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# Undergraduate Adult Children Of Alcoholics And Choosing A College Major

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Undergraduate Adult Children of Alcoholics and Choosing a College Major

(TITLE)

BY

## Sara L. Schaller

## THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

## College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

## 2007

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

June 13, 2007
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June 13, 2007
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DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL HEAD

Undergraduate Adult Children of Alcoholics and Choosing a College Major

BY

Sara L Schaller

June 13, 2007

A thesis

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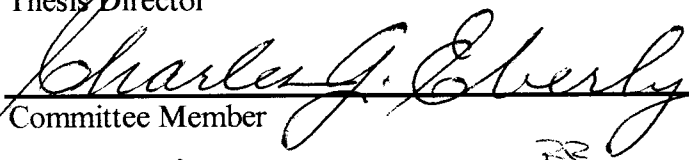
Eastern Illinois University

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

**MASTERS OF SCEINCE IN COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS**
Department of Counseling and Student Development in the Graduate School
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my father, Paul Schaller, the smartest man I know. I will always treasure what I have learned from your experiences and your willingness to share.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot believe the time has finally come to thank all those who have supported me throughout this learning process! I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation for my three committee members: Dr. Rick Roberts, Dr. Charles Eberly, and Dr. Leanne Olson. To Dr. Roberts, I thank you for your understanding and words of encouragement throughout these two years. You pushed me along when I didn't think I could continue! To Dr. Eberly, I appreciate your excitement and enthusiasm for my research. You believed that I could do it! To Dr. Olson, thank you for stepping in when I needed you the most. What you taught me at Wisconsin Lutheran College prepared me in so many ways to believe in myself and write this "big paper." I appreciate your giving spirit and passion for research!

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Special thanks to Bobbi Kingery for her help with the process of getting emails for undecided majors, you really helped when I felt like I had no where to turn! And finally to those who participated in my study, thank you for taking the time and effort to fill out the online survey. To the three participants of the interview process, thank you for continuing the study and allowing me the opportunity to discuss sensitive issues.

# ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:    Undergraduate Adult Children of Alcoholics and Choosing a College Major

Sara Lynn Schaller, Master of Science in College Student Affairs, 2007

Directed by:    Richard L. Roberts, Ph. D.
Chair of the Department of Counseling and Student Development

This study examined the career decision-making experiences of undergraduate students who were classified as "undecided" in their majors and who qualified as adult children of alcoholics using the Children of Alcoholic Screening Test (Pilat & Jones, 1984). Through basic interpretative qualitative research, this study examined the decision-making experiences of adult children of alcoholics as they choose a major.

Results of this study were limited based on participation; however, three undergraduate females did share their experiences regarding family alcoholism and choosing a major. Only one participant discussed the impact of her family alcoholism on her decision of choosing a college major. Two other participants stated their parents did not have drinking problems. The findings of this study are an important step toward understanding a population of undergraduate students who are looking for guidance in choosing a major. Future research for this specific population should use a mixed methods or longitudinal design.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The disease of alcoholism has negatively impacted the American family and continues to affect family members into adulthood. Eight million children in the United States, approximately 11 percent, live with alcoholic parents (http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/). While alcoholics and alcoholism have been the subject of research for many years, the effects of alcoholism on family members have only recently been considered. Research was conducted specifically about the children of alcoholics and the effects of alcoholism on their lives (Domenico & Windle, 1993; Fischer & Kittleson, 2000; Griffin, Amodeo, Fassler, Ellis, & Clay, 2005; Hall, Bolen, & Webster, 1994; Jones & Houts, 1992; Segrin & Menees, 1996). Results indicated family dysfunction may be a product of parental alcoholism, but other family stressors such as physical abuse, divorce, neglect and abandonment may also have an effect on the future of the adult children of alcoholics (Fischer & Kittleson, 2000). Alcoholism and its effects on the family will continue to be a problem for the development of children of alcoholics.

Children of parents who abused alcohol may continue to experience negative effects into adulthood, especially during critical developmental milestones such as attending college, where alcohol use may be a source of a growing number of problems (Segrin & Menees, 1996). Gaining independence from their parents, students may use alcohol as a way to socialize and meet new people on campus (Segrin & Menees, 1996). Depending on their past experiences, students may easily be pressured into the misuse of alcohol. For adult children of alcoholics, their early experiences with alcoholism may

also have an effect on their lives academically (Morrow, 1995), such as choosing a college major.

Choosing a major is a critical step for undergraduate students since major choice can lead students into a specific career path. Students are expected to narrow their choices of a major during their freshman year. Selecting a major early in the college experience allows students the opportunity to attend all necessary courses for their major in a timely manner. However, some students struggle with this important decision, especially when other situations, such as family stressors, may be happening simultaneously in their life. This is especially acute when the family stressor is alcohol-related (Eigen, Harman, & Hartman, 1987; Hartung, Lewis, May, & Niles, 2002).

*Research Questions*

The research interest of the present study included experiences of college students, undecided in their majors and also classified as adult children of alcoholics. The specific research questions that guided the present study were: (1) Why do you think you have had difficulty choosing a college major? (2) Has your parent's problems with alcohol had an effect on your decision-making abilities? (3) What kind of support or help do you need to make a life decision? (4) What other decisions in your life have you had difficulty deciding? and (5) Has your parent's alcohol problems had an effect on other areas in your own life?

*Significance of the Study*

Much of the current literature identified adult children of alcoholics and addressed the relationships between family alcoholism and anxiety (Fischer & Kittleson, 2000), attachment theories (Tomori, 1994), emotional stability (Woititz, 1983), romantic

relationships (Domenico & Windle, 1993) and social development skills (Jones & Houts, 1992; Segrin & Menees, 1995). There was no specific research found by the primary investigator in her literature search for undergraduate adult children of alcoholics that assessed their ability to choose a college major. The findings of the present study will shed some light on a sub-group of undergraduate students who are looking for guidance in choosing a major. Higher education professionals may become more aware of family backgrounds of students and the support needed to assist undergraduate adult children of alcoholics.

*Limitations of the Study*

The present study was a qualitative analysis of interview data collected regarding experiences of undergraduate students classified as adult children of alcoholics and undecided in their major at a mid-size state-supported institution. The amount of data collected was dependent upon the undecided students' willingness to share their experiences regarding parental alcoholism. Because of the topics' sensitivity, students who were contacted to interview may not have felt comfortable discussing their parental alcoholism experiences with the researcher. The researcher chose to offer research participants alternate ways of collecting data including sending answers to questions through email or via a phone interview as an alternative to face-to-face interviews. Allowing these two alternate options may have made the data collection less verifiable considering there were no transcribed tape manuscripts available for review and cross-checking information.

Family alcoholism and the impact it may have on choosing a college major is difficult to study. Many outside variables could affect the development of students and

their decisions, including single-parent homes, divorce, child abuse, physical abuse and other disruptions in the life of a student. Therefore, family alcoholism specifically may not be representative of other variables that may be present in the current sample of respondents.

