FIRST-GENERATION LATINX STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THEIR TRANSITION INTO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Angelica Gil Garcia
B.A. California State University, Fresno 2014
M.A. California State University, Fresno 2017

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Fresno State
Kremen School of Education and Human Development

California State University, Fresno
May 2021
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Abstract

The fastest-growing population of Latinx students across California Community Colleges calls for an analysis on institutional practices to ignite change and improve the overall educational achievements of this student population. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students by employing the conceptual framework of intersectionality as they transition into community college. Using a phenomenological approach and semistructured interviews, the researcher focused on the students’ own descriptions of their experiences to understand the process of their transition into community college and understand how this student population navigates the career decision-making process as a result of their experiences. First-generation Latinx students expressed a mixture of feelings and identified strong sources of support during the initial college planning process. During the transition into college, the first-generation Latinx students expressed financial challenges, the need for more clarity in course sequence and major requirements, and the desire for more experiential learning opportunities to connect with professionals within their career interests. Last, the students confirmed diverse ways in which their intersecting social identities created disadvantages. Understanding the lived experiences of Latinx students is essential in supporting their transition into community college to facilitate student success.
with equity, access, and inclusion. This study provided implications for higher education professionals to help increase student success.
This dissertation was presented
by
Angelica Gil Garcia

It was defended on
April 29, 2021
and approved by:

______________________________
Mariya Yukhymenko, Chair
Curriculum and Instruction

______________________________
Juliet Wahleithner
Literacy, Early, Bilingual, and Special Education

______________________________
Angelica Reynosa
Fresno Pacific University
Completing the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership was a challenging journey. This study would not have been possible without the support of many individuals whom I want to thank. First, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Mariya Yukhymenko, for all her time, support, patience, guidance, and motivation that she provided, but most importantly, for believing in me every step of the way. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Juliet Wahleithner and Dr. Angelica Reynosa, for their time and patience and for their interest in my research. The time invested in my educational accomplishments, from my chair and my committee, is highly valued.

Next, I’d like to thank the participants who volunteered to participate in my study. I appreciate your interest in my research and enjoyed meeting with each and every one of you. The stories shared through the interviews reminded me of why my work as a counselor in higher education is important and increased my appreciation of the diversity that students bring with them.

Additionally, I would also like to thank my wonderful daughter, Samantha. Thank you for your unconditional love, your patience, and overall understanding during busy and overwhelming times for me. I appreciate your curiosity in my work and your words of kindness that kept me motivated, focused, and strong. I hope that my educational accomplishments inspire you to accomplish all of your educational goals. The world is yours!

Last, a big thank you to my family, especially my parents. Gracias Mami y Papi. You are my inspiration to follow my dreams and succeed in my educational accomplishments. Thank you for all of your love and support. I will forever be grateful for all your hard work and sacrifices that both of you experienced in order
to give me better opportunities and a better future. I love you both very much! I also want to thank my undercover therapist, my sister Lorena. Thank you for being my best friend, my encourager, and for providing a shoulder to lean on. Thank you for being an outlet that allowed me to vent and recollect myself to stay focused on the finish line.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, college enrollment has increased nationally. The college enrollment rate between 2000 to 2018 for 18- to 24-year-old students has increased from 35% to 41% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). A breakdown of college enrollment by race and ethnicity between the years 2000 to 2018 shows the largest enrollment increase from the Latinx student population (22% to 36%), compared to other races and ethnicities. While these percentages show a significant increase in college enrollment from Latinx students, the educational attainment of Latinx students does not reflect such success. Degree attainment among students of various races and ethnicity shows large disparities in educational attainment (American Council on Education, 2017). In 2017, the American Council on Education analyzed the U.S. population trends and educational attainment from the U.S. Census Bureau and found that only 8% of Latinx students had obtained their associate’s degree nationally. This is a concern as the Latinx student population has increased significantly throughout higher education institutions, especially within California Community Colleges.

California reflects national trends in college enrollment and degree attainment due to its large Latinx student population, where more than half of the K–12 population are Latinx students (52%; Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Most of these students eventually pursue a degree in a two- or 4-year higher education institution (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). California Community Colleges alone reported 59.5% of Latinx students during the 2019–2020 academic school, which is a large student body (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office [CCCOCO], 2013). Given these large numbers of Latinx students enrolled in California Community Colleges, there is a need to expand our knowledge of the
Latinx students’ background and experiences as they transition into community college to support their career decision-making process and help increase their overall educational attainment.

**Problem Statement**

The disparities in degree attainment within California Community Colleges are not only a concern, but they are a social justice issue as well. The fast-growing population of Latinx students in community colleges calls for an analysis of institutional practices to help improve the overall educational achievements of this student population. Latinx college students are more likely to be first-generation compared to other race or ethnic groups, with 44% of Latinx students being the first in their family to attend college (Santiago et al., 2019). The problem is that there is not much research that focuses on first-generation Latinx student experiences as they transition into the community college system. Mertes (2013) pointed out the importance of the first-year experiences in college and mentioned that the largest number of students who drop out of college usually do within their first year. Therefore, understanding how intersectionality supports or hinders the experiences and career decisions of first-generation Latinx community college students will help higher education leaders become better equipped to support this student population as they transition into college.

The intersectionality of social identities and student experiences is concerned with identifying and addressing ways in which gender, race, social class, first language, and first-in-family status, sexuality, ability, and religion, etc. intersect and impact the participation and outcomes of college students (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Social identities, such as race, class, and gender, shape students’ experiences in higher education (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Since first-generation Latinx students are “more likely to come from low socioeconomic
backgrounds, less likely to be academically prepared for college, be satisfied with their major, and ultimately graduate,” there is a need to implement more culturally responsive pedagogies and increase the awareness of marginalized student experiences (Macias, 2013, p. 18). Additionally, Harlow and Bowman (2016) stated that first-generation Latinx community college students confront career decision-making challenges and would benefit from more career development and guidance due to their family structure and their parents’ level of education. Increasing an overall understanding of the experiences of this student population will help break barriers that impact student success.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transition into the community college system. This study focused on how the realities of race, social class, gender, first-generation status, legal status, and language support or hinder the transition into community college and how first-generation Latinx students navigate the career decision-making process as a result of their experiences. By drawing from the first-generation Latinx students’ own descriptions of their experiences through in-depth interviews, in this study, I explored intersectionality within the student’s experiences and their career decisions. It is imperative to understand the lived experiences of this student population and is essential in supporting their transition into community college to facilitate student success with equity, access, and inclusion. To work toward this purpose, I proposed the following central research question along with two subquestions:

**RQ1.** How do first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences transitioning into community college?
a) How do their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences?
b) How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?

**Overview of Methodology**

To answer my research questions, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study. Bhattacharya (2017) stated that qualitative research aims to discover patterns captured by the population of interest, focuses on human experiences to make meaning out of those experiences, and is informed by constructivism, where knowledge is constructed based on the experiences. A phenomenological research approach allowed me to understand the social and psychological phenomena and focus on the essence of the described experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students. Eddles-Hirsch (2015) and Groenewald (2004) highlighted the value of phenomenological studies in providing the researcher with the ability to capture the humans’ experiences and the ways that they interpret their reality. The epistemological lens of a constructivist informed my approach. Using the constructivist lens, I examined the first-generation Latinx students’ experiences to understand how their experiences reflected intersecting social identities and understand how these experiences drive their career decisions. First-generation Latinx community college students currently enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution within California’s Central Valley were recruited to participate in interviews. A higher education institution that is identified as a Hispanic Serving Institution is a college or university where Hispanic students make up a minimum of 25% of total enrollment (White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative, n.d.). Targeting a community college that is a Hispanic Serving Institution was helpful when recruiting participants for this study.
To gain an understanding of the experience of first-generation Latinx students transitioning into community college, I gathered and transcribed all interviews for analysis and coding. The data analysis employed was Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological data analysis process. Colaizzi’s (1978) data analysis process allowed me to identify significant statements mentioned within the interviews, formulate meaning out of the significant statements, and organize these into themes based on the participants’ experiences. The theoretical frame that was utilized was intersectionality, which provided a lens to increase an overall understanding of first-generation Latinx community college students’ intersecting social identities and highlight their career decisions based on their experiences.

**Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is developed by the researcher to describe existing views of the problem and understand the problem under study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Conceptual frameworks also link concepts and theories to describe how ideas in the study relate and interact with each other (Adom et al., 2018). Figure 1 shows how my conceptual framework along with major concepts related to this study intersect in meaningful ways. As shown in Figure 1, the first-generation Latinx community college students are at the core. Constructs of their identity are shaped by their intersecting social identities that interact with each other and influence their college experiences and career choices. Therefore, intersectionality is shown in the outer layer of the figure.
First-Generation Latinx Community College Students

Community college is the primary starting point for many first-generation Latinx students (Solis & Duran, 2020). In addition, community colleges provide first-generation Latinx students with the opportunity to increase their social mobility by providing access to better opportunities within their selected careers (Martinez et al., 2017; Nora et al., 2018). Furthermore, first-generation Latinx community college students are a unique student population due to their intersecting social identities and diverse experiences. Since a first-generation Latinx community college student is a student who is the first person in their family to attend college, they confront unique challenges as a result of their intersecting social identities, which are reflected throughout the students’ experiences and career choices (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012).
**Student Experiences**

The precollege experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students entail limited knowledge about college and the college preparation process. Consequently, first-generation Latinx students experience a cultural shock and struggle with mixed feelings during the transition into community college (Orbe, 2004). Furthermore, Solis and Duran (2020) stated that Latinx students face additional challenges, which include “a hostile campus climate, a lack of sense of belonging, challenges with academic preparation and college knowledge, affordability, and family obligations” (p. 2). This puts first-generation Latinx students at a disadvantage because they find themselves navigating college and their career journey without parental support, compared to non-first-generation community college students.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality in higher education, specifically among first-generation Latinx community college students, requires more awareness and understanding to increase equity, access, and inclusion (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Understanding diverse student backgrounds and experiences can ultimately increase cultural competence and culturally sensitive practices in higher education. In this study, the students’ intersecting social identities were highlighted. The unique background and experiences of each student perceived their first year in college. Intersectionality stems from Latino critical race theory. Latino critical race theory highlights the importance of,

considering how race and racism affect the experiences of college students of color and is especially conscious of accounting for how additional dimensions of identity that might also be subjected to additional or different forms of discrimination or marginalization in the case of Latinos. (Villalpando, 2004, p. 43)
By drawing from intersectionality, I examined the experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students to understand the challenges that emerge from their intersecting social identities based on their experiences.

**Significance of the Study**

Contributions from this study will help identify specific needs during the first-generation Latinx students’ transition into community college to inform student-centered practices (e.g., outreach, orientations, special programs or supportive services, academic advising, career counseling, and guided pathways). This study will also contribute to research to expand on the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students since not much research exists that focuses on the intersectionality of this student population. Understanding the students’ experiences (e.g., background and challenges) and how social identities marginalize and create disadvantages for this student population is essential because it will provide community college leaders with an understanding of the type of support and resources they can provide to first-generation Latinx students. This study can enable community college leaders and practitioners to leverage the findings to reevaluate recruitment, orientation, advising, career counseling, and special programs when working with first-generation Latinx community college students.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined to facilitate a common understanding since they will be frequently mentioned throughout this study.

**First-generation college student.** Refers to the students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college and obtain a college degree. This means
that neither parent has enrolled nor obtained a degree from any higher education institution (Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012).

**Intersectionality.** Refers to the social identities that create disadvantages and marginalize students of color, including the Latinx student population. These social identities are based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, language, culture, immigration status, or accent that are not just accounts of identity itself but also reflect systems of oppression, power, and other forms of subordination like gender, race, and class discrimination (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Latinx.** Also known as Latino/a. Latinx is a gender-neutral label to refer to Latino/a, Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, etc., and for individuals that identify as having a Latin American ancestry (Salinas & Lozano, 2019).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students in order to understand how their realities of race, social class, gender, first-generation status, legal status, and language drive their experience as they transition into the community college and to understand how they make career decisions based on their experiences. This chapter presented the problem, the purpose, the research questions, an overview of the methodology, conceptual framework, significance of this study, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed description of the theoretical framework that I utilized to increase an overall understanding of the problem. I also present a review of the literature to examine current literature about the experiences and intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students. Additionally, I provide literature on the career development and
career needs of this student population. Chapter 3 provides detailed information about the methodology, researcher’s bias, research participants, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of this study. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the interpretation of the findings, implications, limitations, provide future directions, and end with a conclusion.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will provide background information on the experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology is to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transition into community college. An emphasis will be placed on how first-generation Latinx students’ intersecting social realities support or hinder the transition into community college and how they make career decisions based on their experiences.

This literature review is organized thematically and begins with the theoretical framework utilized for this study. Following the theoretical framework is a review of literature about first-generation Latinx community college students, starting with the historical background that highlights the current status of Latinx students, first-generation Latinx students, and California Community Colleges. Next, I highlight current literature about first-generation community college students as they transition into college and their experience during their first year in college. Last, I point out current challenges, with a focus on career readiness, to emphasize the importance of career development for first-generation community college students. This literature review concludes with a summary and identifies gaps in the literature to highlight the evolving needs of this student population as they transition into community college.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks refer to the theory or theories that are used to explain an event, a phenomenon, or a problem (Imenda, 2014). The purpose of the theoretical framework is to show how the selected theory influences the research under study by providing a lens through which the research problem can be
understood (Adom et al., 2018). This study was conceptualized using intersectionality as the theoretical framework.

