

The Role of Families in Medical Students' Professional Identity Formation (PIF)

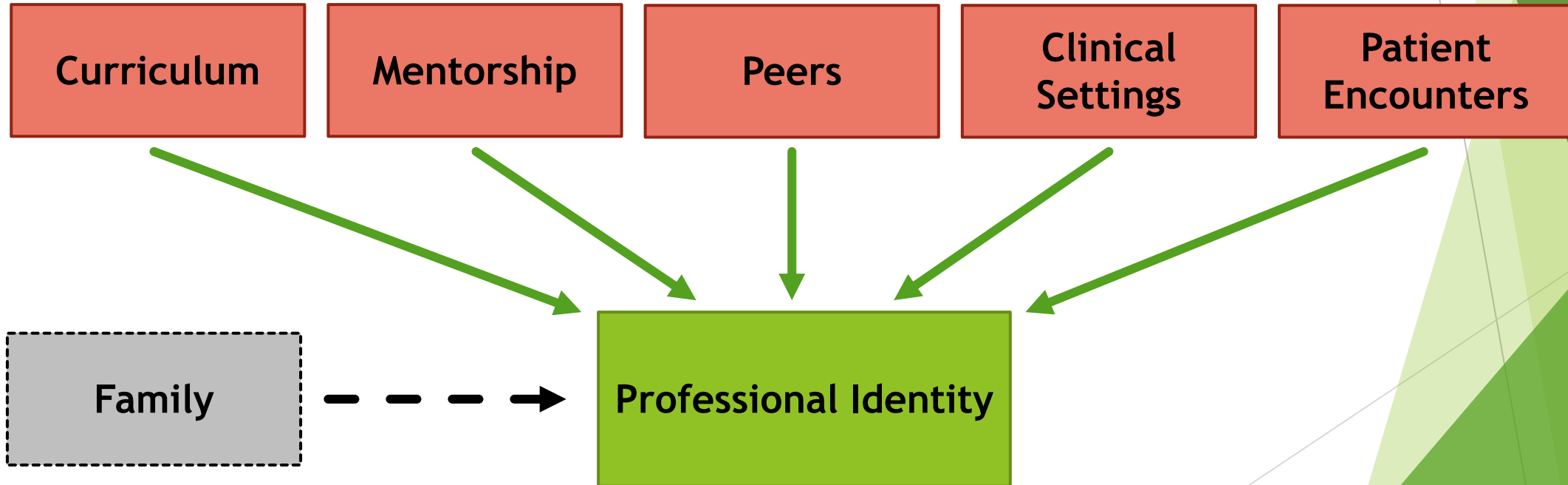
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LCI Project Team

William Agbor-Baiyee PhD	Rosalind Franklin University Chicago Medical School
Louise Arnold PhD	University of Missouri—Kansas City School of Medicine
David Hatem MD	University of Massachusetts School of Medicine
Meg Keeley MD	University of Virginia School of Medicine
Jessica Lewis PhD	Florida International University Wertheim College of Medicine
Brian Mavis PhD	Michigan State University College of Human Medicine
Megan McVancel MA	University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine
Silvia Olivares PhD	Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey
Jennifer Quaintance PhD	University of Missouri—Kansas City School of Medicine
Maya Sardesai MD MEd	University of Washington School of Medicine
Robert Shochet MD	Montefiore Medical Center
Marjorie Wenrich PhD, MPH	University of Washington School of Medicine

Introduction

- Professional Identity formation (PIF) is a major outcome of medical student education



Introduction

- ▶ Family often cited in context of career decisions: e.g., to be a doctor, specialty choice, practice location
- ▶ Family secondary to other primary identities such as gender, ethnicity or social class from which students create professional identities (Monrouxe, 2010)
- ▶ Family and friends counteract threats to identity during medical school (Haidet et al., 2008)

Purpose of this Study

How do medical students
perceive the influence
of their families
on their
professional identity formation?

