who espoused choosing one's battles urged discretion in both the issues women take on and the language used during confrontation in order to achieve their goals.

Fear of Judgment/Consequences

As stated in the findings, this theme represents the judgment and consequences the women in this study feared would occur if they spoke up about discrimination. This theme was comprised of subthemes that addressed a reluctance to identify as a feminist, fear of negative labels, and fear of losing one's job. The women in this study often qualified their responses regarding their feminist identities, usually espousing the fundamental tenants of feminism but shying away from the identification because of the negative connotations associated with the word. When they did claim a feminist identity, many participants still voiced concern for how others would perceive this identification. Participants often feared that identifying as a feminist or speaking up about inequalities in the workplace would earn them labels such as "troublemaker" or "boat rocker." While some women didn't care what others thought about them, most expressed concern about repercussions that would occur if they were to receive such labels and said they would probably choose to be silent instead. Finally, women who were afraid they would lose their job if they spoke up about discrimination said they would stay quiet if they really needed the job.

Justifications

This theme addresses the reasoning women in this study used to dismiss issues of discrimination or sexism. Most often participants framed discriminatory or sexist comments as humor in order to minimize their importance and avoid addressing them. Participants reported receiving jokes from peers and professors alike that called into question a woman's motivation for attending college, her ability to perform in a program, her ability to make money, and her menstrual cycle. Rather than speak up about these jokes participants spoke of the importance of taking the jokes in good humor and not saying anything about them even if they weren't completely sure if the men were serious. The ambiguity of the messages allowed women to choose to dismiss the comments rather than address them. As in other situations mentioned, the women in this study reported feeling as though they would be thought of negatively if they spoke up about the comments instead of accepting them as a joke.

Explanations for Mutedness

As demonstrated by the findings the women in this study experienced many issues of mutedness related to a reluctance to speak up, a fear of consequences or judgment, and a dismissal of sexism as humor. Muted group theory, as defined by Ardener (1972) pertains to the power imbalance between dominant and silenced groups. This power imbalance results in what Kramarae (1981) refers to as the mutedness of women, which occurs when women or other subordinate groups are unable to freely express themselves when and where they wish like men are. This was evident in the present study as women were dismissed and told to grow thicker skins, feared negative repercussions if they spoke up about discrimination, and were afraid to identify as feminists.

Although the issues of mutedness the women in this study reported didn't directly tie to the wage gap, the impact of mutedness on workforce behaviors has the potential to impact the wage gap. Evidence of this is present in literature as women are shown to request raises less frequently than men, show less aggression, hedge more often, and are interrupted more in meetings (Aries, 2006; Wood & Dindia, 1998). The behaviors have the potential to influence the wage gap as many experts contend that the gap is caused by factors such as negotiation skill and discrimination. If women are too afraid of consequences or feel as though they will be dismissed then they are unlikely to ask for raises or speak up in the face of inequality.

An additional aspect of muted group theory involves the segregation of issues as women's issues, diminishing their importance. Perriton's (2009) critical analysis of the business case for diversity, for instance, found women were discouraged from voicing concerns about workplace equality so that their concerns wouldn't be designated as women's issues by the men in charge. Instead these women were encouraged to frame their concerns in a way men would find appealing. This was found in the data as women reported the need to speak carefully when bringing up issues in order ensure their requests were heard. This concern was supported in the literature as women have been shown to experience more negative consequences than men when asking for raises or promotions (Waldman, 2014).

As noted in the findings, women in this study were often reluctant to identify as feminists out of fear of judgment and because of the negative connotations surrounding the term. Given that participants often struggled to define feminism it is possible that college-aged women are ambiguous about the meaning of feminism. Aronson's (2003)

study on feminists versus postfeminists supports this claim as more than half of her participants approached feminism with more ambiguity than previous research suggested and qualified their views of feminism with life experiences.

In an essay devoted to her own struggle with adopting a feminist identity, Ashcraft (1998) recounted many of the same reluctances the women in the present study stated. From dismissing sexism as humor, to staying silent for fear of judgment, Ashcraft articulated the difficulty she experienced in both advocating for herself in an organization and coming into her feminist identity. She contended that organizational micropractices may foster a reluctance to claim a feminist identity for women who don't see feminism as relevant or who wish to maintain relationships with men. She defined micropractice as "ground-level interaction, or the interplay of individual perceptions and choices in the concrete contexts of mundane communication" (p. 587). Through examination of her encounters she contended that in her quest for male approval and hesitancy to claim feminism she pitted herself against other women. As previously noted, the participants in the present study articulated many of the same struggles Ashcraft described. It is possible that their reticence lies in these micropractices – these day-to-day interactions – and a fear of losing male approval. As gathered from Ashcraft's experience, it is possible that women with the same struggles will participate in their own subjugation through the devaluing of other women. This could impact the wage gap as hegemonic participation, as stated earlier, helps reinforce the power imbalance between men and women as well as gender stereotypes that lead to discrimination.