**Intersectionality**

**Background**

To understand intersectionality, I provide a brief overview of critical race theory (CRT), which brought to light constructs of intersectionality. Critical race theory began in the 1970s as a legal discourse of civil rights and as a move toward social reform specific for people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Many scholars have utilized critical race theory as a theoretical framework “to analyze the role of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in the lives of People of Color within the field of education” (Pérez Huber, 2008, p. 159). The role of CRT is to examine the lives of people of color and focus on how multiple forms of oppression intersect and manifest within their experiences (Pérez Huber, 2010). Other theories that stem off from CRT are Asian theory, critical tribal theory, feminist critical theory, Latina/o critical race theory, and White critical theory, which are specific to the experiences and marginalization of individuals within those particular populations (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) is important to highlight because it extends from CRT and specifically examines the Latina/o population and their experiences with ethnicity, language, immigration status, and culture (Pérez Huber, 2010). There are five major components that makeup CRT’s education tenets: (a) the centrality of race, racism, and intersectionality; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (Davila, & de Bradley, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009). These central
tenets challenge traditional patterns of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status and offer a transformative response to race, gender, class, and oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Due to the focus of this research study, the centrality of race, racism, and intersectionality will be emphasized because it considers the experiences of individual and the racialized oppression at the intersection of race, class, gender, and other social identities (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Overall, CRT can help improve our understanding of first-generation Latinx student experiences by recognizing issues related to social justice and racial inequality among the Latinx population (Villalpando, 2004). Therefore, in this study, intersectionality will be used to examine ways in which intersecting social identities impact the experiences of first-generation students in the educational system by marginalizing the Latinx community.

**Framework**

A vital component to CRT is intersectionality, which refers to the intersecting social identities unique to the experiences of people of color (e.g., Latinx, African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander) and highlights racism, sexism, and classism as layers of subordination based on constructs of identity (Patton et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005). Intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, a feminist scholar who analyzed the experiences of Black women through her work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). The purpose of Crenshaw’s 1989 work was to address the marginalization of Black women in law, feminist, and antiracist theories and politics (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). Additionally, Crenshaw (1991)
wanted to show how social power and identity politics exclude and marginalize those who are different. For example, women, African Americans, people of color, and gays and lesbians, among those with other marginalized social identities, confront more disadvantages compared to more privileged populations based on the social, cultural, and economic realities that contribute to differential treatment and affect student mobility with higher education opportunities (Thiele et al., 2017). Although intersectionality began as a theoretical lens that focused on race and gender, many scholars have broadened the use of intersectionality to take part in issues that involve constructs of social identities and issues of power and legal and political systems (Carbado et al., 2013). Castro and Cortez (2017) described intersectionality as “a platform to more accurately understand how identities—such as race, gender, class, and sexuality—are not individual accounts of identity so much as they are reflections of larger organizational systems of power and oppression” (p. 80). Furthermore, the intersection of social identities considers identities that contribute to the students’ experiences due to social categories such as race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation, among others, which interact to create systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination (Proctor et al., 2017). These intersecting identities impact the first-generation Latinx community college students’ experiences and opportunities because the students’ intersecting social identities interact with each other and create disadvantages and challenges in higher education (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Means and Pyne (2017) also mentioned that a student’s first-year experience in college, and engagement in student involvement opportunities, are shaped by intersecting systems of oppression.

Crenshaw (1991) highlighted three types of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational, and the implications of each for women of color.
Crenshaw (1991) described structural intersectionality as the location of women of color and their identity at the intersection of race, class, gender, or other that makes their experience different than the more privileged community of individuals. Crenshaw (1991) also described political intersectionality as a dilemma that forces women of color and other marginalized individuals to choose between political alliances with conflicting values on critical issues (e.g., antiracists vs. feminists), making them feel stuck between ideologies that do not align with the complexities of their experiences. Last, representational intersectionality refers to the “ways in which [cultural] images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1283). These types of intersectionality also have implications for first-generation Latinx community college students based on the information this student population receives about the college admissions process, curriculum offerings, resources, college counseling, parents’ level of education and social-economic status, financial aid, and public policies (Patton et al., 2015).

Despite the fact that intersectionality originated in legal discourse, it has been used as an analytical lens to examine structures of power and social inequities among marginalized populations (Cooper, 2017). Cooper (2017) mentioned that intersectionality is not just limited to race and gender itself, but any combination of social identities that produce disadvantages in relation to power and identity. To understand the intersecting social identities, or identity politics, that exist in the axes of power, domination, and oppression, Morgan (1996) provided a diagram (see Figure 2) to show how privilege and domination affect our education system and to increase awareness and equity with respect to our
own identities within the axes. This figure has been used to demonstrate intersecting axes of power, domination, and oppression. Additionally, Crenshaw (1989) employed a metaphor to explain multidimensional discrimination as a result of the interactions of race, gender, and other social identities that intersect.

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

Furthermore, this figure shows how linked social identities are “interconnected to systems of power shaped” and shows how “privilege and oppression can coexist because of the complexities inherent in multiple identities linked to the stratified system of power relations” (Chan et al., 2018, p. 63). This figure also demonstrates how the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students become disadvantaged because it shows how their overlapping social identities create multiple forms of oppression. For example, most of the first-generation Latinx community college students’ intersecting social identities are constructs of oppression or resistance due to their gender, origin, sexuality, social class (working class), ability, physical appearance (brown skin), minority background, financial instability, and English as their second language, putting them at a disadvantage. Crenshaw (1991) stated that increased awareness of intersectionality helps to “better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics” (p. 1299). Since its adoption within higher education research, intersectionality has been driven by viewing higher education as the foundation to actively challenge inequities and serve equitable societies (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Understanding intersecting social identities will
help increase our knowledge of social constructs that support or hinder the overall experiences and career decisions of first-generation community college students.

**Figure 2**

*Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression*

![Diagram of intersecting axes of privilege, domination, and oppression]


**Application to the Study**

Duran and Jones (2019) stated that there is a lack of research that engages intersectionality and also mentioned a need for more research that focuses on identity development integrating intersectionality. Some studies have shown how the intersection of social identities of first-generation Latinx students creates
limitations in the students’ academic and career advancement due to the students’ background, family support, and college and career readiness (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Furthermore, the ethnic and racial minority backgrounds continue to be challenges that make it difficult for first-generation Latinx students to succeed, given the intersection of social realities and their low levels of academic preparation, which determine the educational achievements of Latinx students in higher education (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Soloranzo et al., 2005).

In this study, intersectionality will be used to describe the complex experiences of first-generation Latinx students based on their intersecting social identities. Social identities such as national origin, immigration status, working-class, gender, sexuality, religion, and language make it challenging to understand Latinx student needs since they are the most diverse group among racial ethnicities within the United States (Nunez, 2014). The first-generation Latinx community college students’ micro, meso, and macro levels will be used to examine the identity constructs (personal influences), social context (social norms), and the institutional or structural conditions that support or hinder the students’ experiences (Corlett & Mavin, 2014). Understanding the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students is crucial to advocate for equity, inclusion, and access as they transition into college and increase retention during the student’s first year in college. Even though intersectionality has been most commonly used in legal studies, feminist studies, and sociology, “intersectionality could be employed in higher education to go beyond descriptions of multiple social identity experiences in order to examine institutional and societal power dynamics shaping experiences” (Nunez, 2014, p. 37). Therefore, intersectionality will be used to examine the experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students as they transition into college, with
a focus on their social and personal experiences, challenges, and career decisions. My goal is to understand how intersectionality supports or hinders academic, social, and career aspects of life in higher education among first-generation Latinx community college students.

The theoretical framework was carefully selected to align with the focus and purpose of this study. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) will provide a lens to increase an overall understanding of first-generation Latinx student experiences as they transition into community college and how their intersecting social realities marginalized them while in college. Ways in which external and internal influences impacted the career development and career decisions of first-generation Latinx community college students will also be highlighted. The evolving needs of Latinx students demand more awareness of their experiences during this phase in their lives, where they confront many changes and challenges. Therefore, my goal was to examine how intersectionality shapes the experiences and career decisions of first-generation Latinx community college students as they transition into community college.

**Historical Background**

**Latinx Students**

For many years, individuals with Latin American ancestry utilized Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, Colombian, Argentinian, Peruvian, Dominican Republic, among other race and ethnicities, to self-identify (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). As early as in the 1930s, the term Mexican was the first historically used term to refer to the Latinx population (Cohn, 2010). Years after, in the 1970s, the term Hispanic was first noted after it was adopted by the U.S. government and used by the U.S. Census (Cohn, 2010).
Since then, the term Hispanic has remained a commonly used term to refer to the Latinx population. However, due to its limited representation of countries where Spanish was the primary speaking language, the U.S. government adopted the term Latino, which was then used to provide a choice and included the people from Latin America (Alcoff, 2005). The term Latino refers to individuals who identify as “mestizo” who are individuals that are mixed (Salinas & Lozano, 2019, p. 303). Latinos represent people from Central and South America and also include languages that are not Spanish, such as languages from Belize, Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). It was not until 2004 when the queer community used the term Latinx to provide gender inclusiveness when referring to the Latina/o population (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Many years later, Salinas and Lozano (2019) stated that in 2016, the term Latinx flourished with the rise of social media and has slowly gained popularity throughout educational institutions; however, it has yet to be utilized by the U.S. Census.

In efforts to trace the usage of the term Latinx throughout community colleges, Salinas et al. (2020) found that there is currently an increase in the use of the term Latinx throughout community college scholarly journals. However, they found that few dissertations focus on Latinx students in community colleges and found the term Latinx to be “fairly limited” throughout many community colleges (Salinas et al., 2020, p.16). As this student population continues to increase, cultural acknowledgment, diversity, and an overall understanding of the Latinx students’ background and experiences are important to provide more inclusivity embedded throughout community colleges. This is especially important since, in 2019, the U.S. Census found that the Latinx population makes up 18% of the U.S. population, making Latinx the largest minority group in the country (United States
Census Bureau, 2019). Yet, Latinx student populations continue to face many challenges as they transition into community college.

First-Generation College Students

The Latinx student population has made significant progress in college enrollment, retention, persistence, and degree attainment; however, more actions in implementing practices are necessary to change the discourse of disparities in the overall educational attainment of Latinx students (Santiago et al., 2019). Latinx college students are more likely to be first-generation compared to other race or ethnic groups, with 44% of Latinx students being the first in their family to attend college (Santiago et al., 2019). In addition, a large number of first-generation Latinx students make up the majority of the students enrolled in two-year public institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Furthermore, in a report written by Engle and Tinto (2008) at The Pell Institute, they found that first-generation Latinx students were more likely to drop out of college after their first year or transfer into a 4-year institution after six years compared to at least 50% of their more advantaged non-first-generation peers.

Nonetheless, first-generation college students typically come from low-income backgrounds and need to maintain a full-time workload while attending community college (Harlow & Bowman, 2016). To be a first-generation college student means that students cannot count on guidance and knowledge from their parents because their parents did not attend college themselves and lack college and career readiness knowledge. This puts first-generation Latinx students at a disadvantage because they are forced to navigate college and their careers without parental guidance. Taking into account race, social class, gender, and sexuality, first-generation Latinx community college students confront many challenges due
to the combination of social identities that marginalize this population, being that they are underprepared academically and psychologically (Inman & Mayes, 1999).

**California Community Colleges**

In 2017, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) found that 3.5 million Latinx students, nationally, were enrolled in higher education, with 46% being Latinx students attending two-year institutions (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2019). California Community Colleges (CCC) are the largest two-year higher education systems with 116 colleges throughout California, serving 2.1 million students annually (California Community Colleges, 2020a). California Community Colleges offer associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates and are the bridging pathway for students who aspire to transfer into a 4-year higher education institution to obtain a bachelor’s degree. In addition, CCCs support students who seek to obtain additional training or certification in Career Technical Education (Martinez et al., 2017). Many first-generation Latinx community college students who begin their journey in higher education begin at a community college, making them the highest race or ethnicity compared to other racial groups to attend community college (Cataldi et al., 2011).

Furthermore, in 2017, 44.5% of students enrolled in CCCs were Latinx students (California Community Colleges, 2020c). Given the high percentages of Latinx students enrolled in community college, it is in the best interest of the community colleges to have successful and thriving graduates and meet the needs of our global economy, our current economy, and for the health of our future economy, as a result of its graduates. It is crucial to train skilled graduates, by understanding their talents and abilities, to embrace their strengths within their selected careers and increase their overall success (McConnell, 2000). Given the background and experiences of first-generation Latinx students, Martinez et al.
(2017) highlighted the need for higher education professionals to examine the experiences of Latinx students within community colleges in response to institutionalized barriers, particularly associated with educational inequities. In this study, I will focus on the experiences of first-generation Latinx college students as they transition into the community college system. Special attention on how the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students will be explored to understand the role of intersectionality within the transition into community college and career decision-making process.

**First-Generation Latinx Community College Students**

Most first-generation community college students are from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds; however, the Latinx student population makes up the majority of the first-generation community college student body (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Nomi, 2005). Important characteristics of first-generation Latinx students to consider when they transition into community college and when evaluating student services are their cultural background, social-economic status, and college and career preparation. Most studies (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Scanlan, 2019) have mentioned how these characteristics impact the transition into college and their overall college experience during their first year; however, not much emphasis has been placed on how the intersecting social identities support or hinder their experience as they transition into college. Therefore, gaining a better understanding of experiences among first-generation Latinx students is important.
The Transition into College

Since most first-generation Latinx students come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Tello & Lonn, 2017; Torres, 2004), they attend high schools located in low poverty areas, where the priority may not be to provide college and career readiness curriculum due to fewer resources available, and instead, place a larger focus on students meeting high school graduation requirements (Clayton et al., 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Being that first-generation Latinx community college students are less academically prepared and have fewer financial resources, enrolling in a community college becomes the most affordable option that guarantees college admission (Clayton et al., 2019). Once they transition into community college, after graduating high school, many first-generation Latinx students work long shifts and balance a loaded schedule (Cunningham et al., 2012; Inman & Mayes, 1999). As a result of the lack of college readiness, first-generation Latinx students register for remedial courses, which creates delays in their graduation goals, increasing the dropout rates (Nomi, 2005). Many first-generation Latinx students live at home with their parents, attend college part-time due to work demands, and have other family obligations (Nomi, 2005). In a study conducted by Covarrubias et al. (2019) involving first-generation college students, the students indicated that they were forced to gain independence by advocating for themselves, pursuing individual interests, becoming more resilient and self-reliant, and breaking away from family traditions. Given these challenges, Inman and Mayes (1999) found that first-generation Latinx community college students also face culture shock during their transition into college due to a multitude of changes, lack of knowledge, and college preparation.
First-Year College Experience

First-generation Latinx students struggle to adjust to the college environment and continuously renegotiate their social supports as well as their cultural expectations (Mahan, 2010). Difficulty adjusting to college and lack of familiarity with the college student life, resources, and opportunities become social and emotional barriers that first-generation Latinx students confront (Garcia, 2017). In addition, first-generation Latinx students struggle with a lack of sense of belonging, have low self-esteem, feel less confident about succeeding in college, and are less involved in campus activities (Strayhorn, 2018; Tate et al., 2015; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Furthermore, feeling less socially accepted was considered a major social barrier that challenges this student population during their first year in college, and for some, throughout their whole college experience (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Much of this is due to their limited social support networks during their first year in college (Olson, 2014). Since an increase in social support is linked to an increase of sense of belonging, Dueñas and Gloria (2020) stated that student involvement, family engagement, and the college’s culture are pertinent to increase first-generation Latinx student success.