Methodology

- ▶ IRB Approval through Johns Hopkins Medical School
- ▶ Semi-structured interviews with 40 graduating medical students from four medical schools
- ▶ 45 to 60 minute interviews recorded by a team member from another medical school
- ▶ All interviews were transcribed through automated service and reviewed for accuracy
- ▶ Students' perspectives on factors influencing PIF within a broader study of the effects of learning communities on student PIF

Methodology (continued)

- ▶ Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC © 2007) software used to identify relevant interview passages using keywords
- ▶ Open coding used to develop categories addressing perceived impact of family members and family relationships on medical students' PIF
- ▶ Pairs coded the transcripts independently, compared codes, and resolved differences through discussion

Results: Participants

- ▶ 24 Women (60%); 16 Men (40%)
- ▶ Age: Mean 28.4 yrs (SD= 2.9) Median 28 yrs (25 - 38 yo)
- ▶ Self-Identity:

White	22 (55%)
Asian	11 (28%)
African Am	3 (8%)
Hispanic	2 (5%)
Multiracial	2 (5%)
- ▶ 1st generation college graduates: 2 (5%)
- ▶ 1st generation medical school graduates: 25 (63%)

Results: Frequency of Family References

- ▶ Overall, students made 472 references to family or family-related terms such as father, cousin, wife, etc.
- ▶ Mean=12.9 family references (SD=9.6) Median=12; Range: 0 - 51

References to Family	Students Using Term N (%)	Total Number of Family References (N)
“Family” without details	37 (93%)	177
Family of Origin (father, mom, sister)	38 (95%)	175
Extended Family (aunt, cousin, grandpa)	17 (43%)	42
Family of Procreation (wife, spouse, child)	14 (35%)	78

Results: Family Themes

Theme	Sample Statement
Morals and Values	<i>“My mom would always tell me...you have a special gift, you’re good with people, don’t lose that and I always keep that in the back of my head....Everything that I am today is because of them...they taught me the value of being good to people, the value of how far kindness can go”</i>
Motivation and Inspiration	<i>“I was always one of those people that started pretty early on to think about a medical career. Um, my dad is in medicine and I love science, specifically chemistry and biology, but I knew that I also love people and I felt like talking to my dad who had experienced the research scientist before going to med school. He said, the part I love about medicine is the people aspect”</i>
Balancing Personal and Professional Identity	<i>“Some of my decisions around what I planned to do are practical, that I have a young family. I need to be in a place that I had support”</i>

Results: Family Themes

Theme	Sample Statement
Role Models	<i>“Honestly, I always think about what my mom would do and end up a lot of times doing that. I think about how she would react to things and how she is somebody that I look up to as far as communication skills, how she interacts with others, how when you go to her with a problem, she has like five different solutions and if you do this, then this will happen...”</i>
Questions about Medical Advice	<i>“Within my family I kind of see myself as the decision maker. For example, earlier this year, my mom was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and so like there were things that were more likely to come to me - questions or concerns.... I’m probably the most likely person to do that, rather than my siblings, so kind of the take charge sibling.”</i>
Expectations/Obligations that Create Conflict	<i>“I had to study at Christmas and we didn’t stay home very long because I needed to get back and study. I think it might’ve come off a bit standoffish just because my family has a different set of experiences than I do when it comes to their jobs and stuff.”</i>

Results: Family Themes

Theme	Sample Statement
Ongoing Support	<i>“My fiancé definitely is a strong influence. I've known him for seven years now, so he's known me before I went to medical school and throughout medical school and is the biggest support and has given me space to reflect. And it's nice to have someone who's not in medicine that you're able to come home to and to vent.”</i>
Support During Difficult Times	<i>“How did I get unstuck? It took me a few weeks to get over it and I had to talk to mentors and talk to family and eventually I refocused. Even more intensity on performing well on clerkship and I had definitely increased motivation to do well on step two.”</i>
Health Experiences Relevant to Medical Career	<i>“My grandmother died of pancreatic cancer when I was a freshman in college, while I was taking a chemistry exam actually. And I felt useless... I wanted to do something.”</i>

Discussion

- ▶ Prior research on family roles focused primarily on career decisions
- ▶ Nearly all students referenced their families when reflecting on PIF; most often family of origin
- ▶ Strong evidence of positive impact of family and family members as sources of inspiration, experience, motivation and support
- ▶ However, competing expectations of family and medical school was a source of conflict between students and family members

Discussion

- ▶ These findings underscore the importance of family influences external to medical school that play an enduring role in medical students' PIF
- ▶ Families have both direct effects and indirect effects on PIF
- ▶ Interviews provide rich insights into the multi-faceted and enduring influence of family members on medical students' journeys toward professionalism

Limitations

- ▶ This is part of a larger study of LC and PIF. Interview script not specifically designed to explore this topic; these data represent a subset of interviews from larger study
- ▶ Participants were volunteers: perhaps not representative of many medical school classes; generalizability is unknown
- ▶ Impact of “future families” not considered, although many students explicitly mentioned a future family as part of their career planning

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