This section shows how mutedness impacts women's behaviors in the workforce and views of feminism. As demonstrated, the women in this study are afraid to speak out

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about discrimination and sexism. Remaining silent, however, could impact the wage gap as women choose to leave the workforce continuing the unequal distribution of power rather than effecting change that could lessen discrimination in the workplace. The next section further explores potential consequences of silence on the wage gap.

Consequences of Silence

Throughout the coding and analysis process, mutedness emerged as a major thread linking all of the women in the study. Every woman had an experience in which she felt as though something was unfair or discriminatory and was unable to do anything about it. Despite feeling unable to stand up for themselves many women expressed the importance of speaking up. Ann encouraged women to advocate for themselves, articulating the consequences of silence:

> If you don't speak up then it's going to be accepted that that's okay and that's the standard and that's fine. Whereas, if you experience that inequality and you try to address it at least it brings it to the attention of people that, "Hey, this is happening whether you are consciously trying to do this or whether it's just something that happened it is happening and it's not okay." So I feel like it does need to be addressed but I feel like often time it does not get addressed.

Though an indirect influence, mutedness can impact the wage gap through women's reluctance to advocate for themselves in the workplace, namely in ways affecting negotiation and discrimination. By remaining silent women actively participate in the continuation of the wage gap and reinforce the sexist and discriminatory behaviors they do not address.

This chapter discussed the themes found by the researcher that addressed questions of how women make sense of their role in the workforce, how workforce identity influences perceptions of the wage gap, and how mutedness impacts the wage

gap. Through the lenses of sensemaking theory and socialization, as well as extant literature, the researcher was able to generate possible explanations for the findings and provide support for established studies. While previous studies have been done on how women make choices regarding work and family, this study fills a gap in the literature by examining occupational identity formation in conjunction with perceptions of the wage gap and by extending muted group theory to the wage gap. The present study also furthers literature on the intergenerational transmission of work and family values between mothers and daughters. The next section explores practical applications for the present study's findings.

Practical Suggestions

As discovered in the analysis, enrollment in women's class or participation in a field-specific women's organization provided members with information about the state of the workforce, possible adversity and discrimination, and how to navigate male-dominated fields. Women who reported participation in these organizations were also more knowledgeable about the wage gap and were aware of ways to circumvent sexism in the workplace. In contrast, those who were not a part of such organizations often expressed uncertainty about how businesses operated and had little knowledge of how to ask for raises or address sexism, and they occasionally had unrealistic expectations of what to expect in the workplace.

To help lessen the wage gap and prepare female students to enter the workforce, professional organizations should pair with student branches in colleges and high schools to educate women on what to expect in the workforce and how to navigate a generally masculine environment. University departments should consider teaching a course on the

subject for fields that do not have professional organizations or branches at their school. By educating women we can make them more aware of what to expect and equip them with the confidence needed to make themselves heard.

Limitations

Although this study contributes to an understanding of how young women make sense of their role in the workforce, form their occupational identities, perceive the wage gap and experience mutedness, certain limitations must be considered. First, this study was conducted using a small sample size of traditionally college-aged women (18-24 years old) in the southern region of the U.S. As such, their responses and experiences reflect a certain culture and should not be generalized. Second, participants were mostly Caucasian, of middle class standing, and adhered to Christian views once again reflecting a particular demographic. This uniformity could limit the findings as women from different socioeconomic, education, and cultural backgrounds may have been socialized differently, received different messages about career and family, and experienced mutedness differently. Third, the women in this study were all spoke to how they would make decisions in heterosexual relationships. Fourth, social desirability must be taken into consideration as women may have tried to answer the questions the way they thought the research wanted them to.

Future Research

Future research should look deeper into why women often reproduce their mothers' decisions. As over half of the participants reported that they would likely make the same decisions it is important to understand the possible causes behind the

transmission of role identity. Additionally, it is important that scholars study how LGBTQ individuals make sense of their role in the workforce, perceive the wage gap, and experience mutedness as they may have different experiences than heterosexual women. Scholars should also look further into the issue of exceptionalism and how Millennials are able to separate what they see around them from something that could happen to them. Future communication research should also look deeper into the wage gap and the decisions women make that factor into it.