First-Generation Latinx Community College

Student Challenges

There are many ways in which first-generation Latinx community college students are challenged as they transition into community college. Among the many challenges that this student population faces, some of the most common are lack of family support, financial instability, and lack of college readiness (Covarrubias et al., 2019). In addition, although first-generation Latinx students are exposed to many student involvement opportunities and career options in college, they are unfamiliar with the processes and benefits due to their limited
knowledge, family guidance, and overall college preparation (Olson, 2014). This makes the transition into community college challenging for first-generation Latinx community college students. They confront unique barriers that require additional guidance and support.

**Lack of Family Guidance**

As first-generation Latinx students navigate through their first year in college, they confronted family obligations that interfered with their college experience (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Family responsibilities and cultural expectations are common barriers that first-generation Latinx students confront during the transition into college (Mahan, 2010; Nomi, 2005). Covarrubias et al. (2019) stated that first-generation college students provide their parents with “emotional support and advocacy, language brokering, financial support, physical care, life advice, and heavy sibling caretaking” while in college (Covarrubias et al., 2019, p. 382). In addition, first-generation Latinx community college students have less influence and guidance from their parents than those whose parents have a college degree (Nomi, 2005). Further, Olson (2014) identified educational and family membership mobility as some challenges that continue to persist among first-generation Latinx community college students as a result of college education, social class, and family dynamics. Acknowledging the value of family dynamics and support, Sáenz et al. (2018) found that many first-generation Latinx community college students’ success relied on the family’s role in their educational pathway. In their study, the results revealed that the family outweighed many social and academic challenges and motivated students to persist and succeed at higher levels (Sáenz et al., 2018).

Despite the lack of family support toward the first-generation Latinx student’s education, Calzada et al. (2013) found that family is a sociological
construct that is crucial to all Latinx families, where priority is given to the overall needs and welfare of the family to maintain loyalty, reciprocity, and interconnectedness. Nonetheless, Mahan (2010) and Cortez et al. (2014) found that the first-generation student’s mother is perceived as a positive and important factor toward persistence in their education due to the moral and emotional support in the student’s educational journey. The central focus on family is crucial as studies have found that due to financial instabilities, first-generation Latinx students are interdependent on family support, especially during the transition into college, as they experience unsettled feelings and are overwhelmed with financial obligations (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

**Financial Instability**

Since the average Latinx household income is $54,923, a Latinx student’s expected family contribution for college is significantly lower compared to most racial or ethnic groups (Excelencia in Education, n.d.). Most first-generation Latinx college students depend on federal aid, which includes federal grants, student loans, and work-study. Constrained by financial obligations, first-generation Latinx community college students not only rely on financial aid as a major source of financial support but also are more likely to be employed to help pay for other college expenses (Cunningham et al., 2012; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Nomi, 2005). Perez and McDonough (2008) found that the Latinx student’s identity and experiences (e.g., background, social-economic status, and challenges) might misguide first-generation Latinx community college students toward setting unrealistic career goals. Due to their financial instabilities, this student population typically aspires to obtain a career where they will make a lot of money, influencing their major and career choice (Nomi, 2005). As a result, first-generation Latinx students jeopardize the opportunity to select a major and
careers that truly align with their interests, values, and passion. Instead, they are misguided by their experiences in hopes of a better future.

**Lack of College Readiness**

College readiness refers to the skills, knowledge, and “level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed … at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2007, p. 5). Given the lack of college readiness and the inability to score high in college entrance exams, much research has shown how first-generation Latinx students tend to enroll in a two-year community college (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Clayton et al., 2019; D’Amico et al., 2019; Kurlaender et al., 2018). In a national study on community college education that focused on college readiness, Byrd and MacDonald (2005) found that 41% of first-generation students entering college were underprepared in basics skills, such as writing, reading, and math, leading to placing students in remedial courses. Although studies have not identified specific reasons for lack of college readiness among first-generation Latinx students, some studies believed that lack of opportunities to participate in college preparation, such as advanced placement (AP) courses or college or career readiness, begins during high school, creating equity issues for underrepresented, nontraditional, and high-risk students (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Cárdenas Elliot, 2014; Mendez, 2020; Peck, 2017). Poor college preparation is demonstrated when first-generation Latinx students try to maintain the same study habits that they had while in high school, even though their college courses are more challenging and demanding (Mendez, 2020). In addition, while miscommunication and lack of college preparation hinder the Latinx student’s retention and persistence during their first year in college, loss of interest in the student’s selected major and challenges in meeting program requirements are also largely affected (Gist-Mackey et al., 2018; Stebleton & Soria, 2013). For these
reasons, the role of high school and college counselors is crucial during the transition into college to increase persistence, retention, and overall college and career readiness among this student population (Tello & Lonn, 2017).

It is important to note that although not all first-generation Latinx community college students experience these challenges, these challenges are true for the majority of first-generation Latinx community college students, especially as they navigate the transition into community college (Tate et al., 2015). Financial instability, lack of family guidance, and college readiness are crucial aspects among first-generation Latinx community college students who require special consideration as they transition into college. These challenges increase the marginalization of this student population based on their intersecting social realities. Given that their background shows limited familial influence, support, and exposure to careers (Olson, 2014), and since the ultimate goal of attending college is to prepare for and obtain a career that aligns with their interest and lifelong goals, providing career preparation for first-generation Latinx community college students is crucial.

**First-Generation Latinx Community College Students’ Career Readiness**

Much research has been conducted in 4-year institutions to show how career preparation and career maturity impacts student experiences in higher education. However, little research has been conducted that focuses on first-generation Latinx community college students’ career development. Lack of college and career preparation among first-generation Latinx students is relatively common. Harlow and Bowman (2016) found that first-generation Latinx community college students struggle with a lack of academic preparation, social support, career development, career information and skills, and confront career
decision-making challenges, making it more likely for them to drop out of college. It is crucial for student affairs professionals, especially career services professionals, to understand the student’s background and have a clear foundation of the career development influences of this student population in order to increase retention and overall student success.

**Career Development Influences**

First-generation Latinx community college students struggle to select a major because they have limited knowledge about the process to choose a major, as well as limited guidance from their parents that can influence them toward choosing a major they feel passionate about (Olson, 2014). Olson (2014) stated that first-generation college students “may struggle to choose a major—perhaps because their parents are unable to offer knowledgeable guidance about the process and the ramifications of this decision” (p. 201). Historically, first-generation Latinx students lack appropriate role models and sources of support due to their experiences, family structures, and social and cultural capital, which impact their career development process (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Tate et al., 2015). Due to family structures and being the first in their immediate family to attend college, Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) found that race and gender might also limit exposure to various careers and influence how students view career achievement related to a particular interest.

However, in a study conducted by Tate et al. (2015), findings revealed that family influences for first-generation college students were a dominant factor in their career development process. The first-generation college students mentioned that much of the influence from their parents was through their desired to see them choose a major or career that would provide a better lifestyle than the one they had (Tate et al., 2015). Furthermore, in a survey conducted by the American
Association of Community Colleges, Nomi (2005) found that 87% of first-generation Latinx community college students felt that having a steady and secure job and making a lot of money were very important, which was significantly higher compared to their more privileged counterparts. Due to the experiences and lack of career readiness, some first-generation Latinx community college students set unrealistic career goals and focus on careers that have larger salaries (e.g., engineering, nursing, business, law school), leaving out the most important key aspects of the career development process (Tate et al., 2015).

**Career Development Needs**

Lent et al. (2002) highlighted the value of external, contextual (family), internal, and psychological influences (self-efficacy) that have a significant impact on career interests, career choices, and satisfaction. Therefore, providing the first-generation Latinx community college students with career support and guidance during their first year in college will help increase career confidence and career clarity, especially when guiding students as they identify their skills, interest, academic, and career goals (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Additionally, Tate et al. (2015) found that first-generation college students lack career or professional networks, which have been identified as important aspects of the career development process. Parks-Yancy (2012) found that the lack of professional and social networks increases students’ career development challenges. First-generation Latinx students represent a unique group with distinct experiences, motivations, and values. Therefore, this student population requires a career resources center that can provide immediate access to majors and careers to help increase their knowledge, self-efficacy, and sense of inquiry concerning the major and career selection process (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). Last, to increase the college
social and cultural capital, more outreach efforts from higher education professionals are necessary.

Given the limited research on first-generation Latinx community college students, the need to expand on research that focuses on ways that intersectionality supports or hinders the first-generation Latinx community college student experience, college readiness, career decisions, and oval success is reflective based on their current success. As the Latinx student population continues to grow within higher education institutions, “it is becoming more critical for higher education researchers to attend to variations among Latinos according to multiple social identity categories with respect to college access and success and how different social contexts shape access and success” (Nunez, 2014, p. 34). More attention toward the first-generation Latinx community college student’s needs will help increase their overall success.

**Chapter Summary**

Currently, no research focuses on understanding how the intersecting realities of first-generation Latinx community college students support or hinder their experiences and career decisions as they transition into community college. As the number of Latinx students continues to grow in higher education, there is a need to explore the diverse backgrounds and experiences among marginalized groups, such as the first-generation Latinx community college students. In efforts to build on the limited empirical studies, the purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transition into community college. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this qualitative phenomenology.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To increase equity, access, and inclusion, understanding the experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transition into community college is central to the delivery of culturally responsive student support services. In addition, by examining the stated experiences of this student population, higher education professionals will be able to gain an overall understanding of how intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students support or hinder their experiences and career decisions. With increased awareness about intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx community college students, the findings can be utilized to inform and expand on the increasing needs of this fast-growing student population. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students, specifically during the transition into community college, to understand how they make their career decisions. To address the purpose, the following research questions framing this qualitative phenomenology are as follows:

RQ1. How do first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences transitioning into community college?
   a) How do their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences?
   b) How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?

Role of the Researcher

A brief overview of my background, experiences, social identities, and my role that reflects my positionality, interest, and commitment in this research is shared. My general interest as an academic writer has always led me toward writing, advocating, and increasing awareness of the disadvantages that first-
generation Latinx college students confront. Since there are many reasons why students struggle academically, I believe that continued support, advocacy, and access should continue to be reevaluated in order to meet the needs of all students, especially marginalized students that confront more challenges. My intersecting social identities as a migrant, English learner, low-income, first-generation, and Latina student afforded me diverse experiences that primarily hindered my opportunities with access, student involvement, and career decisions. In addition, these experiences have shaped my leadership style and overall academic trajectory. Throughout my educational journey as a student, I have always struggled with fitting in and feeling like I belong. I had limited access to resources due to my low-social-economic status and would shy away from student involvement opportunities. As a student, once in college, I quickly learned that I was different compared to my more advantaged peers due to my first-generation status, social class, and English being my second language. My background, identity, social class, gender, and experiences always reminded me that I had to work twice as hard to achieve my educational goals.

As a first-generation Latina student, navigating through college was difficult. I was forced to figure things out and explore college on my own. From the moment I went along with the college process of responding to emails and meeting admission requirements to the moment I attended the new student orientation at my college, I was scared. I was scared because there were a lot of emails sent out, deadlines to meet, and documents to submit. I had no idea what an orientation even was. In addition, I had little knowledge of the differences between a major and a career, I remember changing my major four times, and I was clueless about all the amazing resources and opportunities for student involvement on campus. I confronted many obstacles that challenged my self-efficacy as a
student and continuously struggled with balance as a result of having two part-time jobs in college and being a full-time student. However, I was fortunate to have had support and guidance from mentors who truly believed in me, whom I saw as my guardian angels. After selecting my major in liberal studies and deciding that my career would be as a teacher, I joined California Mini-Corp at my institution, which provided me with professional development opportunities, hands-on work experiences, and expanded my social capital. It also was the place where I received the most support and guidance throughout my undergraduate and graduate trajectory. Although I eventually changed my major a few times and did not pursue a career as a teacher, I became a counselor in higher education and owe it all to the hands-on work experiences I obtained through the Mini-Corp program because it helped me identify my passion in counseling.

As a Latina in leadership, my goal as a writer is to inform practice by increasing awareness about the current trends that impact marginalized student populations in their academic, personal, and career development. Given the growing population of Latinx students enrolled in California’s community colleges, I believe that my identity as a first-generation Latinx student will be powerful, influential, and a perfect example of resistance and resilience. I stress the need to support marginalized student populations through their educational journey, so they have the same opportunities to excel in their education, especially as they transition into college.