Unfortunately, no male students volunteered to participate in the interview process for the current study so it was not possible to gain a male perspective toward choosing a major and any interaction with parental alcoholism. The study was conducted at a mid-sized campus located in a large Midwestern state and cannot be generalized to other campuses. However, the data collected may serve as a guide to increase the understanding of adult children of alcoholics and their process in choosing a college major.

*Definition of Terms*

Several concepts important to understanding the present study were defined through a review of literature about parental alcoholism and choosing a college major.

1) An "undecided" student is an undergraduate who has not decided on a specific major and has not filled out appropriate paperwork with a specific discipline. Most "undecided" students should decide on a major by the end of their freshman year.

2) Alcoholism is described as the addiction and misuse of alcohol that may have negative effects on the individual's life (www.adultchildren.org).

3) An alcoholic is defined as an individual who is addicted to alcohol (www.adultchildren.org).

4) An adult child of an alcoholic is defined as children who grew up with one parent or both parents who were alcoholics (www.adultchildren.org).

*Summary*

This chapter has provided a rationale for studying adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) as they enter college and go through the process of selecting a major. Chapter Two provides a literature review of related topics, including adult children of alcoholics' personality development, choosing a college major and career development. Chapter Three will explain the quantitative process used to identify adult children of alcoholics in a sub-set of college students who were undecided in their choice of major and the qualitative methodology used to interview ACOA research volunteers. Chapter Four will detail research findings and Chapter Five will offer conclusions based on the current study and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II

Available literature on adult children of alcoholics and career development processes was limited. However, research about short-term and long-term effects of alcoholism on the development of children who have experienced parents with alcoholism was readily available. This chapter will review the available literature about the topics of the present study.

*Adult Children of Alcoholics*

Adult children of alcoholics have experienced various problems during childhood and into adolescence. These problems include interpersonal and academic difficulties, a greater level of self-deprecation or lower self-esteem, an increase in aggressive behavior and possible difficulty with authority (Baker & Stephenson, 1995). Two other problems, feelings of being rejected and constant fear of emotional loss, which occur throughout the childhood of ACOAs, reach a breaking point during adolescence, a time when the child begins to need independence (Tomori, 1994). Likewise, one of two problems occur during adolescence; either parents, distracted by their own problems with alcoholism allow their children to do what they please and have no boundaries, or the parents cling to the children for support. Either situation may cause feelings of guilt, loneliness, low self-esteem and a lack of social skills with their age peers among children of alcoholics compared to children from non-alcoholic families. Parental alcoholism could potentially corrupt the family processes that allow children to develop and learn social skills (Segrin & Menees, 1996).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined perceived stress as "a relationship between the person and their environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding

his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being" (p. 20). Fischer and Kittleson (2000) studied perceived stress among college students at a midwestern university. Results indicated that parental alcoholism contributed significantly to higher stress levels and anxiety among college students (Fischer & Kittleson, 2000).

Hall, Bolen, and Webster (1994) examined stress in college-aged adult children of alcoholics compared to peers who suffered a traumatic life event (other than alcoholism) and those who indicated neither problem (traumatic life event or alcoholism) during their childhood. Results showed that college-aged ACOAs reported a higher level of self-reported stress and a lower ability to find resources to help themselves than those individuals who did not experience a traumatic life event or alcoholism. This study assessed ACOA college students' adjustment issues and suggested that administrators and counseling programs should take into consideration family background when offering guidance.

Domenico and Windle (1993) studied interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships among female ACOAs and non-ACOAs. Using a sample of middle-age, middle-class women, Domenico and Windle found that ACOA women reported elevated levels of depression and lower sense of well-being than the non-ACOA group. The authors also suggested a lower martial satisfaction level and a higher level of marital conflict among ACOA females. The ACOA women used more negative coping skills, such as alcohol consumption, more frequently than non-ACOA women.

Griffin, Amodeo, Fassler, Ellis, and Clay (2005) examined the long-term effects of parental alcoholism in women. Findings suggested that women with alcoholic parents did score significantly worse than women without alcoholic parents on social adjustment

($r = .17, p < .01$), depressed mood ($r = .19, p < .01$), and life satisfaction ($r = -.13, p < .05$); they also reported more alcohol problems in adulthood than women without alcoholic parents ($r = .13, p < .01$). The authors of this study emphasized the current interest in professional literature regarding the importance of examining the larger family environment, instead of a single stressor such as parental alcoholism (Griffin, et al., 2005).

Kashubeck and Christensen (1992) investigated the differences between collegiate ACOAs and community ACOAs, ranging in age from 25-66. Results indicated the ACOA community member group reported higher levels of distress and stronger negative feelings and attitudes regarding parental alcoholism than did the college ACOAs. Several factors may explain the results of the study, such as college-age ACOAs could be more supported in their environment. However, another reason may be that the ACOA community group may be more sensitive to a survey about alcoholism because they are actively participating in of a support group and currently discussing alcohol-related issues, while the college-age ACOAs were not in active discussion about issues.

Jones and Houts (1992) studied parent-child communication and social skills among young adults with alcoholic parents. The authors did not find significant results among communication and social skills in ACOAs; however, results did indicate that ACOAs had difficulty recognizing verbal and non-verbal emotions. They did suggest the importance of looking at different characteristics of families with problem drinking and do further research in this area.

Segrin and Menees (1996) compared individuals with other family stressors that could be related to parental alcoholism, such as divorce, major illness and

unemployment, with individuals affected by parental alcoholism. Results indicated that adult children of alcoholics were likely to have an increase experiencing other stressors that can have disruptive effects, such as parental separation, divorce, and unemployment.

*Adult Children of Alcoholics and Personality*

The study of adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) with an emphasis on personality has been well-established (Woititz, 1983; Baker & Stephenson, 1995; Coleman & Frick, 1994; Cartwright, McKay, & Stader, 1990; Seefeldt & Lyons, 1992; Fisher, Jenkins, Harrison Jr, & Jesch, 1993). Woititz (1983) suggested there were 13 qualities that ACOAs deal with or struggle with on a daily basis: (1) normalcy; (2) difficulty with follow-through; (3) lying; (4) judging themselves without mercy; (5) difficulty having fun; (6) taking themselves very seriously; (7) difficulty with intimate relationships; (8) overreacting to changes over which they have no control; (9) constantly seeking approval and affirmation; (10) feeling different from other people; (11) super responsible or irresponsible; (12) extremely loyal even when loyalty is undeserved; and (13) impulsive behaviors. These 13 qualities affected ACOAs at work, at home, and in personal relationships (Woititz, 1983). The objective of her research was to help ACOAs understand their behaviors and allow ACOAs to work through the difficulties they may face due to parental alcoholism.