Conclusion

The wage gap is an enduring phenomenon, spanning more than 50 years. It is vital that scholars, organizations, and laymen, better understand the factors that perpetuate the wage gap in order to foster change. It isn't enough to label women's career choices as a sufficient explanation for non-discrimination based discrepancies; it is essential to know why women are making these choices. This study posits that women make sense of their role in the workforce by imitating their mothers' choices, conceptualizing the role as a choice that only they have, and by internalizing their value as workers. In addition, the present study examined workforce role identity and perceptions of the wage, as well as the impact of mutedness on the wage gap. Results of the study further expanded literature on organizational socialization and career choice, extended muted group theory to the wage gap, and provided suggestions for action to lessen the wage gap.

Table 1

Summary of Thematic Findings

Research Question	Theme	Description
RQ1: How do traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce?	Intergenerational Reproduction of Role Identity	Participants reproduce their mothers' decisions regarding work and family roles • Daughters of career mothers place their career before their familial role • Daughters of mothers who worked but regretted not spending time with their children plan to stay home part-time with their children but still placed a high value on their career • Daughters of mothers who stayed home part-time plan to do the same and place equal importance in their career and family roles, but adhered to a "family first" value system Exceptions: • Daughters of parents with poor work-life balance plan to work part-time to balance their work and family roles but still placed value in their workforce role • Daughters of stay-at-home mothers were excited for their careers but fear of missing out with their children
	Identity as Choice	Participants conceptualized their occupational identity as a choice between their role in the home and their role in the workforce. This choice belongs to women and was not extended to men except for under certain circumstances and conditions. No conditions were placed on a woman's choice to stay home.

(continued)

Research Question	Theme	Description
RQ1: How do traditionally college-aged women make sense of their role in the workforce?	Just as Good as Men	Women in this study viewed themselves as equal to men, but internalized their value in the face of sexism. Participants made sense of their role in the workforce by dismissing negative messages from peers and professors, internalizing their value, and accepting that they will have to work harder than men to be taken seriously in the workplace.
RQ2: How does workforce role identity influence perceptions of the wage gap?	This is a Man's World	These participants believed that they live in a man's world and perceived discrimination to be part of life. These women were generally ambivalent about the wage gap, noting the inevitability of inequality and unfairness and believing little to nothing could be done about it. Exceptions: Awareness and exceptionalism
	Emergent theme: Awareness	Participants who were involved in field-specific women's groups were knowledgeable about discrimination in the workplace, thought the wage gap was a problem, and had possible solutions for the wage gap.
	Emergent theme: Exceptionalism	These participants never experienced discrimination, were not educated about women's work issues, and did not perceive the wage gap as a problem or something that would affect them. They not only had no idea about how to fix the wage gap they were generally ambivalent about it.
RQ3: How does mutedness impact how college-aged women make decisions in the workforce?	Hesitancy to Speak Up	This theme encompasses a lack of confidence, dismissive message, and choosing one's battles. Participants reported difficulty speaking up on their own behalf, believing that nothing would come of voiced concerns, and using discernment when deciding to speak up.

<div align="right">(continued)</div>

Research Question	Theme	Description
RQ3: How does mutedness impact how college-aged women make decisions in the workforce?	Fear of Judgment and Consequences	This theme represents the judgment and consequences the women in this study feared would occur if they spoke up about discrimination.
	Justification	Most often participants framed discriminatory or sexist comments as humor in order to minimize their importance and avoid conflict.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

Let's start by you telling me a little bit about your family…
- Who did you live with as a child?
- Growing up, what did your parents do?
  o If mom worked: Did your mom always work?
    ▪ Did she ever talk to you about why she made that decision?
      • Have you ever thought about if you would make the same choice?
  o Now you said your dad does XX, did he ever discuss why he chose this profession with you?
    ▪ If mom stayed home: do you think your dad ever considered staying home instead? Why or why not?
      • Do you think ideas about men staying home with their kids have changed? Why or why not?
- What kind of activities did you participate in growing up?
  o Do you think your mom/dad's job made it easier or harder for you to take part in these activities? What makes you think this?
- How did you and your parents spend time together when you were a kid?
  o Do you think your mom/dad's job made it easier or harder for them to be involved in your life? Do you have any stories that could illustrate this?
    ▪ Did your parents ever say anything to you about the choices he/she made?
      • Do you think you would make the same or different choices?
- As a child/teenager, what were some of the thing you wanted to be "when you grew up"? What did your parents say about that?
  o Did your parents ever talk about certain careers or choosing a career? Whether that be direct advice to you or them just talking about or giving opinions about careers.
    ▪ Why do you think they said those thing to you?
    ▪ If you have siblings, do you think your siblings got similar talks? Why or why not? How might they have differed?
- Did your parents ever talk to you about how starting a family would impact your career? If so, what did they say? If not, why do you think that is?
  o Do you think what they said has impacted your goals or career choices at all?
- How did your parents react when you told them your current major/program selection?
  o Why do you think they reacted this way?