As a scholar and a practitioner, I believe that embracing all student identities, cultural backgrounds, and traditions is important because it will allow students to become more confident, feel welcomed, and increase feelings of belonging within their educational environment. There is a need to shift our way of teaching, advising, and counseling minority student populations.
My focus on qualitative methodology is intentional because this approach allows me as the researcher to increase more knowledge and awareness of first-generation Latinx student experiences, backgrounds, feelings, and perspectives on their needs, resources, and the support they demand within the education system. My goal is to create an environment where all student identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, ability, national origin, and more are embraced to create an equitable and inclusive social justice-learning environment.

**Research Design and Rationale**

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore and understand the essence of the phenomena. In order to understand why this research design was selected, a brief description of the research design is provided to show and explain how this approach helped me achieve the purpose for this study. Defining features of qualitative phenomenological studies are highlighted below.

**Qualitative Approach**

The term *qualitative* refers to “a number of approaches that share some common characteristics, with somewhat different philosophical and theoretical emphasis” (McMillan, 2016, p. 304). The goal of qualitative research is to work within the context of human experiences, and it seeks to understand the ways in which meaning is made out of those experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). A qualitative research design generally tends to explore and understand human behavior (Christensen et al., 2014). Qualitative research design is widely used to answer research questions that discover (a) the who, which refers to the culture, community, or group of individuals, (b) the what, which refers to the phenomena or experiences, and (c) the where, which is based on events or experiences that
help make meaning and gain insights from participants’ perspectives regarding a poorly understood phenomenon (Kim et al., 2017). In addition, Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research should be used when there is an issue that needs to be explored, when the goal is to empower others to share their story, or when the research seeks to develop a theory to understand the complexity of the problem. This approach allowed me to interact directly with the participants to explore their experiences as they transitioned into community college, while also allowing me to examine deeply and understand their experiences and perspectives as a whole.

**Phenomenological Approach**

A phenomenological approach traditionally provides a constructivist lens in qualitative work (Bhattacharya, 2017). It is concerned with understanding the social and psychological phenomena from the participants’ perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, this approach allows the participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and values collectively and allows researchers to identify common themes within the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; McMillan, 2016). A key characteristic of this phenomenology is its transcendental philosophical approach, also known as descriptive phenomenology (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is considered the founding father of transcendental phenomenology, forming the foundation of all phenomenology, as he perceived that a phenomenon of lived experiences captures “the way a person experienced the world and their interpretation of reality (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015, p. 252).

By taking this descriptive phenomenological approach, I was able to describe emergent themes of the participants by prioritizing the subjectivity of their experiences and how their experiences are defined (Englander, 2012). Some key features of a phenomenological study are the following: the emphasis on the
examined phenomena; the focus on individuals who experienced the phenomena; the use of bracketing, or reflexivity, from the researcher; the use of interviews as a primary way to collect data; the use of coding and categorizing smaller and major themes; and last, it provides a discussion that highlights the nature of the participant experiences (Creswell, 2013). Through this approach, I examined the direct descriptions and perceptions of the first-generation Latinx community college student experiences utilizing interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Overall, this phenomenology allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the first-generation Latinx community college students’ experiences and provided me with detailed descriptions of their experiences within the real-life context in which it occurred (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

**Researcher Assumptions**

Underlying assumptions in qualitative research typically include that reality is subjective and has multiple perspectives based on the participants in the study (Simon, 2011). Assumptions can also affect a study and are out of the researcher’s control; therefore, it is important for the researcher to state and explain their assumptions in the study. The main assumption in this study was that the participants selected for interviews would answer truthfully. To understand the phenomena based on the participants’ perspectives and not based on my perspectives as the researcher, I used bridling to reduce potential biases that can interfere with this study. Since my biases and interest in this research are due to my background, challenges, and experiences as a first-generation Latinx college student, the interviews will allow me to learn about the phenomena by focusing on the participants’ experiences. Highlighting this underlying assumption will help me as the researcher acknowledge my biases and set aside my biases to make meaning of the findings objectively.
Researcher Bias

Phenomenological research requires the researcher to use bracketing to set aside preconceived beliefs to gain a clear view of the phenomenon, which allows the researcher to focus on the participants’ perspectives (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Furthermore, bracketing requires the researcher’s perspectives and assumptions to be set aside and requires the researcher’s own experiences to be set aside to participate in the value of the reflections shared by participants (Groenewald, 2004). It is important to acknowledge one’s own biases, experiences, assumptions, and perspectives as a researcher; however, it is pertinent to note that we cannot fully remove ourselves from our experiences because they will always influence us to a certain extent (Ellett, 2011). Rather than bracketing one’s perspectives or experiences and putting them aside, Dahlberg (2006) introduced bridling. Like bracketing, bridling is a reflexive technique that allows the researcher to examine their involvement with the phenomena by continuously reflecting on how meanings come to be (Vagle, 2009). Bridling requires the researcher to restrain from preconceived beliefs (e.g., personal beliefs, theories, or other assumptions) that can potentially mislead our understanding of the meaning to understand the phenomena (Ellett, 2011). To restrain myself from my preconceived beliefs, bridling allowed me to focus on the participants’ experiences as well as provided me with the opportunity to relate to their experiences through the use of a reflexive journal, where I reflected on my thoughts, reactions, and connections after interacting with the participants. This process (reflexivity) served as a reminder that although the participants’ situations may be similar to mine, their experiences also differ.
Research Site

The research site selected for this study is one of the first California Community Colleges located within the Central Valley. California’s Central Valley is predominately known for its large-scale agriculture, with an average population of 8.5 million, and is projected to increase to 11.5 million in 2040 (PBS News Hour, 2010; Public Policy Institute of California, 2006). In addition, due to its cheap housing and rich and extensive agriculture and farmlands, the Central Valley produces 8% of the nation’s agriculture (PBS News Hour, 2010). The extensive agriculture attracts many Latinx families along with other races and ethnicities, increasing the number of Latinx residents (Meierotto et al., 2020). However, according to the Center for Continuing Study for the California Economy (2019), the Central Valley continues to have high unemployment and poverty rates. Another distinguishing characteristic about the Central Valley is that within its ethnically diverse population, the Latinx population is the largest group and has lower education levels compared to the rest of the state (Public Policy Institute of California, 2006). My interest in this community college is due to its classification as a Hispanic Serving Institute and its 59.5% of Latinx students enrolled during the 2019–2020 academic school year (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2013). Since the first-generation Latinx community college student population was my targeted participants of interest, the community college selected helped me achieve this study’s purpose due to the large Latinx student population.

Research Participants

The participants for this study were selected by using purposeful sampling. Palinkas et al. (2015) stated that purposeful sampling is a widely used technique in qualitative studies that identifies and selects its participants to meet the criteria of
the phenomena under study based on their knowledge or experiences. The purposeful criteria of this study focused on participants that were first-generation Latinx community college students. To meet my goal, I also utilized snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is defined by Noy (2008) as a sampling procedure where the researcher “accesses informants through the contact information that is provided by other informants,” also referred to as the “word of mouth” method (p. 330). These sampling techniques helped me reach my goal of identifying participants for my study. To maintain confidentiality, I asked each participant to provide three recommendations of peers or classmates who were eligible as potential participants for this study. One participant out of the three recommendations was selected to participate in the study. Since this study focused on the lived experiences of first-generation community college students as they transition into college, the participants were selected through their response and interest expressed from a recruitment email (see Appendix A). I sent out a recruitment email to first-generation Latinx community college students from the community college listserv. All participants were 18 years or older.

A total of 11 student participants were interviewed from one community college located in California’s Central Valley to answer the research questions for this study. All participants were recruited through email solicitation and snowball sampling. Emails were sent to first-generation Latinx students within the selected community college. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Zoom, a virtual communication platform. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ identity and maintain confidentiality. There were a total of seven female students and four male students who participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 18-years-old, being the youngest, to 26-years-old, being the oldest. All participants self-identified as first-generation Latinx students. Each
participant was asked to provide their age, sex, major, and career goal for further context (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Participants’ Demographics of First-Generation Latinx Community College Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Highest Level of Parents’ Education</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Career Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Araceli</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Teacher/Translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Patricia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>K–12 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jessica</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Criminology</td>
<td>Juvenile Probation Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Angela</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Public Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alisson</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>High School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Marisol</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Pre-Allied Health</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Melissa</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Pre-Allied Health</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Jason</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>Social Worker: Foster Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Alberto</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Chicanos Studies</td>
<td>College Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Marcos</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. David</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Methods**

A basic method of gathering qualitative data in phenomenological studies is through interviewing participants. Fontana and Frey (2008) highlighted the purpose of interviewing participants in qualitative work and stated that interviewing provides “rich, in-depth experiential accounts of an event or episode” of the participants in a research study (p. 120). In addition, gathering data utilizing interviews that ask open-ended questions is consistent with key features of phenomenological research, which engages the participants, allows their voice to
be heard, and makes meaning through patterns (Moustakas, 1994). Since the purpose is to gather as much information about the participants’ experiences and career decisions as they transition into community college, my role as the researcher is to be true to the data collected based on the interviews with the participants.

For this study, I utilized semistructured interviews and began with broad, open-ended questions, following up with more specific subquestions, which were guided based on the participant’s responses. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) focused on questions that were developed to capture the participant’s background, experience during the transition into college, challenges, and career choices. Interviews with participants were conducted on a continuum until saturation was met and there was no further need to recruit participants.

All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Zoom is a virtual communication platform utilized for meetings, webinars, distance education, and much more. A passcode was provided to participants for access to the Zoom interview to ensure confidentiality during the Zoom interview. Prior to the start of the interview, I ensured that the participant was in an area where they felt comfortable to minimize distractions. A total of two interviews were held at different times with each participant. The first interview ranged between 35–60 minutes. After the first interview, a second interview was scheduled with the participant within a week, which ranged between 30–45 minutes. The second interview allowed me to use the participant for member checking to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, gain deeper insights into the participant’s experiences, ask for clarification, and ask further questions that arose from the previous interview. During the second interview, significant statements and themes from the first transcribed interview were shared with the participants. All
of the data collected from the participants were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) that included approved permission for recording. Information about the study and the rights of the participants were also included within the informed consent form to ensure that the participants were fully informed about the study’s purpose and the interview process. Three participants were able to sign the verbal consent electronically. Verbal consent was obtained from eight participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

Confidentiality of the research participants was maintained throughout the study. A consent form was provided to all participants to ensure that they understood the purpose, risks or benefits, and their participation in the study. The participant’s identity was protected by utilizing pseudonyms. I utilized the second interview as a member check with the participants to ensure that I stayed true to the data, based on their stated experiences during the transition into community college. Trustworthiness and credibility were maintained throughout this study by using participants for member checking for the data analysis process and by using bridling where a reflexive journal was used after each interview for the data collection process. Ethical standards were followed when conducting the interviews, which involved human participants. An institutional review board approval (IRB) was submitted to ensure that participants are not harmed or considered at risk of physical, emotional, or psychological harm.

**Data Analysis**

After the interviews with each participant, the recordings were transcribed for analysis. Each interview transcript was reviewed in detail to check for errors
and to ensure accuracy. Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological data analysis process was employed to analyze the interview transcripts in this study. Colaizzi’s phenomenological data analysis was developed to analyze qualitative, descriptive phenomenological studies (Morrow et al., 2015). Colaizzi’s (1978) data analysis process is consistent with descriptive phenomenology because it focuses on the human experiences and the way in which they experienced the phenomena. Using Colaizzi’s 7-step phenomenological data analysis process, I, first, read the interview transcripts several times; second, I identified and highlighted significant statements, referred to as horizontalization of data; third, I rephrased the significant statements into formulated meanings, based on identified meanings that were relevant to the phenomena; fourth, I organized the meanings into themes, known as meaning units; fifth, I categorized the themes and subthemes based on the phenomena; and finally, the findings were shared with the participants for member checking to ensure that I captured the participants’ experiences and how they experienced the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016). All data were manually analyzed, which provided me with the opportunity to fully immerse myself in the data and stay close to the data. During the data analysis, I adhered to the value and importance of bridling as a reflexive notion rather than suspending my assumptions so that they do not compromise the phenomena. For this, I maintained a reflexive journal and utilized it after each interview throughout the data collection process, which allowed me to reflect on my thoughts, reactions, and connections that I had with the data. My reflexive journal contributed to the final discussion by helping me acknowledge my biases and acknowledge the differences and similarities between the participants’ experiences and mine.
**Trustworthiness**

Since qualitative data does not utilize a particular technique to confirm validity or reliability, trustworthiness and credibility are commonly used to demonstrate validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Therefore, to ensure that trustworthiness was maintained in my study, I shared the generated significant statements and themes with the research participants through a member check. To ensure that I did not compromise the integrity of my data collected from the participant’s interviews, I utilized my reflexive journal to bridle my preconceived assumptions and experiences after each interview. Allowing the participants to review the themes that I generated from the interview transcript allowed the participants to authenticate the genuineness, openness, and thoughtful descriptions and themes generated from the data that reflected their experiences.