Many researchers have challenged Woititz's approach to ACOAs and personality characteristics. Baker and Stephenson (1995) examined 8 out of the 13 characteristics attributed to ACOAs by Woititz which included difficulty with follow-through, judging themselves without mercy, difficulty having fun, taking themselves very seriously, overreacting to situation which they have no control over, seeking approval and

affirmation, super-responsible or super-irresponsible and impulsiveness. They found no apparent differences between these eight personality traits in ACOA men and non-ACOA men (Baker & Stephenson, 1995). However, ACOA women were found to be more flexible, impulsive and pessimistic than the non-ACOA control group. Conversely, Baker and Stephenson focused on the positive attributes that may be associated with ACOAs, which included personality traits such as easygoing, independence, self-assurance and self-directedness.

Coleman and Frick (1994) used the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) to survey undergraduate students classified as ACOAs with a group of non-ACOA undergraduate students. Their results indicated ACOAs could be distinguished from the control group on the following scales: Depression, Psychopathic Deviate and Psychasthenia. The authors suggested that ACOAs may be at risk for adjustment difficulties during their undergraduate experience and into their adult life.

Other researchers suggested that there was no difference between ACOAs and control groups (Harman, Armsworth, Hwang, Vincent, & Preston, 1995). They studied the adjustment of 547 undergraduate students who were ACOA and non-ACOA participants. Their results suggested adjustment differences based on gender and showed both ACOA and non-ACOA groups within the normal ranges on the personality scale.

Seefeldt and Lyons (1992) attempted to validate Woititz's research about adult children of alcoholics. They found there were no significant differences between self-identifying ACOAs and non-ACOAs on Woititz's thirteen personality traits. Instruments used in their research measured twelve of the 13 traits Woititz described. These researchers also warned against the popular stereotype of adult children of alcoholics.

"The result may be that many individuals are misled into perceiving that they have special problems that require treatment…" (p. 592) when indeed their personality traits are within the normal range.

Fisher, Jenkins, Harrison Jr., and Jesch (1993) compared ACOAs not only to adults without identified non-dysfunctional family histories (AIDFH), but also to adults with dysfunctional family histories (ADFH). Results indicated differences between the ACOAs and AIDFH groups but no differences between ACOAs and ADHF groups. The ACOA and ADFH groups reported more problems experienced in childhood with lower achievement and lower social maturity which were different from the AIDFH group. It is also important to note that the Creative Potential scale scores were higher for ADFH and ACOA groups, which may be due to the coping mechanisms used through childhood. Higher creative potential scores may indicate creative abilities in the work setting and ACOAs may find this skill helpful when beginning their career path.

Using a statistical technique called cluster analysis to determine subgroups of ACOAs along personality dimensions, D'Andrea, Fisher, and Harrison (1994) focused their research on cluster analysis of non-college age ACOAs. They hypothesized that the ACOA group would show a normal personality profile. The participants were assigned to clusters based on the results of a personality inventory, showing the results grouped together in separate ranges. A three-cluster solution was the best way to interpret the results, which showed 44 percent of ACOAs were at or above the mean on the personality scale, 40 percent were slightly below the mean and 16 percent were considerably below. Results indicated a three-cluster solution that was consistent with predictions and the largest subgroup of ACOAs, 44 percent of the sample had a normal

personality profile. This research supported the idea that ACOAs may not differ from others based on personality traits.

Cartwright, McKay, and Stader (1990) also did a cluster analysis on ACOAs and non-ACOAs and discovered similar findings to D'Andrea et al (1994). Their results grouped the males and females in three separate groups based on their personality results from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and California Personality Inventory (CPI). There were six groups (3 male, 3 female) mixed with ACOA and non-ACOA participants. A high percentage of normal profiles were found in each group, suggesting that even though ACOAs may be predisposed to alcoholism, they may have less abnormality than suspected (Cartwright, McKay, & Stader, 1990). Both of these cluster analysis studies also suggested the need to be cautious when studying ACOAs and assuming they are a homogeneous subgroup in the general population.

*Influences on Choosing a College Major*

Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) examined parental influences on a student's selection of a college major. Researchers surveyed incoming freshman regarding their parents' college attendance, college graduation, encouragement, residential status and work status. The results showed that parents may not have a major influence on their child's selection of a college major. However, a majority of students reported that their mother and father had encouraged them to attend college.

Leppel, Williams, and Waldauer (2001) studied the effects of socioeconomic status and parental occupation on choice of a college major. The authors used data collected from an earlier national survey to analyze the variables. Results suggested that having a father in a professional occupation has a larger effect on female students and

having a mother in a professional occupation has a larger effect on male students. Also, students who believed that making a good amount of money was important were more likely to major in business than other students.

Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005) surveyed undergraduate students on their influences of their choices of major. The researchers examined which students initially chose a major and which factors, if any, related to the changes in the major later. Results showed that interest in the subject was the most important factor for incoming freshman, regardless of gender. Students appeared to change their major because of positive factors associated with a new major, rather than negative factors of the old major.

Galotti, Ciner, Altenbaumer, Geerts, Rupp, and Woulfe (2006) investigated the decision-making styles of choosing a college major. The authors surveyed undergraduate students in their first semester of college regarding their decision-making styles and attitudes towards thinking and learning. For this study, individual differences did not show up during the information-gathering or decision-making process of choosing a major. However, the authors suggested that different people approach decisions in different ways and it remains to be seen where in the decision-making process individual differences occur.

*Family Dysfunction and Career Development*

Splete (1985) offered seven significant factors that affected an individual's career decision-making and career development: location, genetic inheritance, family background, socioeconomic status, family composition, parenting style and parenting work-related attitudes. Spete stated, "These factors influence the formation of self-concept, values and personality which in turn influence initial career choice and

education" (p. 56). The author stressed the importance of family interaction theories and patterns as a large influence on children's career decision-making skills.

Eigen, Hartman, and Hartman (1987) examined the relationship between family interaction patterns and career development by employing a longitudinal study of high school students. The authors found no significant relationship between family patterns and career development; however, findings suggested that many adolescents may develop career decision-making skills in two different kinds of family systems. A flexible family structure with strong emotional attachment or a more authoritarian structure with more individual freedom are the two types of family systems that were important for good decision-making skills among adolescents. These family structures allowed the adolescents freedom to explore their career interests and offered the support needed to begin their career path.

Morrow (1995) discussed ways to assess patterns of family interactions that influence adolescent career development. The purpose of Morrow's research was to provide more information to school counselors regarding students from dysfunctional families and how their families may influence their vocational development. Morrow stated that difficulties in career development occurred when the family does not support or allow the adolescent to explore career areas. Family behavior is an important factor when discussing vocational identity of high school students and supportive mentors outside of the home may be helpful for students from dysfunctional families to succeed because their families may not provide support.