- o Did you expect any of their reactions to be different? If so, why?

Let's move to your experience in school.
Let's jump back to when we talked about how your parents reacted to the first thing you said you wanted to do when you grew up…
- Do you remember the first time you told a teacher or someone else at school what you wanted to do when you grew up?
  - o How did they respond?
- Can you remember another time a teacher spoke to you about a certain career or career choice, or commented on your skills as a student?
  - o Do you think that advice/comment influenced you at all? If so, how?
    - ▪ If not, why do you think that is?
- Tell me about your major/program. How did you choose it?
  - o Think with me for a minute about a hypothetical scale where one side is extremely female dominated and the other side is extremely male dominated, where does your major fit?
    - ▪ Okay, now why do you think it's that way?
  - o How do you think women who choose this major are perceived around campus?
    - ▪ Why? Who do you think most negative comments come from?
  - o Are women in this major treated the same as men?
    - ▪ For instance, do you think they are taken as seriously?
    - ▪ What makes you think this?
    - ▪ Do you have any stories, personal or a friend's, that illustrate this?
  - o Is this on par with how women in general are treated in this institution?
    - ▪ Can you expand on that a little more?
  - o What do you think a woman's biggest struggle is in this institution with regard to treatment or career choice?
    - ▪ If applicable: Can you think of a time you would speak up for yourself or other women to rectify this issue?
    - ▪ Do you think women should speak up about any inequality they experience at school or at work? Why or why not?
    - ▪ How do you think women who speak up about such issues are perceived by their professors and peers?
      - • Why do you think that is?
  - o How do people react when you tell them your major/what you are studying?
    - ▪ Why do you think they react this way?
    - ▪ Do you ever avoid telling people about your career choice? If so, why?
    - ▪ Under what circumstances would you choose to be vague about what you want to do?
  - o Think back to some of your classes with me…
    - ▪ Have you ever had a problem getting your ideas or thoughts heard? If so, can you tell me about what happened?

- Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly valued/devalued in class?
  - So in thinking about your career and your eventual workplace, do you think the culture and treatment in will be the same or different for you as it's been in college?
    - What makes you think that? Do you have any concerns about it?

Alright, I would now like to ask you some questions about the wage gap…

The wage gap is a statistic derived from comparing the salaries of men and women. The overall gap currently stands at 22 cents, with women making 78 cents to the man's dollar. Experts say 4.8 to 7 cents of the gap is caused by discrimination, while the remainder can be account for when career choice, negotiation skills, workforce exit, and other factors are considered.

- Are you familiar with this concept, and if so, how?
- Do you see the wage gap as a problem? If so, what do you think should be done about it?
  - Do you think your views are common among your friends/peers?
- Let's think hypothetically for a moment…
  - Imagine you've just been offered your first professional position. Your employer sends you your starting packet complete with details about they are offering you financially (salary, benefits, etc.)…
    - Can you think of any circumstances where you would try to negotiate their offer?
  - Okay, now imagine you have just started working in an organization and you find out that someone else with similar skills and experience was just hired with a higher starting salary than yours.
    - Would you say something about it? If so, to who? If not, why?
    - Can you think of a time you would ask for a raise? Why or why not?
    - What about a promotion?
  - Can you think of any circumstances where you wouldn't speak up about a perceived inequality or instance of unfairness?
    - Why or why not?
- Some researchers have suggested that the wage gap partially exists because women either don't ask for raises as much as men or, when they do, they aren't responded to in the same way as men are. Have you heard anything like this before? What do you think about that?
  - Can you relate to this at all? Have you or a friend experienced anything like this?
- Would you identify yourself as a feminist?
  - Why or why not?
    - If so, are there any situations where you would keep quiet about this?

Catch-all Questions
- If you could name one person who influenced your career choice, who would it be and why?
- What does work-life balance mean to you?

- o What would your ideal work-life balance situation be for your own career?
  - What about your partner? Your future family as a whole?
- Under what circumstances would you leave your career?
- Is there anything you think I should know about how you are planning to make career and family choices?

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