**Rigor in Qualitative Research**

The purpose of qualitative research is to “work within the context of human experiences and the way meaning is made out of those experiences” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 6). To demonstrate excellence in qualitative research, Tracy (2010) highlighted specific criteria, stating that qualitative research must be a worthy topic; be rigorous, sincere, credible, and resonate with the reader; significantly contribute to research; and achieve meaningful connections based on the purpose of the study. To meet these criteria and to truly understand the experiences of first-generation Latinx students, I plan to engage in the rigorous process of this qualitative study which involves ongoing data collection and interactions with participants, in-depth analysis of interviews and coding, and reflection on theoretical constructs to expand on current research and contribute to practice (LaDonna et al., 2018). Given the rigor, there are anticipated limitations in this study that are out of the researcher’s control.
Limitations

There are some limitations to this study that were carefully considered while planning the research design and interview protocol. Potential limitations to consider were our global pandemic due to COVID-19, transferability of results, and the role of the researcher. Currently, all educational instruction has merged into online instruction as a result of COVID-19. This change in the delivery of instruction has impacted many students in diverse ways, which interferes with face-to-face communication and willingness to take an interest in a virtual interview, which may add to virtual exhaustion. Also, the transferability of my results may cause some limitations due to my role as the researcher, as well as reported similarities between the potential participants and me. These similarities may make it difficult for me, as the researcher, to fully disconnect myself from the participant’s experiences. It is possible for the participants to feel more comfortable knowing that I am also a first-generation Latinx student. However, this may influence biased responses from the potential participants.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the role of the researcher, research design and rationale, researcher assumptions, researcher bias, research site, participants, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis, trustworthiness, rigor, and limitations. A qualitative phenomenology was selected to understand the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students as they transition into college. The focus on the participants’ experiences is important to understand their experiences, perspectives, and the role that intersectionality plays within their experiences. Overall, this research approach helped me understand how intersectionality supports or hinders the participant’s experiences and
influences on their career decisions. In Chapter 4, I provide the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transition into community college. The central research question that guided this study was the following: How do first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences transitioning into community college? Two subquestions related to this guiding question were the following: (a) How do their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences? and (b) How do they make career decisions based on their experiences? This chapter begins with a description of the participants’ background. This chapter also includes a brief overview of the significant statements and formulated meanings from the interview transcripts and presents the themes and subthemes that were extracted from the data analysis process. The findings are organized by themes and subthemes. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Participants’ Background

There was a total of 11 student participants in this study. Specifically, seven female and four male students within the same community college were interviewed. A brief description of the participants’ background is included to provide the reader with further details. Although each participant is unique, they share similarities within their identity as a first-generation Latinx student, born in the United States, English being their second language, parental level of education, and the participants’ time out of school (Table 2).

Table 2 provides an overview and highlights main areas within the participant’s background, such as the location where the participants’ were born, who they grew up with, and who they are living with, indicates if parents
Table 2

Overview of Participants’ Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Melissa</th>
<th>Araceli</th>
<th>Marisol</th>
<th>Patricia</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Angela</th>
<th>Alisson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>born in the United States</td>
<td>is the youngest of two older siblings</td>
<td>is the oldest sibling</td>
<td>is the oldest sibling</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Pre-Allied Health</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Pre-Allied Health</td>
<td>is married and lives with her husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents are Mexican immigrants</td>
<td>is on her fourth semester in college</td>
<td>in her second semester in college</td>
<td>in her second semester in college</td>
<td>career goal: certified registered nurse anesthesiologist</td>
<td>career goal: certified registered nurse anesthesiologist</td>
<td>in her last year in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lives at home</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Spanish</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Pre-Allied Health</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Child Development</td>
<td>career goal: registered nurse program</td>
<td>career goal: registered nurse program</td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents have some high school education</td>
<td>in her fourth semester in community college</td>
<td>career goal: registered nurse program</td>
<td>career goal: obtain a teaching credential</td>
<td>plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td>plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td>plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>grew up in a bilingual home</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is the oldest sibling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>took a year off from school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>currently in her second year in college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>major: Associate Degree in Pre-Allied Health</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>career goal: certified registered nurse anesthesiologist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jason</th>
<th>Alberto</th>
<th>Marcos</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• born in the United States</td>
<td>• is the youngest sibling</td>
<td>• he is currently in his last semester</td>
<td>• he took some time off during his first year in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• parents are Mexican immigrants</td>
<td>• took a year off during his first year in college</td>
<td>• major: Associate Degree in Business</td>
<td>• major: Associate Degree in Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• parents have some elementary education</td>
<td>• is on his last year in college</td>
<td>• he plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td>• career goal: public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• placed in foster care as a child</td>
<td>• major: Associate Degree in Chicano Studies</td>
<td>• career goal: business with an emphasis in management</td>
<td>• in his last semester in community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• grew up with a foster family</td>
<td>• plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td></td>
<td>• plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• maintains a close relationship with his maternal mom and paternal dad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• at the age of 18-years-old, he began to live on his own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• major: Associate Degree in Social Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• plans to transfer into a 4-year institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• career goal: social worker in foster care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. DACA refers to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.*

immigrated into the United States, includes parent’s level of education, primary language spoken at home, highlights if they are the oldest or youngest sibling, reflects their academic progress towards their associate’s degree, and includes their major and career goal. This table can be used as a reference while reading through the findings. Greater detail for each participant is provided in Table 2.

**Melissa.** Melissa was born in the United States. Her parents immigrated from Mexico at a young age. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and younger
brother. Melissa grew up in a bilingual home and speaks English and Spanish with her parents and brother. Her parents completed some high school in Mexico but did not receive their high school diploma. Due to family challenges, Melissa took a year off from school. She is currently in her second year in community college and is completing the prerequisites that are required for the registered nursing program. Her career goal is to become a certified registered nurse anesthesiologist.

**Araceli.** Araceli was born in the United States and grew up with her parents, who are Mexican immigrants. She currently lives at home with her mom and dad. Araceli grew up primarily speaking Spanish at home and English at school since her parents only speak Spanish. To this day, she only speaks Spanish with her parents. Her parents did not have the opportunity to attend high school. She is the youngest of two older siblings who do not live at home. Due to her background as an English learner, Araceli is working toward an Associate Degree in Spanish for a career as a Spanish teacher or translator within the medical setting. She is currently in her fourth semester in community college and is still deciding if she will transfer into a 4-year institution.

**Marisol.** Marisol was born in the United States. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and younger siblings. Her parents immigrated to the United States at a young age. Marisol’s first language is Spanish. She grew up speaking both English and Spanish with her family. Her mom had the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma in Mexico, while her dad did not. She experienced a unique transition into college due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Marisol finished high school online and began community college online. She is currently in her second semester in community college and is working toward an Associate Degree in Pre-Allied Health. After completing her general education courses and program prerequisites,
she plans to apply for the registered nurse program within the community college to become a registered nurse. She does not plan to transfer into a 4-year institution.

**Patricia.** Patricia was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with her family at a very young age. Both of her parents are Mexican immigrants. Neither her mom nor dad had the opportunity to complete high school while in Mexico. Patricia currently lives at home with her parents and siblings. She is the oldest out of the three. Patricia grew up speaking Spanish at home and learned English at school. Due to her background, Patricia is a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) student. She is working toward an Associate Degree in Child Development and needs one more semester to finish her degree. Patricia plans to transfer into a 4-year institution to obtain her teaching credential to teach at the high school level.

**Jessica.** Jessica was born in the United States and grew up with her parents, who are Mexican immigrants. She currently lives at home with her mom, dad, and younger sister. Jessica grew up speaking Spanish at home and learned how to speak English at school. Neither parent had the opportunity to attend high school. Jessica is working toward an Associate Degree in Criminology for a career as a juvenile delinquency instructor. Her goal is to teach at the high school or college level, where she can make an impact in her community. She is currently in her last semester within community college and plans to transfer into a 4-year institution after completing her associate’s degree.

**Angela.** Angela was born in the United States. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and two younger siblings. Her parents immigrated to the United States before she was born. Neither her mom nor dad attended high school. Angela and her family primarily speak Spanish at home. She learned how to speak English in school and speaks English with her younger siblings. Angela will obtain her
Associate Degree in Accounting and plans to transfer into a 4-year institution after completing one more semester.

**Alisson.** Allison was born in the United States. As a child, she grew up with her mom, older sister, and brother. She did not mention her dad. Alisson’s mom did not attend high school while in Mexico and only speaks Spanish. Although Alisson’s first language is Spanish, she grew up speaking both English and Spanish with her siblings. Due to family challenges at home, Alisson moved out of her house during her first year in community college. She is currently married and lives with her husband. Alisson is working toward an Associate Degree in English and has a year left to complete her associate degree. She plans to transfer into a 4-year institution after completing her associate’s degree to become a teacher.

**Jason.** Jason was born in the United States. His parents immigrated to the United States before he was born. Jason believes that his parents completed some elementary education. As a child, he confronted family challenges and was placed in foster care. Although he grew up with a foster family, he has maintained a close relationship with his maternal mom and paternal dad, who both work in the field. At the age of 18-years-old, he reached the age limit and was no longer permitted to live with his foster family. Therefore, he was forced to live on his own. He sought shelter at his aunts’ and friends’ homes. After transitioning into college, Jason received much support from the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) program since he began living on his own. Jason is in his second year in the community college and is working toward an Associate Degree in Social Work to become a social worker in foster care.

**Alberto.** Alberto was born in the United States. His mom immigrated to the United States from Mexico. He lives at home with his mom, who raised Alberto and his siblings as a single mom. Alberto did not mention his dad. He is the
youngest of two older siblings who did not attend college. Although his mom only speaks Spanish, he grew up speaking Spanish and English. Alberto’s mom completed some middle school education while in Mexico. She did not have the opportunity to complete high school. Alberto took a year off during his first year in community college because he did not know what career choice to select. He is about two semesters away from obtaining an Associate Degree in Chicano Studies. His goal is to transfer into a 4-year institution and become a college instructor.

Marcos. Marcos was born in the United States. His mom immigrated to the United States at a young age. Marcos was a child when his dad died. Marcos’s mom raised him and his older brother on her own. His mom had the opportunity to complete some high school in Mexico. Marcos grew up in a bilingual household speaking both English and Spanish. During his first year in community college, he took a year off due to family challenges. He is currently in his last semester and will be completing an Associate Degree in Business. He plans to transfer into a 4-year institution to complete a bachelor’s degree in business with an emphasis in management.

David. David was born in the United States. As a child, he grew up with his mom after his parents divorced. He currently lives at home with his dad and stepmother. Although his parents divorced, he maintains a close relationship with his immediate family, including his maternal mother. David’s first language is Spanish but grew up being bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. His dad has a high school diploma, while his mom completed some college courses for career technical education but never obtained a degree or certification. Due to family challenges, David took some time off during his first year in community college and was able to return within a year to continue working toward his Associate Degree in Communications for a career in public relations. He is
currently in his last semester in community college and plans to transfer into a 4-year institution.

**Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings**

Using Colaizzi’s (1978) data analysis process, all interview transcripts were carefully read several times to understand how the participants described their experiences during the transition into community college. A total of 148 significant statements were extracted from the transcribed interviews that described the experiences of first-generation Latinx students. Sixty-two of the significant statements produced similar formulated meanings among student participants. The findings are based on the 62 significant statements. Table 3 provides a partial list of the significant statements and formulated meanings that were taken from the participants’ responses. As shown in Table 3, the significant statements that related to the experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college were highlighted. The significant statements were then rephrased into formulated meanings to “illuminate the meanings hidden in the various context and horizons on the investigated phenomenon” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). The formulated meanings were categorized by major themes that emerge. The major themes are supported by subthemes that highlight detailed context within each theme. After significant statements, formulated meanings, and themes were shared with participants for a member check, the significant statements, themes, and subthemes were finalized. There were a total of 12 themes and 37 subthemes. Each theme and subtheme was organized and listed under its corresponding research question.
Table 3

Example of Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings, Themes, and Subthemes of First-Generation Latinx Students and Their Experience Transitioning into Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Formulated Meanings</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I think one of the things that definitely help is when colleges go to our high school...they helped us with our application, so it was like a step-by-step process so that we knew exactly what we were doing.” - Angela</td>
<td>College representatives are helpful during the initial college planning and application stage because they provide the initial support and guidance on a one-on-one basis during the application process.</td>
<td>Initial Guidance and Support</td>
<td>• High School Teachers &amp; Counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When I was transitioning to college, my high school counselor did help me a lot like with my financial aid and answered any questions that I had.” - Melissa</td>
<td>In high school, she had a lot of guidance and support from her counselors but once she transitioned into college, since she didn’t know anyone, she had to take the initiative to ask for help.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• College Representatives &amp; Counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Most of my teachers and most of my counselors from high school where the most helpful. Once I turned 18, I got kicked out from foster care, and so I was still going to high school, and I feel like if it wasn’t for them then I would have never really gone to college. Also, EOPS counselors. I think they went, above and beyond too. I had a car payment at that time, and I let them know my situation that if I couldn’t pay my car, then maybe school wasn’t for me. I needed to pay off my debt and they were very kind enough to like write me a check to pay my car, just pay some other bills that were piling up on me and I promised that I would continue to go to school, no matter the circumstances are holding me back.” - Jason</td>
<td>The main reason why he was able to be in college is due to the immense support and guidance form his teachers and counselors in high school. In addition, special programs like EOPS played an important role by providing exceptional financial support during a time a need.</td>
<td>• Family Members</td>
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<td>Table 3 (cont.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“I have a specific counselor for DACA. But I also reached out and would go to a different counselor and that counselor actually got me into this class, and it was like a successful tip, or you know basically learning how to go through college like what classes to take.” - Patricia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Her DACA college counselor was very helpful and referred her to a course that provided successful tips for college.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“My family’s super supportive, even when we had nothing...even my dad was super excited, and he was buying like banners and all sorts of stuff.” - David</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>College brought a sense of hope to his family. Family was supportive, excited, and encouraging throughout the initial onboarding college process.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>“Supported me as in never giving up. I got like a personal situation with my mom. She had to have surgery, in that case in my head, I was thinking oh I should no longer go to school, I should just stay home and take care of my mom, but for them, it was more like no and if you go to school, you get something even better, you get better paid. School will help you more, so it was more as them helping me out not giving up. My brothers too, they also said, you know, like you’re already halfway there, you should just finish.” - Jessica</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regardless of the challenges her family confronted, her parents, especially her mom and siblings, always encouraged her to never give up. They helped her understand that an education would open a lot of opportunities and provide financial stability.</strong></td>
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**Findings**

The findings of this study provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena and answers the central research question and sub-questions. In this section, I will discuss the overarching themes and subthemes to describe the experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college. Additionally, I will highlight their intersecting social identities and describe how this student population makes their career decisions based on their experiences. The following sections will include the themes and
subthemes presented in the tables and include significant statements that led to the emergent themes.