Ryan, Solberg, and Brown (1996) studied career search self-efficacy, family dysfunction and parental attachment among community college students. Results

indicated that family dysfunction and parental attachment influenced career search self-efficacy beliefs. These results suggested that students from dysfunctional families may need more emotional support and vocational guidance when deciding on a career path because they may not have a strong relationship and trust with their family members.

Guerra and Braungart-Rieker (1999) studied parental acceptance and encouragement as a predictor of career indecision. The purpose of their study was to correlate career indecision with the relationships between the parents and children. The results of this study supported the authors' hypothesis that students' views of the parental relationship were related to career decision making, even years after school.

Hartung, Lewis, May, & Niles (2002) studied family interaction patterns and college student career development. The authors hypothesized that the stronger the family adaptability and cohesion, the more likely individuals will find and commit to a career path. However, results indicated that family adaptability and cohesion did not relate significantly to the vocational development of the college students studied.

Chope (2002) studied the family's influence on an individual's career choice and how career counselors should work with that individual and their family background. Chope indicated that the structure of family is changing, "The traditional family, with delineated roles of provider and nurturer is difficult to find, making it more important for counselors to discuss early childhood and adolescent experiences to understand the individual's decision-making abilities" (p. 177). Chope suggested that when a family is connected and engaged in the career process, the child may develop a stronger social network and a supportive environment.

*Adult Children of Alcoholics and Career Development*

Skorupa and Agresti (1998) studied career indecision in adult children of alcoholics and adult children of non-alcoholics attending college. According to Goodstein's (1965) definition, career indecision is described in two separate types. One type involved the lack of information about careers of the decision making process offered to an individual and the second type involved making a career decision based on anxiety regarding making decisions. Career identity referred to the ability to identify and decide which career path is best for one's self (Skorupa & Agresti, 1998). From Skorupa and Agresti's research, both ACOA and non-ACOA groups were similar in levels of career identity and irrational thinking; however, anxiety levels were higher among ACOAs than non-ACOAs. Results of this study may indicate that career indecision may be a consistent problem among ACOA college students due to anxiety problems.

Schumrum and Hartman (1988) researched adult children of alcoholics and chronic career indecision. The purpose of their work was to examine how chronic career indecision may develop as a result of growing up in an alcohol-related dysfunctional family. Problems that may be a factor for ACOAs and career decision include anxiety, self-perception and external locus of control.

Baker and Stephenson (1995) studied personalities and the ACOA population. From their results, once the ACOA subjects did enter college, they were more likely to major in helping professions than control group subjects. This may be due to their childhood experiences when they had to be helpful and supportive of their alcoholic parent.

Baker and Stephenson (1995) supported a study by Pilat and Jones (1984) who identified a significant number of ACOAs as therapists. The authors surveyed approximately 81 therapists, 47 students studying social work, and 26 health professionals and found that half of the therapists in the group were adult children of alcoholics, according to the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (Pilat & Jones, 1984). It is unclear whether this outcome stemmed from helping their parents and family deal with alcoholism or their awareness for the need of such professionals among the general population.

*Summary of Research Findings*

The literature reviewed for the present study encompassed research about adult children of alcoholics' behaviors, choosing a college major and career development. Specific to the ACOA population, there were mixed results regarding their behaviors that may have been impacted by alcoholism, such as their personalities, social skills, self-esteem issues and levels of stress and anxiety. According to current research, adult children of alcoholics do not have a specific personality type as previously described in earlier research. The literature did highlight several specific effects of parental alcoholism, such as higher stress and anxiety levels.

Factors that may influence choosing a college major were interest in the subject matter, parental occupation and financial stability. When looking at deciding on a specific career path, research suggested that family interactions were important to the students' decisions, especially the family's support and encouragement. Adult children of alcoholics may experience career indecision due to their childhood experiences. However, further research suggested that ACOAs may decide on a career in the helping

professions, such as therapists, counselors and social workers, based on their childhood

experiences when they had to be helpful and supportive to their parents.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine undergraduate students who were classified as "undecided" in their majors and who qualified as adult children of alcoholics through an Adult Children of Alcoholics screening survey. Through an online survey and basic interpretative qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this study examined the decision-making experiences of adult children of alcoholics as they choose a major.

*Research Questions*

The research questions of the present study included experiences of college students, undecided in their majors and also classified as adult children of alcoholics. The specific research questions were: (1) Why do you think you have had difficulty choosing a college major? (2) Has your parent's problems with alcohol had an effect on your decision-making abilities? (3) What kind of support or help do you need to make a life decision? (4) What other decisions in your life have you had difficulty deciding? (5) Has your parent's alcohol problems had an effect on other areas in your life?

*Procedures*

In order to target the audience to undecided majors specifically, the researcher directly emailed all undergraduate students who remained undecided in their major according to the University Records department. This list of email addresses was provided to the researcher through the Information Technology Systems department for research purposes only after being approved by the University Registrar. The email sent to the undecided majors included a link to an electronic survey using a program called

"Zoomerang" (www.zoomerang.com) purchased through the Housing and Dining Department Services for the use of Housing professionals. Research participants completed the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST) developed by Pilat and Jones (1984) along with selected demographic information. The informed consent screen introduced the survey information to the participants, and selecting the survey served as implied informed consent. Demographic information and the CAST survey questions were available through a link on the email. After completing the survey (Appendix C), participants were asked to leave an email address if they were willing to volunteer for a follow-up interview with the researcher.

When participants completed the online Children of Alcoholics Screening Test and demographic information, information was tallied by the researcher. Those participants who were identified as adult children of alcoholics were contacted by email for a follow-up interview with the researcher to gather qualitative data. A second informed consent (Appendix D) was provided to the participants including any risks involved with the qualitative study. Qualitative research was used to gather similar themes among the participants' answers and gather more specific information than the questionnaire (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

*Participants*

Research participants for the current study were undergraduate undecided majors from a mid-sized state-supported institution in the Midwest. Total enrollment in Spring 2007 was 11, 336 students. The campus was located in a small community of over 30,000 people, including university students in the census. For the purpose of the research, potential participants who were undecided in the major were asked via email to take an

online survey to classify them as adult children of alcoholic or not. The email was sent to 607 undergraduate students who were undecided in their major. Of those students, 43 individuals (35 female, 8 male) completed the online survey. Thirty-eight were freshman, 4 were sophomores, and 1 was a junior in college. Ages reported by online participants were 18 years old (N=20), 19 years old (N=18), 20 years old (N=4), and 21 years old (one). The three participants who subsequently volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher were 18 years old.

Nine of 43 individuals who responded to the online survey were classified as adult children of alcoholics because they answered "yes" to six or more questions on the 30-item CAST survey. A second follow-up email was sent to ask for further participation from the nine individuals. The follow-up email offered three options for interview participation: face-to-face interview, phone interview, or responding to five questions provided on an attachment to the follow-up email. A freshman female returned the attachment with answers to the five questions. Two more female participants volunteered to carry out phone interviews. These three female participants provided the qualitative data for the current study.

*Instruments*

The Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (Pilat & Jones, 1984) consisted of 30 "yes" or "no" questions which measure psychological distress associated with parental drinking, perception of the relationship between parents, attempts to control the parent's drinking, efforts to avoid alcoholism, exposure to alcohol-related violence, and how an alcoholic parent may be perceived by the child (Yeatman, Bogart, Geer, & Sirridge,

1994). If the participants answered "yes" to six or more of the survey questions, they were classified as adult children of alcoholics.

The CAST obtained a Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient of .98, according to Yeatman, Bogart, Geer, & Sirridge (1994). Charland and Cote (1998) found the homogeneity of the instrument was high, with a Cronbach alpha statistic of .89 and a Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient of .90. Charland and Cote (1998) also stated, "...the CAST is a highly reliable and valid instrument that can be used by clinicians and researchers alike to identify ACOAs" (p. 1002).

The use of the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (Jones & Pilat, 1985) in the current study was to effectively assess the family alcoholism backgrounds of the participants who were undecided on their major. Providing the survey online was a quick way of obtaining the correct information for further research regarding family alcoholism and choosing a major. The CAST is available in Appendix C.

At the end of the CAST portion of the online survey, five demographic items were also provided. Gender, race, age, and year in school were four items used to describe the sample of participants. The final item was a space to provide their email addresses if they were willing to volunteer for a follow-up interview with the researcher.

One individual responded by answering the set of five questions and two individuals set up phone interviews with the researcher. The purpose of the research was explained to each participant, the informed consent was read to each participant, and interview questions were used in the same manner. The following questions were asked:

1) Why do you think you have had difficulty choosing a college major?

2) Has your parent's problems with alcohol had an effect on your decision-making abilities?

3) What kind of support or help do you need to make a life decision?

4) What other decisions in your life have you had difficulty deciding?

5) Has your parent's alcohol problems had an effect on other areas in your life?

The researcher used open-ended questions allowing the participants to have a conversation with the researcher. This allowed the researcher to answer additional follow-up questions to probe for further information based on the participants' initial responses.

*Online Data Analysis*

After analyzing the data from the online survey, nine individuals were classified as adult children of alcoholics because they answered "yes" to six or more questions on the 30-item CAST survey. These nine individuals were emailed to ask for their participation in a one-on-one interview with the researcher (Appendix D). Because of the lack of response from these nine individuals, the researcher expanded the participants to include those who answered "yes" to five or more questions on the CAST. A follow-up email was sent to two additional individuals and response options were expanded to include a phone interview and an attachment with the set of five interview questions. Ten dollar gift card incentives were also available to those students who participated in the interview process of the study. Numerous emails were sent out for a period of three weeks to encourage participation in the study.

*Interview Data Analysis*

The individual who responded via email answered the five questions that would have been asked during the interview process. Detailed field notes were taken during the two phone interviews by the researcher. The information compiled was reviewed for common themes using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The researcher worked to take detailed written notes during the telephone conversations and added additional details immediately after the completion of the telephone interviews.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter will present results of the online CAST survey. Also, this chapter is a presentation of the experiences of choosing a major among three women undergraduate students. Each of these women responded to five major interview questions offered by the researcher. One participant chose to respond through email by sending the researcher the answers to the five interview questions. Two participants responded through phone interviews set up with the researcher. Each woman had information to offer explaining the factors that have had an influence on their choosing a major.

*Online Survey Results*

The CAST online survey with demographic information was sent to 607 students classified as undecided in their major. Of those 607 students, 43 responded to the online survey. Thirty-four (79.1%) participants answered "yes" to the range of 0-5 questions, which did not classify those individuals as adult children of alcoholics. However, nine (20.9%) participants answer yes to six or more questions which did classify them as ACOA status. Table 1 shows the number of how many answered "yes" to the 30 questions in order to classify them as ACOA status.

*Online Results of Three Female Interview Participants*

Three freshman women chose to participate in the qualitative portion of the study. One woman sent back the answers to the set of interview questions through email. Two women chose to set up phone interviews with the researcher. According to the online CAST results, two women answered "yes" to six CAST questions. Because of the lack of participation from those individuals who answered "yes" to six or more of the questions,

*Interview Questions and Themes*

Five interview questions were asked of the three participants. One participant responded through email and two participants responded over the phone. These five questions were created to ask about their specific experiences with choosing a college major and parental alcoholism.

1) Why do you think you have had difficulty choosing a college major?

2) Has your parent's problems with alcohol had an effect on your decision-making abilities?

3) What kind of support or help do you need to make a life decision?

4) What other decisions in your life have you had difficulty deciding?

5) Has your parent's alcohol problems had an effect on other areas in your life?

Two participants offered information regarding choosing a major, but did not talk about parental alcoholism because they stated that their parents did not have "a drinking problem." However, one participant did discuss her experiences with choosing a major and how parental alcoholism had affected her choices.

*Difficulty in Choosing a College Major*

When discussing the reasons why they had difficulty choosing a college major, two of the women discussed the anxiety and one stated her "worry about not making the right decision." One woman stated, "I feel that I have difficulty choosing a major because I'm scared that after all the time and money I spend in school, that I will not end up doing the career I chose." The fear of not getting the right kind of job after graduation and making money was also stated, "I just want to find a career that is in high demand and that will make me happy. My goal is to have a job in a career I choose very soon after I

graduate so I can start paying off my loans." Another woman took a different perspective and stated that she was interested in so many different areas that she could not narrow her interests down to one field of study.

*Parental Alcoholism and Student's Decision-making Abilities*

All three of the women differed in their answers regarding how their parents' alcohol problems had an effect on their decision-making abilities. Two of the women stated that their parents' drinking did not have any effect on their decisions because their parents were not alcoholics. One stated, "My parents do not have a drinking problem, therefore me not having a declared major has nothing to do with my parents. I have difficulty making a decision because I'm not sure what I want to do with the rest of my life." For her, the difficulty in making a decision is because of the future impact it may have on the rest of her life.

One woman was indecisive with her answer to this question. She stated, "I don't think so" when asked about her parent's alcohol problems and their effects of her decision-making abilities. The researcher asked a follow-up question about her parents' decision-making styles and she stated, "Both of my parents are indecisive and have a hard time making decisions, I think I must have inherited this trait from them."

*Support for Major Life Decisions*

All three women stated that their families were a major support for making life decisions. One woman stated, "I definitely need my family's support on what I do as a career because their views are very important to me." Another woman said, "I usually talk to my parents about major life decisions but I can't completely rely on them so I talk to my older brother and sister." She went further to discuss her relationship with her older

siblings and the importance of their input because "they have gone through making different life decisions." Another woman also discussed the importance of getting advice outside of family, "I get advice from everyone that I know, friends, family, my advisor." The women all focused on talking with others before making a life decision. Each woman relied on someone other than themselves to support or offer advice about decisions.