**Experiences During the Transition into Community College**

Using the transcripts from the interviews for this study, I delved deeply into the participants’ descriptions to answer the overarching research question and understand the participants’ experiences during the transition into community college. Table 4 provides a list of themes and subthemes that highlight the first-generation Latinx student participants’ experiences during the transition into community college. A total of eight themes and 23 subthemes relate to this section. After each subtheme, the number within the parenthesis indicates how many times each subtheme was mentioned within the 148 significant statements from the interview transcripts. The themes and subthemes for this section were grouped into pre- and postcollege transition experiences. Major themes within the precollege transition are initial guidance and support, precollege feelings, what they wish they would have known, and reasons for selecting community college. Major themes within the postcollege transition are student support services, postcollege feelings, challenges in college, and reasons for pursuing a college degree. Themes and subthemes are discussed in further detail.

**Initial Guidance and Support**

For this section, the participants identified various sources of initial support and guidance prior to the transition into community college. Based on the participants’ experiences, three subthemes led to this theme: guidance and support from their high school teachers and counselors, college representatives and counselors, and family members. Although their experiences vary, they were
Table 4

First-Generation Latinx Students’ Experiences During the Transition Into Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central RQ: How do first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences during the transition into community college?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Guidance and Support</td>
<td>High school teachers &amp; counselors (4)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College representatives (2)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family members (9)</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Feelings</td>
<td>Scared (4)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxious (2)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nervous (5)</td>
<td>X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overwhelmed (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What They Wish They Would Have Known</td>
<td>Financial budgeting (6)</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic courses &amp; registration (5)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College supplies needed (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Selecting Community College</td>
<td>Most affordable option (5)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pathway to a 4-year institution (4)</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Supportive Services</td>
<td>Financial Aid (6)</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EOPS (2)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dream Center (1)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutorial Services (5)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Feelings</td>
<td>Confused (2)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overwhelmed (2)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in College</td>
<td>Adjusting to college (6)</td>
<td>X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation (4)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balance between school and work (5)</td>
<td>X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Pursuing a College Degree</td>
<td>Prove oneself to others (4)</td>
<td>X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For social-economic change (?)</td>
<td>X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

all able to identify a source of informational and resourceful support from school professionals and emotional and motivational support from family members.

**High School Teachers and Counselors**

Melissa, Alisson, Jason, and David all uniquely responded to the value of the support they received from their high school teachers and counselors. They each received guidance and support based on their needs. Melissa, for example, mentioned the sources of guidance and support that she initially received related to her financial aid application prior to the transition into community college. She stated, “When I was transitioning to college, my high school counselor did help me a lot like with my financial aid and answered any questions that I had.” Based on her financial needs, Melissa recalled the guidance and support her high school
counselor provided since having her financial aid application submitted was important for Melissa as she prepared for community college. Similarly, Alisson and David mentioned the guidance and support they received from their high school teachers and counselors. David stated, “They [teachers and administrators] did everything in their power to get me to comprehend what I was going to be dealing with.” High school teachers and administrators provided David with academic knowledge and advice to help him understand the dynamics of college and the value of education. Similarly, Allison mentioned that one of her high school teachers, who she considered her mentor, provided her with advice and support throughout her education and career.

In addition, Jason spoke about the strong impact that his high school teachers and counselors had on his college education and explained the main reason why he was able to graduate from high school and go to college:

Most of my teachers and most of my counselors from high school were the most helpful … I feel like if it wasn’t for them, then I would have never really gone to college … they would always encourage me to come back to school, finish, graduate, and they would provide me with bus tokens for the bus station.

After turning 18 and leaving his foster care home, there were many changes that Jason had to adapt to, such as living arrangements and transportation during his senior year in high school while also preparing for community college. The high school teachers and counselors played a key role in providing resources, academic advising, and helped increase their knowledge about college education, and provided overall support through the college preparation process.

**College Representatives and Counselors**

College representatives and counselors were additional sources of guidance and support prior to the transition into community college. Three participants
identified college representatives and EOPS college counselors as an integral source of support prior to the transition into community college. For example, Angela shared how helpful it was for her to speak to a college representative and obtain guidance and support throughout the college application process:

I think one of the things that definitely help is when colleges go to our high school ... they helped us with our application, so it was like a step-by-step process so that we knew exactly what we were doing.

The college representative was able to work one-on-one with Angela and guide her through the matriculation process, which helped her understand how to move forward with the application process.

In addition, Jason explained the support he received from an EOPS counselor as he prepared for community college. Due to financial needs, the EOPS counselor connected Jason with financial resources, which played an important role in Jason’s college planning process. The EOPS program provided exceptional financial support during a time of need as he transitioned into community college:

EOPS counselors, I think they went above and beyond too. I had a car payment at that time, and I let them know my situation, that if I couldn’t pay my car, then maybe school wasn’t for me … they were very kind enough to like to write me a check to pay my car, just pay some other bills that were piling up on me.

The financial resources that the EOPS counselor was able to connect Jason with provided Jason with the opportunity to continue his plans toward pursuing a college degree by eliminating financial concerns. The topic of money came up throughout the interviews. Money was a concern for a number of participants. The financial needs of this student population were reflected through their decisions based on their financial instability and steered much of the participants’ experiences in college. For example, David spoke about the guidance and support
that EOPS counselors provided him through the financial support for school supplies, school textbooks, and other college expenses. He stated, “They [EOPS] were willing to work with me on so many different issues.” During the interview, David emphasized the support he received from the EOPS counselors and valued all the guidance. Connecting with college representatives and college counselors prior to the transition into college provided a sense of relief to these students because they understood what to do within the application process and obtain financial resources.

**Family Members**

Family was another source of initial guidance and support that was mentioned by nine out of the 11 student participants. Family members positively influenced the students’ journey as they prepared for college. Although the first-generation Latinx student participants sought guidance and support from school professionals for information and resources, their family members played an essential role in providing emotional support and motivation toward their college preparation. For example, as David prepared for the transition into community college, he noticed the excitement from his dad. David stated, “My family’s super supportive … my dad was super excited, and he was buying like banners and all sorts of stuff.” College brought a sense of hope to his family because he is the first one in his family to attend college. David’s family was supportive, excited, and encouraging throughout the initial onboarding college process. In addition, Jessica highlighted the value of the support she received from her family, even when she felt uncertain about college.

They [parents] supported me as in never giving up … for them, it was more like, “No, and if you go to school, you get something even better, you get better paid. School will help you more.” So, it was more as them helping me out on not giving up.
Similarly, Angela shared the support that her parents provided by pushing her to reach her full potential. Angela stated, “They [parents] were pushing me to try my best, and I feel like they’ve always believed in me, especially because I’m the oldest.” Her parents have always believed in her since she is the oldest and the first one in the family to attend college.

Overall, high school teachers, high school counselors, college representatives, and college counselors primarily provided informational and resourceful support, while family members provided emotional and motivational support. The participants demonstrated much value for the initial guidance and support they received as they prepared for community college.

**Precollege Feelings**

This theme was formed based on the following subthemes: scared, anxious, confused, and overwhelmed. Overall, students reported a wide mix of negative responses to the precollege transition since they are stepping into a new environment. A few students also shared feeling happy and excited to begin a new chapter in their lives. These positive responses were mentioned, along with feelings of being scared and nervous.

**Scared.** Four student participants expressed feeling scared due to feeling alone, their general understanding of the different dynamics of college compared to high school, and not knowing where to go for help. For example, Angela shared that going to college was an exciting but also scary experience. She stated, “It was scary because you don’t know anybody, besides the friends that are already going into this college.” Not being able to go to college with all the friendships she established during high school made her feel scared because of limited exposure to friends and an established support system from people she already knew. Additionally, Jason also expressed his scared feelings when he stated, “It was
scary because I knew that it was not gonna be like high school.” Stepping into the college culture scared Jason, especially after all the support his high school teachers and counselors provided him. Furthermore, Patricia shared that she felt scared because she felt like there was no one else to reach out to for essential questions about going to college, including choosing her major, selecting appropriate classes, and putting together her class schedule. She shared:

> It was really scary because I didn’t have nobody else to really like ask for help, I was just kind of like on my own, and I’m trying to figure out what I want to do, what major I want to go into, what classes to take, and what time to go.

Patricia did not feel prepared for college and did not have much knowledge about resources available to her. Not knowing where to go and whom to turn for help during the transition into college made her feel scared as she prepared for college, her major, and her class schedule.

**Nervous.** About half of the student participants shared feeling nervous prior to the transition into community college due to their understanding of the hard work they would have to put into college, their belief in their ability to pass college courses, and their increased responsibilities as college students. For example, Melissa shared that while she was happy, she also felt nervous about upcoming work. “I was a little bit nervous, but I also felt like happy, and I felt like a sense of like refreshing because I knew that this was going to be a new journey and new chapter in my life.” She also shared that she realized that it would be hard work but acknowledged and believed that hard work was worth it because it would pay off in the future.

For Marisol, thinking about not being able to pass her classes made her feel nervous because she thought about her ability to manage a college-level course load and understood that college courses would be more rigorous than classes in
high school. Marisol shared, “I was really nervous and thinking the whole time that I wasn’t really capable of passing any classes because they were like college-level.” Although she felt nervous, Marisol also shared feelings of excitement to start her first semester in college and felt determined to pass all her college courses no matter how difficult they would be.

The increased responsibilities that come with being a college student made Alberto feel nervous. In high school, students have a preassigned class schedule with back-to-back courses, and everything is available and accessible in one place for them. While in college, students must arrange their course schedules, determine times, and make sure they make it to class on time. Understanding the increased responsibilities, Alberto shared, “In general, our responsibilities … how to turn in this at a certain time and go to this class at a certain time and things like that. It wasn’t like in high school.” The increased accountability for college students made Alberto feel nervous.

**Anxious.** A few student participants stated feeling anxious due to the college campus size, the number of events, large student population, and first-generation status, which increased their anxiousness. As a result of being a first-generation college student, Alberto expressed anxiety due to the expectations from his family and as a student. Preparing for community college and being a first-generation student created anxiety for Alberto. He stated, “I want to say that was like an anxiety thing for me like honestly, I think that actually did gave me anxiety.” The thought about being the first one in his family to attend college and understanding the different expectations from high school and college made him feel anxious.

On the other hand, David felt anxious due to the college environment he was stepping into. David shared, “I was definitely anxious … like a fish out of
water because again at community colleges, it’s like you’re around so many different people, you know, so many events and people … So I was definitely feeling 50% anxious.” Thinking about all the events in college, the campus size, and people within community college made him feel anxious, while also feeling “like a fish out of water.” which hints at feelings of being overwhelmed based on the increased activities that occur within the college environment.

**Overwhelmed.** A few students felt overwhelmed because they did not know what to expect and did not have many mentors to turn to for advice. Even those students who felt excited about the new chapters of their lives shared feeling uncertain and scared because of the unknowns that were ahead of them. Feeling overwhelmed was a feeling that also comes up during the postcollege transition, which will be discussed within the postcollege feelings. Alisson, for example, shared that she viewed the transition to college as overwhelming:

So, the transition, if I could describe it in one word simply, it’s simply overwhelming. I think in high school, a lot of times teachers tell you like college is different, but they don’t really specify, and I feel like a lot of the times in education, we sometimes fail to prepare our students for what lies ahead once they graduate. In my experiences, I wasn’t prepared.

The transition to college was overwhelming for Alisson because while she knew that college would be different from high school, she did not know exactly how. Alisson did not feel prepared for the transition into college. One of the challenges that contributed to feeling overwhelmed was the topic of money. This was a concern for a number of students, even those who did not have to work to support their studies. For example, Marcos shared, “I kind of got, you know, overwhelmed by the cost of school.” Finances seemed to be at the forefront of the students’ decisions and feelings as they planned for college.

Overall, the first-generation Latinx community college students primarily reported feeling intimidated about upcoming college experiences. They shared that
they felt nervous, scared, anxious, and overwhelmed because they felt unprepared for college, did not know what to expect, and did not have a designated mentor to turn to for help.

**What They Wish They Would Have Known**

Three subthemes of financial budgeting, academic courses and registration, and needed college supplies led to this theme. As first-generation Latinx students prepared for community college, they expressed a desire to have a clear understanding of how much money they were going to spend, what courses to register and plan for, and the college supplies necessary to purchase for college.

**Financial Budgeting.** Six participants highlighted financial budgeting as an essential area they wish they would have been better prepared for before transitioning into community college. Having a financial outlook on college expenses and organizing finances for school was mentioned among participants as an area that would have helped them better prepare for college. For example, Marcos shared, “I wish I would have known how much money out of pocket it’s going to cost me through my duration in college.” Understanding the amount of money out of pocket that he would need to spend in college was important for him because it would have given him a financial outlook of what to prepare for and how much money he would have to save for college expenses. In addition, Jason shared how challenging it was for him to work and make time for his classes. He mentioned, “Financial aid was the biggest one. How to pay for it [college], how was I gonna make that work with my life, my life schedule like working. Those are the two biggest ones.” Based on his financial need, having to work, and going to college, he struggled with prioritizing between school and work because he understood that he had to work to have money to go to school. Therefore, recognizing that he would have college expenses and knowing in advance could
have prepared him better with more clarity on the amount of time and hours he needed to invest at work and how much time he would invest in school. In addition, Angela highlighted the desire to understand early on in college that she would need to budget money toward her textbooks, scantrons, and other school supplies. She stated:

I didn’t know how expensive books were or how you have to purchase them … I would have loved for someone to give me a head start to save a little money for texts, like this is going to be how much you’re going to spend, even on scantrons.

Angela would have liked for someone to show her how to purchase her textbooks, in addition to preparing her in advance about extra expenses needed for school textbooks.

Furthermore, Marisol had to take into account her class schedule and financial expenses, such as books, in addition to her availability for a job. She mentioned, “My schedule, like if I was going to work or not. Then, financially and books, it was like just kind of my thinking that I needed to get ready and know what to like be prepared for.” Marisol thought about the things she needed to prepare for and understood that the financial expenses in college would help her become better prepared for college due to the alignment she could make in organizing her class schedule while looking at the possibility and need of getting a job and how much she needed to spend on college supplies.