*Other Difficult Decisions*

When asked about other difficult decisions they had to make besides choosing a major, all three women agreed that choosing an undergraduate institution was a difficult decision. Two of the women had to decide on going away to college or staying at home. One woman commented,

> Since I had not decided on a major I was in between going to a community
>
> college and just taking general education classes or going away to school. My
>
> parents and I sat down and discussed it and we decided that it would be a good
>
> idea for me to gain some independence and go away to school.

For this woman (supported by her parents), the decision to gain further life experiences outweighed a decision to remain undecided in her major before entering college. Another participant applied to ten schools, got accepted into seven schools and visited five institutions. For her it was a matter of where she felt the best "fit" and would be comfortable in her surroundings. She stated that her choice of this university had worked out well for her.

Another participant chose to enter cosmetology school and get certified because she was undecided in an area of study and wanted something to fall back on in case she needed a job. Her parents were in full support of her choice since she did not know a

specific area of study. If she ever found herself unhappy with her job, she knew she could use her cosmetology schooling to provide her with financial support until she had time to look into another career she would enjoy.

*Parental Alcoholism and the Effects on Other Areas of Life*

When asked about other effects of their parents' drinking habits, two of the women felt that their parents' drinking had no negative effect on them. However, looking at the Children of Alcoholic Survey questions, both participants answered "yes" to the three questions: (1) Did you ever feel responsible for or guilty about a parent's drinking; (2) Did you ever argue or fight with a parent when he or she was drinking; and (3) Did you ever feel that you made a parent drink alcohol. In addition, one participant answered "yes" to "wishing her parents would stop drinking," felt she took "blame for a parent's drinking," and "fought with her siblings about her parent's drinking." It could be possible that these two individuals did not feel comfortable discussing this sensitive topic of parental alcoholism with the researcher.

One participant did reveal that she has anxiety problems and is taking medication to help with her anxiety. She felt that she has had a "hard time trusting people and relying on people" because of her experiences with her father's drinking. She also stated that she tends to trust people more who do not drink alcohol. She has found support with students that do not drink and does not trust those students who do consume alcohol. Her roommate has also been a source of support since they have similar experiences with alcohol in their families.

*Summary of Results*

There were a high number of classified adult children of alcoholics out of a fairly low online survey response (20.9 percent). Nine individuals were initially emailed to participate in face-to-face interviews. Due to a lack of response, two more individuals were emailed and the interview process was changed to allow for phone interviews and a set of questions to send through email. However, a limited amount of data was collected, possibly due to the lack of participation and the multiple collection methods. Three individuals voluntarily participated in the interview process of the current study. Participants were asked about their experiences of choosing a college major and the effects of parental alcoholism.

According to two of the women, their difficulty with choosing a college major did not have anything to do with their parents' drinking. They found support from their parents with their decisions. The other woman discussed the possible issues she faced due to her father's drinking habits, including anxiety and trust issues.

# CHAPTER V

## Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The present study was designed to identify adult children of alcoholics and explore their experiences of choosing a college major. Three undergraduate female students contributed to the present study and identified reasons for their difficulty in choosing a college major. This chapter is a comparison of the information presented in the literature review and the findings from the three interviews and online survey data included in the present study. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for student affairs professionals and researchers.

*Summary of Findings*

Past literature regarding adult children of alcoholics, specifically adolescents and the college-age population, suggested that ACOAs may experience more stress and anxiety while attending college than those students who may not directly deal with parental alcoholism (Fischer & Kittleson, 2000; Hall, Bolen, & Webster, 1994). Findings from the current study showed mixed results. While two participants were well-adjusted, one participant discussed her anxiety issues and did state that she was on medication for her anxiety problems. She also openly discussed her lack of trust for her father who she considered an alcoholic. Despite the possibility that ACOAs report higher levels of stress than other students, Kashubeck and Christensen (1992) suggested that being a part of the college environment provides support for ACOAs. In agreement with Kashubeck and Christensen (1992), two of the participants from the present study stated that academic advisors and friends they had met while on-campus were a huge support to them both academically and personally.

Findings from the present study agreed with mixed results from the literature regarding adult children of alcoholics and personality traits. Past literature, mainly from Woititz (1983), who has written numerous books about ACOAs and personality, suggested that ACOAs struggle daily with the negative effects of alcoholism at work, at home and in their relationships. One participant did find that her parent's alcoholism had some negative effects on her relationships and decision-making struggles. However, more current research has shown that ACOAs do not have distinct personality traits (Baker & Stephensen, 1995; Coleman & Frick, 1994; Seefeldt & Lyons, 1992; Fischer, Jenkins, Harrison Jr., & Jesch, 1993). There was no way to indicate if all three participants had similar personality characteristics. However, past research suggested that there are many different variables that may affect personality and it is difficult to narrow in on one specific variable, especially the broad area of alcoholism.

Findings from the present study suggested that it may be important to have family support regarding important life decisions, similar to Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) who reported in their study that mothers and fathers may not be a major influence on their child's selection of a college major, but do offer support and encouragement. Malgwi, Howe, and Burnaby (2005) reported that interest in the subject was the most important factor for students choosing a college major. Their findings are in agreement with the results of the present study. All three participants wanted to choose a major they were interested in pursuing because of the enjoyment they found within that discipline.

While parental influence may not be significant for choosing a college major, research has shown that family interaction and behaviors can affect the career development of an adolescent (Splete, 1985; Morrow; 1995; Ryan, Solberg, & Brown,

1996; Chope, 2002). Based on the current findings, all three participants mentioned family as an important factor for the decisions they made, specifically choosing a college. None of the participants specifically stated their direct family influences, but all three did recognize their family as a source of support. For adult children of alcoholics and career development, research has shown a pattern of career indecision (Skorupa & Agresti, 1998; Schumrum & Hartman, 1988). Literature suggested that ACOA college students may have difficulty choosing a career path because they did not have strong mentors in their parents to teach them how to make the right decisions. Because of their possibly difficult childhood, college student ACOAs may experience anxiety and low self-esteem. One participant of the current study did recognize that she does have anxiety problems and difficulty handling her parents' drinking habits. However, two participants did not discuss anxiety or self-image problems in regards to their family life or choosing a college major.

*Conclusions*

The present study was a qualitative analysis of data collected regarding experiences of undergraduate students classified as adult children of alcoholics and undecided in their major at a mid-sized public institution. The amount of data collected was dependent upon the undecided students' willingness to share their experiences regarding parental alcoholism. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, students who were contacted to interview may not have felt comfortable discussing their parental alcoholism experiences with the researcher. The researcher chose to offer further ways of collecting data including sending answers to questions through email or phone interview. Allowing

these two options made the data collection less reliable considering there was no tape-recorded manuscript available for review and cross-checking information.

Despite the depth of knowledge and understanding that can come from qualitative research, the sensitivity of the subject of alcoholism and family background may have hindered the data collection of the present study. While three participants chose to fulfill the interview portion of the study, they did not offer much depth to their answers. Only one participant revealed much about her family alcoholism problems and her own struggles with anxiety. While the two other participants answered "yes" to several critical questions on the CAST survey, such as "did you ever feel responsible for or guilty about a parent's drinking?" and "did you ever feel that you made a parent drink alcohol?" neither participant discussed any alcohol issues with their parents and both students denied any alcohol problems. This could suggest that they could answer questions online, but did not feel comfortable discussing the issues. Quantitative research may have been helpful for the current study based on the sensitivity of the topic and lack of participation.

This study was conducted in late March and early April toward the end of the academic year. If the study would have been conducted earlier in the semester, when students may have perceived they had more time, the response to the email solicitation and interview follow-up may have been more than at the end of the semester. Male participants would have also added a different dynamic to the results of the present study, especially since current literature discussed gender differences.

*Recommendations*

While the present study's findings are limited, the importance of the topic of adult children of alcoholics and choosing a college major is critical to continue to study. The

impact of family background on college students and their decision-making abilities may carry over into important decisions during adulthood. Student affairs practitioners and future researchers should be aware of the recommendations listed below.

*Student Affairs Practitioners:*

1. Only one participant mentioned an "academic" advisor as a source of support for her decision about choosing a college major. If a student is having difficulty in choosing a major, perhaps the academic advisor should probe further about family influences and support.

2. During the early part of the academic year, it is important to have workshops and presentations about the different college majors. Findings from the present study suggest that it may be difficult to choose a college major because there are so many academic areas available to select. Perhaps more workshops describing each academic major would clarify each major and possibly guide each student's decision.

3. Career counselors may want to discuss different ways of advertising to those students who are undecided in the major. Currently, the career counselors offer one-on-one guidance regarding undecided students' interests and how they can explore those options. However, findings of the study suggest that students may be unaware of this service.

4. Proper programs and services for ACOAs would be helpful in supporting and guiding ACOA students. For this reason, Residential Life professionals should be aware of the effects of parental alcoholism on students they may interact with on a daily basis.

*Future Researchers:*

1. It is important to get a proper sample of undecided majors including male students to address as many different perspectives as possible.

2. Extending the research from only adult children of alcoholics to students who come from dysfunctional families may be helpful in examining family impact and differences

3. For the sensitive topic of alcoholism, researchers may want to discuss quantitative research and data analysis. It may be more successful to gather information from a survey than discussing sensitive information through an interview.

4. A longitudinal study of adult children of alcoholics would hopefully increase the number of participants and enrich the data collected.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Introduction Email to Undecided Majors

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sara L Schaller and Dr. Rick Roberts from the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University.  The purpose of the present study is to explore the decision-making experiences of adult children of alcoholics and choosing a college major.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as undecided in your college major, which is a requirement for the population of the current study. If you are no longer undecided in your major, you cannot participate in this study.

I invite you to click on the link below, read through the informed consent thoroughly, and take a 30 item survey that will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. ***Those who complete the survey and leave their email address for further research purposes will be placed in a drawing for a $25 iTunes music gift card.***

***LINK HERE***

If you do not want to participate in this study, please simply delete the email and there will be no further contact with you by the researcher.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the faculty sponsor below at the information below.

Thank you for your time!

Sara Schaller, Principal Investigator
Graduate Student, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2579 (Office)
Pemberton Hall, Eastern Illinois University
slschaller@eiu.edu

Dr. Rick Roberts, Faculty Sponsor
Chair, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2400 (Office)
Buzzard Hall, Eastern Illinois University
rlroberts@eiu.edu

# APPENDIX B

Online Informed Consent

# CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

*Investigation of Adult Children of Alcoholics and their Decision-Making Experiences of Choosing a College Major*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sara Schaller and Dr. Rick Roberts from the Department of Counseling and College Student Development at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as undecided in your college major, which is a requirement for the population of the current study. If you are no longer undecided in your major, you cannot participate in this study.

- ## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the present study is to explore the decision-making experiences of self-reported adult children of alcoholics as they choose a college major. A secondary purpose of the study will shed light on more information for college career counselors in the area of career development and adult children of alcoholics.

- ## PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the survey available after you read the following information and click on the link to the survey. Your consent will be given when you click on the link that will lead you to the survey. The attached survey is regarding behaviors of your parents and their alcohol use from your perspective. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

At the end of the survey, you may voluntarily leave your email address for further contact with the researcher based off of the results of the survey. *Those who complete the survey and choose the leave their email addresses will be placed in a drawing for one $25 iTunes music gift card!*

- ## POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable physical risks or discomforts of the present study. However, the information of parental alcohol use may be sensitive for some individuals. For those individuals who may have difficulty after completing the survey, information for the Counseling Center is provided at the end of the survey and you are encouraged to speak with a counselor regarding family alcoholism issues.

If you do not wish to complete the survey, you may simply delete this email. Once you click on the link to the survey, you have consented to completing the survey. However, you do not need to follow through with all survey questions if you choose not to.

- ## POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants do not benefit directly from the current study. However, further research on this topic may provide college career counselors with more information on how to work with adult children of alcoholics who are having difficulty deciding on a college major.

## • CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the data from the survey remaining separate from the email addresses. All original data will be stored in the survey system and only accessed by the researcher. However, if you leave your email address your data will be known by the researcher for the purpose of contacting you for further research.

This research study is for completion of a Master's thesis. After completion, all information will be stored on a disc and locked in a cabinet in the Department of Counseling and College Student Development.

## • PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.
You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## • IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Sara Schaller, Principal Investigator          Dr. Rick Roberts, Faculty Sponsor
Graduate Student                               Chair of the Department
(217) 581-2579 (Office)                        (217) 581-2400 (Office)
Pemberton Hall, Eastern Illinois University    Buzzard Hall, Eastern Illinois University
slschaller@eiu.edu                             rlroberts@eiu.edu

## • RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL   61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

APPENDIX C

Online Survey

Survey Questions by Pilat & Jones (1984):

Have you ever thought that one of your parents had a drinking problem?   Yes   or   No

Have you ever lost sleep because of a parent's drinking?    Yes   or   No

Did you ever encourage one of your parents to quit drinking?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever feel alone, scared, nervous, angry or frustrated because a parent was not able to stop drinking?    Yes   or   No

Did you ever argue or fight was a parent when he or she was drinking?    Yes   or   No

Did you ever threaten to run away from home because of a parent's drinking?  Yes   or No

Has a parent ever yelled at or hit you or other family members when drinking?  Yes   or No

Have you ever heard your parents fight when one of them was drunk?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever protect another family member from a parent who was drinking?  Yes   or No

Did you ever feel like hiding or emptying a parent's bottle of liquor?  Yes   or   No