**Academic Courses and Registration.** Five of the first-generation Latinx students mentioned that they would have liked to have known the prerequisites toward their academic courses and registration, specifically their general education courses and courses based on their major. They felt that understanding the prerequisites for their major would have made it easier to have a clear roadmap of courses required as they moved forward with their major. For example, Patricia
shared her insights on what she believed would have been most helpful to know during the transition into college, and stated, “General ed classes, I think it’s helpful knowing what major you’re going to do so, you know, like what path you’re going into and what classes to take that would connect with other general classes.” Understanding prerequisites toward her selected major is important since program prerequisites constantly change. Patricia believed that having a clear roadmap that reflected the course sequence for prerequisites and general education courses would have been helpful. Similarly, Marisol mentioned she would have liked to have more clarity on what general education courses to register for because she felt lost. She mentioned, “I think that it would have been a little bit better if I knew exactly what general education classes to register for because somebody does it for you in the beginning, and you just kinda go with that.” Since she received support with the course registration from the beginning and a college representative assisted with everything, Marisol did not know what general education courses to register for the following semester and felt confused. Additionally, David stated, “I would definitely say that knowing what prerequisites I need for my major … to establish my career-oriented goals would be the best for me. Just know what to expect and what classes look like.” Having more knowledge of his major prerequisites would have been helpful as he set his career-oriented goals.

**College Supplies Needed.** A few students mentioned that understanding what college supplies they needed to prepare before the transition into college were essential and would have been helpful. Some of the college supplies mentioned were textbooks, scantrons, laptops, and a print card for printing. Angela indicated that she would have liked for someone to give her some insight on how much money to have available to purchase her textbooks, scantrons, and other school
supplies. Angela was surprised by the textbook prices and learning that she would need to purchase scantrons, which she did not expect. Similarly, Jessica mentioned that she was not prepared with the appropriate college supplies when she initially entered college. She stated:

Basically, knowing that I need to purchase a laptop and having all the school materials because I did not have a laptop in high school, I would only just use [it] within the school computers. So, I was not really prepared. Once I start[ed] going to college, I really needed a laptop and to purchase my textbooks. I wish they can provide more tips on the little things that are important.

Since most school supplies are provided to students during high school, she was unprepared for the essential school items she needed. Another essential college supply that Melissa highlighted was the print card. She stated, “In the library, there’s like this print card. I didn’t know how to load it or how to do that.” Since she does not have a printer at home, she knew she would have to print her assignments while in college and learned that she needed to charge a print card with money to print any documents.

Overall, the first-generation Latinx students felt that financial budgeting, academic courses and registration, and college supplies were areas they wished they were better prepared for and wished they would have known before transitioning into community college.

**Reasons for Selecting Community College**

This theme was formed based on the subthemes of most affordable options and pathways to a 4-year institution. Due to affordability, selecting a community college was one of the reasons why first-generation Latinx students selected this option. In addition, this student population viewed community college as a pathway to transfer into a 4-year institution.
Most Affordable Option. Five participants mentioned that they selected community college because it was the most affordable option where they could take more classes and eventually transfer into a 4-year institution while at the same time save money. Angela shared why she selected community college and stated, “I knew that it would be much more affordable for me, so that was part of the reason why I went to college instead of a state university.” Community college was the most affordable option and only option when planning to further her education in college due to her financial limitations. Similarly, Patricia stated, “I feel like I had the opportunity to take more classes instead of going to state and limiting myself because of my financial needs.” As Patricia completes her general education and works toward her associate’s degree, she feels that she can take more courses in community college without having the financial pressure in the back of her mind. Community college gives her the opportunity to take more courses in contrast to feeling more limited if she had attended a 4-year institution due to the tuition and her financial needs.

In addition, Jason shared, “I did want to go to a 4-year as soon as I graduated high school, but how much would it cost and stuff like that, I never really got to think about financial aid helping me get into that route.” Although Jason initially wanted to attend a 4-year institution, he was not aware of the capacity of financial aid, and since the tuition fee was something that stood out the most, he ended up choosing a community college. Marcos also stated that he selected community college due to affordability and saving more money before transferring into a 4-year institution. As seen throughout other themes, money, affordability, and finances were the core issues, which first-generation Latinx students base their decisions. When comparing the tuition between a community
college and a 4-year institution, this student population preferred the community college due to affordability.

**Pathway to a 4-year Institution.** Four participants mentioned that they selected the community college option as a pathway into a 4-year institution. Not only is community college more affordable for this student population, but it is also the best option for them while planning to transfer into a 4-year institution. For Melissa, although her initial goal was to attend a 4-year institution, she realized that she would be able to complete more courses, save money, and transfer into a 4-year college after completing her general education courses at a community college:

I selected a community college because I was looking at like 4-year universities, but then I came to realize that in those two years, I’m going to be doing like my general ed, and when you look at a city college … you’re still getting the same quality education, and it’s cheaper. So, I feel like it’s better to like save money and like take the same classes and then go to like a 4-year college.

She selected the community college for an opportunity not only to complete her general education courses but also to eventually transfer into a 4-year institution of her choice. Similarly, Jason’s first option was a 4-year institution; however, he selected community college due to challenges with financial resources. Once in community college, he realized that he could transfer into a 4-year institution of his choice where it would have been more difficult to transfer into a 4-year institution right after graduating from high school. Jason stated, “Once I entered community college, then I heard it was easier to get into the university.” After learning that he could complete his general education courses in community college, he realized that transferring to a 4-year institution would be most feasible while receiving financial support through financial aid.
Overall, although some participants mentioned that they selected community college due to affordability and as a pathway to a 4-year institution, their decision was heavily derived from affordability and later learning that they could save money to eventually transfer into a 4-year institution of their choice.

**Student Support Services**

Four subthemes led to this theme of student support services. Within the postcollege transition, the first-generation Latinx students mentioned financial aid, EOPS, the Dream Center, and tutorial services as student support services that were helpful during the transition into community college.

**Financial Aid.** About half of the first-generation Latinx students mentioned financial aid as support that made it possible for them to have the opportunity to attend community college. Without financial aid, students shared that it would have been impossible to go to college. For Jason, his unique circumstances made it nearly impossible to go to college; however, with the guidance and support from an EOPS counselor, he obtained financial resources and also qualified for financial aid. Jason stated, “Financial aid was the biggest one … I applied for financial aid, and I qualified.” After finding out that financial aid is available for him, Jason later expressed his interest in transferring into a 4-year institution to obtain a bachelor’s and master’s degree. The increased knowledge of financial aid and how to pay for college inspired Jason to strive for more and further his education. Similarly, Angela shared her gratitude and value toward financial aid and mentioned:

Thank God I didn’t have to pay for anything. The only thing that came out of my pocket was the books … if I would have not qualified for financial aid, it would have been difficult for me and my family to get through college.
Angela expressed a sense of relief due to the financial aid support she receives. She only had to pay out of pocket for her textbooks, making it feasible for her to go to college and focus more on her education. Without financial aid, she would have confronted more financial barriers and challenges. Marisol shared the value of the financial support that financial aid provided and stated, “Also, financial aid, I guess, it was a big support because I wouldn’t be able to pay my classes or any books I needed.” The first-generation Latinx students that highlighted financial aid demonstrated high value for the financial aid awarded to them because it alleviated financial stress and made college education more attainable.

**EOPS.** Two students specifically mentioned EOPS as a major source of support during their transition into community college. EOPS stands for Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, which is a student support service available for eligible students and provides personal, academic, and financial student services. The participants mentioned that the EOPS program counselors were able to provide academic, financial, and personal support. For example, due to Jason’s background in foster care, high risk of homelessness, and financial need, he highlighted EOPS as a student support service that was most helpful. During the transition into community college, he mentioned that he had many financial obligations that he could not keep up with, and when he spoke to an EOPS counselor about his situation and needs, the counselor was able to connect him to financial resources and support that allowed him to continue his education in college. Additionally, David stated:

EOPS is filled with people who see you as a human, not just a statistic, and I noticed that right from the beginning because they were willing to work with me on so many different issues … I had a specific issue pertaining to me, and it was eating away at me, and they were like, “Well, let’s talk it out. Let’s see what we can do. Maybe we can find you some financial
support to work around this issue.” There’s nothing they will not do to try and help you.

Aside from the academic support and guidance that the EOPS program provided these students, Jason and David emphasized the financial support and resources obtained from EOPS. They spoke highly of the one-on-one attention they received and the staff’s genuine desire to assist them so that they were successful.

**The Dream Center.** Similar to EOPS, Patricia highlighted the support she received from the Dream Center. Due to her DACA approval and eligibility for services from the Dream Center, which provides information and academic counseling to students with diverse immigration status, Patricia spoke about the support from her DACA counselor and the support she received. Patricia stated, “I have a specific counselor for DACA … that counselor actually got me into this class, and it was like successful tips, or you know, basically learning how to go through college like what classes to take.” Her DACA college counselor was very helpful during the initial semester because she enrolled Patricia into a course that provided successful tips for college, which Patricia was not aware of. This course helped Patricia become better prepared for college. Additionally, Patricia spoke about the financial resources that she could get, such as Cal grants and scholarships through the support resources from the Dream Center. She stated, “I’m lucky enough to have DACA because it gives me an opportunity to go to college.” She felt lucky to have the financial resources available because she was not fully aware of all the available support before transitioning into college.

**Tutorial Services.** Melissa, Araceli, and Jessica mentioned seeking academic support from the tutorial center. They found tutorial services helpful because not only were they able to obtain support for a specific subject or class,
they were also able to connect with other students and make new friends. For example, Melissa shared:

So, when I asked for tutorial services, it was for one of my very first classes, and there I met somebody, and then she became my friend. We both would basically go to the tutorial center, and we started like pairing up, and we were like meet up after class, and you know, like study for that class. It was very, very helpful … I felt like I had more support. I can collaborate with a classmate or two, and then we ended up adding another person, and we just became like a little study group.

Tutorial services opened up opportunities for Melissa to connect with other students who also sought out the tutorial services for support. Similarly, Araceli explained how she sought out support for a class and joined a tutorial group. She mentioned, “I like the group I was in for tutoring because I believe the tutor understood me, and I liked the feel of people around. Like after a while like you feel connected to them and like you help each other.” Araceli felt comfortable with the tutoring group she was placed with an established a support group with the members. Last, Jessica spoke about how helpful it was to obtain tutoring support for her math class. She mentioned, “As soon as my math class was finished, I went ahead and I attended my tutoring session, which was like around an hour to two hours, and it did help with my, with my math class.” Overall, tutoring services provided Melissa, Araceli, and Jessica with a close group where they received academic support and established new friendships.

Postcollege Feelings

This theme of postcollege feelings was based on two subthemes: confused and overwhelmed. After the transition into community college, the first-generation Latinx students primarily mentioned that they felt confused and overwhelmed due to not having a clear understanding of who their counselor was, what courses to register for, and feeling overwhelmed with the college demands.
Confused. Jessica and Angela mentioned they felt confused after the transition into community college due to having to figure out what counselor to reach out to for support within their course planning. In addition, the confusion was also due to the general education courses required. For example, Jessica stated:

I was a little confused [as] to who my counselor was because I know in high school, you have counselors who are always telling you these are the classes that you’re going to be taking next year and this year. I know that at city, you have your own plan, and you have to decide all the classes that you took in one area … It was a little hard right there to decide on what other class to take.

After the transition into college, Jessica realized that there was no longer going to be a counselor that reached out and provide the class layout of what courses she would need to complete. She realized that she would have to plan her course schedule and reach out to a counselor within her program. This confusion also related to the little understanding of the course registration process and course sequence required within general education courses. For example, Angela mentioned, “I think in the beginning your kind of like lost, like you know you have to do your general ed, but you kind of don’t know where to start.” There are a lot of general education courses to complete, and she struggled with understanding which courses to take first, making her feel lost and confused.

Overwhelmed. In addition to the precollege transition mixture of feelings, being overwhelmed was a common feeling expressed that continued beyond the precollege transition. Alisson and Marcos shared feeling overwhelmed prior to transitioning into community college due to stepping into the unknown and not having many people to turn for advice. Melissa and Jessica mentioned they felt overwhelmed after they transitioned into college due to the amount of invested work needed within the courses. Melissa stated, “I was pretty overwhelmed with
the like amount of work, especially in like the science field, I feel like it takes up a lot of your time.” Learning about the workload and time needed to be set aside for her courses and her major made Melissa feel overwhelmed. Similarly, Jessica shared, “Sometimes I was just stressed and overwhelmed … It did get difficult at a point where you’re just wanting to give up.” Given the number of demands that college life requires, Jessica became overwhelmed and stressed. Overall, confusion and feeling overwhelmed after the transition into community college demonstrated the students’ unpreparedness and understanding of the college culture.

**Challenges in College**

This theme, challenges in college, was formed based on three subthemes: adjusting to course workload, transportation, and balance between school and work, which the first-generation Latinx student participants mentioned.

**Adjusting to Course Workload.** Six first-generation Latinx students mentioned adjusting to college and the increased course workload. Students transitioned into community college with the belief that the workload would be the same as high school. After the transition into community college, they soon realized that their college courses would demand more of their time. For example, Alberto stated, “The expectations … as soon as your first few days of class, you already got an assignment, in the blink of an eye, and you already have to turn it in” and later mentioned, “Homework and due dates I want to say is the biggest one.” He did not expect an assignment within the first few days of class and was surprised by the accumulation of homework and deadlines. Additionally, Araceli mentioned, “The most stressful was in all my classes, the amount of homework they gave out … I feel that it was very stressful.” The amount of homework assigned throughout her classes created stress, which could stem from little
understanding of the time required to invest in college courses. Similarly, Patricia mentioned, “I didn’t know that when you go to college, you really have to make time for college in general, especially the homework time.” This demonstrated the little knowledge this student population had toward the time required to invest in schoolwork.