Do many of your thoughts revolve around a problem drinking parent or difficulties that arise because of his or her drinking?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever wish that a parent would stop drinking?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever feel responsible for or guilty about a parent's drinking?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever fear that your parents would get divorced due to alcohol misuse?  Yes   or No

Have you ever withdrawn from and avoided outside activities and friends because of embarrassment and shame over a parent's drinking problem?  Yes   or   No

Did you ever feel caught in the middle of an argument or fight between a problem drinking parent and your other parent?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever feel that you made a parent drink alcohol?   Yes   or   No

Have you ever that a problem drinking parent did not really love you?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever resent a parent's drinking?   Yes   or   No

Have you ever worried about a parent's health because of his or her alcohol use?   Yes or   No

Have you ever been blamed for a parent's drinking?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever think your father was an alcoholic?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever wish you home could be more like the homes of your friends who did not have a parent with a drinking problem?   Yes   or   No

Did a parent ever make promises to you that he or she did not keep because of drinking? Yes   or   No

Did you ever think your mother was an alcoholic?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever wish that you could talk to someone who could understand and help the alcohol-related problems in your family? Yes   or   No

Did you ever fight with your brothers and sisters about a parent's drinking?   Yes   or No

Did you ever stay away from home to avoid the drinking parent or your other parent's reaction to the drinking?   Yes   or   No

Have you ever felt sick, cried, or had a "knot" in your stomach after worrying about a parent's drinking?   Yes   or   No

Did you ever take over any chores and duties at home that were usually done by a parent

before he or she developed a drinking problem?   Yes    or     No

Demographics

Gender (circle one):   Male    or    Female

Race (circle one):    Caucasian    African-American    Hispanic    Asian    Other

Age:

Year in School (circle one):     Freshman    Sophomore    Junior    Senior    Other


Based on the results of the survey, the researcher may need to contact you with further
information regarding your experiences. Please remember this is completely voluntary.

If you would like, please include your email address below to be contacted:

Email address: _____

***Those participants who leave their email address will be placed in a drawing for a $25
iTunes music gift card and will be informed by email if they have won.***

Last page:

For those individuals who may have difficulty after completing the survey, please contact the
Counseling Center for help and assistance:

Eastern Illinois University
Counseling Center
Human Services Building
(217) 581- 3413
http://www.eiu.edu/~counsctr/cslwelc.html

If you have any further questions regarding the current study, you may contact:

Sara Schaller
EIU graduate student, Department of Counseling and College Student Development
(217) 581-2579
slschaller@eiu.edu

Dr. Rick Roberts
Faculty Sponsor, Department of Counseling and College Student Development
(217) 581-2400
rlroberts@eiu.edu

APPENDIX D

Email to ACOA identified participants

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for leaving your email address for further research about undecided major and adult children of alcoholics. Based from the results of the study, you qualify as a possible participant to be interviewed by the researcher regarding your decision-making experiences and parental alcoholism.

The interview should be approximately 30-45 minutes in length and will be audio recorded for the purpose of the researcher to transcribe at a later date. The researcher will be the only one who will have access to the audio tape. After the information is transcribed, the audio tape will be destroyed.

If you are interested in interviewing for the present study, please email the researcher (slschaller@eiu.edu) back with the approval of allowing further contact. An informed consent will be email to you with potential risks, benefits, and precautions. An interview date and time will then be set up if you would like to continue. *Those who complete the interview with the researcher will receive a one $10 gift card for McDonalds for their participation.*

If you do not wish to interview, simply delete this email and there will be no further contact with you regarding the current research.

Once again if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact myself or the faculty sponsor at our information below.

Thank you for your participation in this process!

Sara Schaller, Principal Investigator
Graduate Student, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2579 (Office)
Pemberton Hall, Eastern Illinois University
slschaller@eiu.edu

Dr. Rick Roberts, Faculty Sponsor
Chair, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2400 (Office)
Buzzard Hall, Eastern Illinois University
rlroberts@eiu.edu

APPENDIX E

Interview Participant Informed Consent

# CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

*Investigation of Adult Children of Alcoholics and their Decision-Making Experiences of Choosing a College Major*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sara Schaller and Dr. Rick Roberts from the Department of Counseling and College Student Development at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as undecided in your college major, which is a requirement for the population of the current study. If you are no longer undecided in your major, you cannot participate in this study.

## • PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the present study is to explore the decision-making experiences of self-reported adult children of alcoholics as they choose a college major. A secondary purpose of the study will shed light on more information for college career counselors in the area of career development and adult children of alcoholics.

## • PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your decision-making experiences, specifically deciding on a college major and your experiences with parental alcoholism.

You have been identified as an adult child of an alcoholic based on the results of the online survey previously taken and are currently undecided in your major. You also left your email address for further contact with the researcher.

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will focus on choosing a college major and parental alcoholism.

The interview will be audio taped for the purpose of allowing the researcher to transcribe at a later date. The audio tape will only be available to the researcher and will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed.

## • POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable physical risks or discomforts of the present study. However, the information of parental alcohol use may be sensitive for some individuals. For those individuals who may have difficulty after interviewing, information for the Counseling Center is provided below and you are encouraged to speak with a counselor regarding family alcoholism issues.

*Eastern Illinois University Counseling Center*
*Human Services Building*
*(217)581-3413*

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participants do not benefit directly from the current study. However, further research on this topic may provide college career counselors with more information on how to work with adult children of alcoholics who are having difficulty deciding on a college major.

- **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION**

After completion of the interview, you will receive a $10 McDonalds gift card for your participation in the
interview. You must fully complete the interview process before you will receive the gift card.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of immediate transcription of the interviews and destruction of the audio tape after the interview data has been published. The researcher will be the only one with direct access to the audio tapes. The researcher and three committee members will have discussion about the interview process and participants' names or emails will not be identified with the transcripts.

This research study is for completion of a Master's thesis. After completion, all information will be stored on a disc and locked in a closet in the Department of Counseling and College Student Development.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.
You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Sara Schaller, Principal Investigator
Graduate Student, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2579 (Office)
Pemberton Hall, Eastern Illinois University
slschaller@eiu.edu

Dr. Rick Roberts, Faculty Sponsor
Chair, Department of Counseling & College Student Development
(217) 581-2400 (Office)

Buzzard Hall, Eastern Illinois University
rlroberts@eiu.edu

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Institutional Review Board
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Charleston, IL   61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

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I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.  I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____                    _____
Signature of Participant                                                   Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

_____                    _____
        Signature of Investigator                                    Participant Informed Consent

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol Questions

Interview Questions

1) Why do you think you have had difficulty choosing a college major?

2) Has your parent's problems with alcohol had an effect on your decision-making abilities?

3) What kind of support or help do you need to make a life decision?

4) What other decisions in your life have you had difficulty deciding?

5) Has your parent's alcohol problems had an effect on other areas in your life?