**Transportation.** Alberto, Patricia, Jessica, and Alisson mentioned that transportation was a challenge for them, resulting from not having a car. Therefore, they had to rely on others or the bus to go to school and get back home. For example, Alberto stated, “For me, personally, was different, you know, like I had to find a way to get to school or you know [to] be in class on time, things like that.” Not having a stable ride to school also made him worry about getting to class on time. Additionally, Jessica shared how challenging it was for her to schedule her classes around her parents’ work schedule, in addition to her work schedule. She stated:

> Working around my parents’ schedule, my schedule, and my work schedule … so it was the changes of work, my parents’ work schedule, and also my homework schedule. I had to find a whole routine each semester, which was always different because each class was different hours.

Until she can get a car of her own, Jessica is forced to plan out her schedule carefully as she takes into account her parents’ time and availability around their work schedules and aligns that to her class start and end times. Similarly, Alisson mentioned, “Planning on how I’m going to get to my classes … if I choose this class at this time, at what time do I need to get up, get on the bus and get myself?” Alisson had to plan and adjust her schedule based on the bus schedule to catch the bus on time. This not only became challenging, but it also created limitations during the course registration process due to the class times and the student’s availability and transportation arrangements.
Balance Between School and Work. Being able to balance school and work was a challenge that five first-generation Latinx students mentioned. Due to their low socioeconomic status, having to work while going to school was not an option. Therefore, juggling between both school and work became a challenge. For example, Jason mentioned, “It was a little hard trying to balance my classes with my work schedule.” Jason had to find a balance between his work schedule and school life as he worked in the fields and had to pay for rent while going to college. He had to secure his finances and create a schedule that allowed him to have enough time for school and work.

On the other hand, Jessica confronted the need to choose between school or work. She stated, “My second semester started a little bit harder. That’s when I felt like it was either work or school at that time. So, I made the choice of stop going to work and just dedicating myself for school time.” Fortunately for Jessica, she had a lot of support from her parents and was able to find a different job that worked around her class schedule.

Overall, given the increased workload in homework required and the investment of time demanded in class, the first-generation Latinx student found this to be challenging due to their busy schedules, finding a balance between school and work, and transportation as these became barriers that created challenges during the postcollege transition.

Reasons for Pursuing a College Degree

This theme, reasons for pursuing a college degree, was created based on two subthemes of proving oneself to others and social-economic change. Students reported the desire to use their educational accomplishments as an avenue to prove to their parents and others their educational capabilities, as well as a way to thank
their parents for their sacrifices. In addition, students pursue a college degree because it is an avenue that opens opportunities for social-economic changes.

**Prove Oneself to Others.** The ability to prove themselves within their educational accomplishments was mentioned by Angela, Alisson, Jason, and David. Due to their unique challenges, they perceived education as an outlet to have a voice and as an outlet to prove themselves to others. By going to college and accomplishing their educational goals, they stated that they would have the opportunity to prove to their parents that their efforts, sacrifices, and hard work were worth it and paid off. For example, David stated:

So, once I got into community college, I looked at it as an outlet to have a voice … you know, the investment in yourself overall. I want to prove myself academically, I want to prove to my boss that I can do this and prove to myself that I’m worthy.

He believes that community college will provide him with a career, education, and preparation to prove himself to others and demonstrate the level of respect he has for himself through his investment in education. In addition, paying their parents back through their education and proving to their parents was another important reason for pursuing a college degree. Angela spoke about everything her parents sacrificed when they came to the United States to give her better opportunities and obtain an education. Angela mentioned how proud it would make them once she obtains her degree and would like to use her education to prove to them that everything they have done for her has been worth it. Obtaining an education is a way of paying parents back for all of their sacrifices and hard work. Additionally, Melissa also shared similarities and wants to make her parents proud and thank them for their hard work while also serving as a role model to other Latinx students. She mentioned:

I wanted to make that like mark on my family and like make them proud because they sacrificed a lot. My dad has helped me pay for like my school
books and my tuition, so I feel like I just needed to like prove myself and really make that work, especially being like Latina also like I’m considered part of a minority group, so I feel like that, that’s really important.

Her educational accomplishments serve as an opportunity to prove to herself as an educated Latina, make her family proud, and serve as a role model for other Latinx minority students. Melissa wants to demonstrate and prove to other Latinx students that it is possible to obtain an education regardless of their background.

**For Social-Economic Change.** Given their experience and background, seven first-generation Latinx students also demonstrated a strong desire to succeed. Much of the reasons why they were pursuing a college degree were to be successful, have a good job, and overall be someone with a career rather than a statistic of noncollege graduates. For example, Alberto mentioned that education is rewarding because it helps a person become successful and not fall into being another statistic. Education also changes how others view the person. He stated, “Having a chance to do something with your life. You don’t just become another statistic like of people that don’t have a college education, and having an education changes how others see you.” Alberto believes that a college degree will change how others view him.

In addition, David shared his frustration on his low social-economic background and stated, “Ultimately, I’m hungry for my career. I’m tired of being poor. Tell you the truth. I’m tired of it. It’s exhausting, and I grew up relatively poor, so this is my time to myself like, you deserve better.” For David, obtaining a college degree will open opportunities that will help improve his overall social-economic status through better employment opportunities and better-paying jobs. Similarly, Melissa mentioned, “I didn’t come from a wealthy family or anything like that, but I started from the bottom, and like I’m trying to move up.” The idea
of a college degree helping a person move up makes a person successful due to the opportunities a college degree provides.

Overall, students reported two major reasons for pursuing their college degree: (a) to prove themselves to others and (b) for social-economic change. Although some first-generation Latinx student participants mentioned the desire to prove themselves to others, students strive to pursue a college degree to primarily prove to their parents and demonstrate their gratitude for the sacrifices and show how all their hard work has paid off. Last, students mentioned that pursuing a college degree for social-economic change was important because it provided better employment opportunities.

**Intersecting Social Identities Based on Their Experiences**

To answer the first subquestion of intersecting social identities, a closer look at these students’ intersecting social identities is discussed. The diverse intersecting social identities that the first-generation Latinx community college students mentioned were reflective throughout their responses. Their race, social class, gender, legal status, language barrier, and first-generation status intersected social identities that have primarily hindered the first-generation Latinx students’ college experience. Table 5 provides a list of themes and subthemes that highlight the first-generation Latinx student participants’ intersecting social identities as it relates to their experiences during the transition into community college. Based on their experiences during the transition into community college, two main themes led to this section: internal and external factors, for a total of seven subthemes. After each subtheme, the number within the parenthesis indicates how many times each subtheme came up within the 148 significant statements. The main themes were internal factors and external factors. Internal factors consisted of three
subthemes of pressure from self, cultural expectations on gender, and English as a second language. External factors were identified from four subthemes of pressure from family, legal status, social class, and race. These themes and sub-themes are discussed in further detail.

**Table 5**

*First-Generation Latinx Students’ Intersections of Social Identity and Their Experiences*

| Sub-Question A: How do their intersecting social identities support and/or hinder their experiences? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Themes | Sub-Themes | Participants | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Internal Factors | Pressure from self (5) | X | X | | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| | Cultural expectations on gender (3) | X | | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| | English as a second language (7) | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | |
| External Factors | Pressure from family (4) | X | X | X | | X | | | | | | | |
| | Legal status (1) | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| | Social class (7) | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | |
| | Race (3) | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X |

**Internal Factors**

This theme, internal factors, was formed by three subthemes of pressure from self, cultural expectations on gender, and English as a second language. Pressure from self primarily stems from the desire to excel in school. Cultural expectations on gender were reflected through the traditional men and women roles within the students’ background. While pressure from self and cultural expectations on gender hindered the students’ experiences, English as a second language reflected ways in which it both hindered and supported the first-generation students’ experiences during the transition into community college.

**Pressure from Self.** Five first-generation Latinx students expressed the pressure they placed on themselves during college due to their desire to excel in their education while delegating between their roles as students, responsibilities at work and home, and their overall dedication in school. They were dismissive of
the challenges they faced, which reflected the added pressure they placed on themselves. For example, Alisson shared:

I didn’t want to disappoint anybody. I honestly kind of feel like that’s one of the reasons I did fail a lot. I think once that changed in my head, it was easier for me to focus on my classes because it was just added pressure of I have to do great.

Alisson placed a lot of pressure on her performance in school and to meet the expectations of her family, specifically the financial support of rent she provided her mom during Alisson’s first semester. As a result of not wanting to disappoint her mom, she felt like she did not perform the best her first semester due to the pressure she placed on herself. After moving out of her house, she focused more on her classes and improved her overall performance in class.

Similarly, Marcos stated, “I think we put a lot of pressure on each other. It’s a little harder to focus. Time, class, work, school friends. There’s a lot to think about and block out when you’re working.” Marcos also felt that the pressure he placed on himself by working, going to school, and having school friends was added pressure that interfered with his focus due to the time demands each required. He understood that he had to commit a lot of time at school but was also hard on himself and demonstrated determination when he stated that no matter the challenges he confronts, he would be willing to struggle through the process to complete his degree. Other students also expressed being hard on themselves through their sense of having to perform well regardless of their school or home challenges. They were hard on themselves, which created added pressure during their first semester in college.

Cultural Expectations on Gender. Melissa, Jessica, and Jason highlighted the cultural expectations from others based on their gender. Due to their background and traditions, Melissa stated that women are supposed to stay at
home to cook and clean while men are expected to work. Going to college is not a common option for members of her family. For example, Melissa stated:

Being a Latina and a woman, I feel like, in the traditional Hispanic or Mexican household, it was kind of like, for women, a woman’s role was just like you just stay home, clean, cook, and like that’s what you do in the US … we don’t have to follow that tradition.

Since Melissa saw traditional households where the expectation for women was to stay at home and not obtain an education, she wanted to break away from this idea. Melissa mentioned that she saw some traditional households that still have the mentality of “You’re just going to go waste your time, you’re going to go waste money.” Eventually, this thought carried on to students in high school, where they began to think that if they were struggling to pass a class, what made them think they could go to college. Melissa did not want to follow this female cultural expectation and was willing to go to college regardless of the judgments from others. Similar to Melissa, Jason shared the judgment he received from his immediate family because he chose to go to college and obtain a career and did not follow in the same footsteps to work in the fields. He stated:

Most of my family, they work in the fields, and so, when they found out that I was going to college and that’s the path that I decided to go, there wasn’t a lot of excitement … more disappointed that I didn’t choose the path that they chose. It’s not even more of a path that they chose, they obviously had to go to the field because they don’t have papers to, you know, work in a better job, but I did get a lot of backlash and hate toward my path to college.

Jason received a lot of judgment based on the expectations from his family and the traditional path to work in the field that most of them selected. On the other hand, Jessica also received judgment from others due to the career she selected. Jessica spoke about the judgment she has received from others for being a Latina female working toward a criminology degree because it is a male-dominated field. She stated, “It’s very hard. I feel like a lot of men feel like if it’s a
Latina girl doing this, it’s something different, and them not taking me seriously. I feel like they look down upon me more.” Jessica felt that she is not treated with the same respect compared to the male students in criminology. Breaking away from cultural and gender expectations created preconceived judgments based on their college education decisions. Although the participants were aware of the judgments they received, they still wanted to pursue a college degree.

**English as a Second Language.** All first-generation Latinx students speak Spanish and English. English is their second language, except for four participants who grew up in a bilingual household, speaking both English and Spanish simultaneously. As a result of English as a second language, Patricia and Araceli felt that they did not establish confidence with mastering English or Spanish. For example, Patricia stated:

> Since I came here, knowing only Spanish, I always grew up thinking I would say some words wrong or not being able to structure my sentence, so I thought that was so difficult for me, like growing up and not know like the perfect English or not know perfect Spanish.

Similarly, Araceli mentioned that although she grew up learning English, she does not feel confident when speaking English due to her accent. She stated, “I feel that I am never super confident because I have an accent, and sometimes, I feel like I don’t know 100% English or even 100% Spanish.” In addition, some students mentioned that they spoke a combination of English and Spanish, also known as Spanglish, at home, which hindered their experiences in college due to the expectation to speak proper English. Since they were accustomed to speaking Spanglish, they had little confidence in speaking English fluently.

On the other hand, the first-generation Latinx students highlighted ways in which English as a second language became an advantage due to speaking both English and Spanish. Angela spoke about the advantages of being bilingual and
stated, “I feel like there’s a lot of students that don’t speak another language … it’s helped me in my personal life, and it’s definitely going to help me out at work.” Angela feels that being bilingual has helped her in her personal life and will help her with future work opportunities. Patricia also mentioned, “I think the whole being bilingual is unique because that gives us more of a chance to get into the job.” Although English as a second language hindered their experience due to confidence to dominate English and Spanish, students felt that English as a second language supported their experience due to their understanding of employment opportunities within their careers.

**External Factors**

This theme, external factors, was created based on four subthemes of pressure from family, legal status, social class, and race. Legal status, social class, and race reflected ways in which the first-generation Latinx student experiences were hindered during the transition into community college.

**Pressure from Family.** Four first-generation Latinx students expressed feeling pressure from their family due to their expectations. Based on the pressure from family, the students felt like they were under a microscope and were afraid to make mistakes. Alisson mentioned that since she is the first one in her family to attend college, she experienced high expectations from her family members, which created pressure. There was a sense of expectation that the students took seriously that made them feel pressured to know everything. Alisson stated:

I had so much expectations from family members … my mom, my brother, and my sister, my cousins, my uncles, my aunt, like they expect so much from me, but nobody was really telling me how to get to where I needed to go. I was just told you need to do great things right, but nobody was showing me how to get there.
The expectation from family to do well in school while learning about college and being the first to attend college created pressure for the students. Similarly, Jessica stated, “It was a lot of pressure, to be honest. Every time my parents would ask me, you know, how I’m doing in school, how is it going sometimes I just, I didn’t know how to respond.” The expectation to do well in school and to know exactly what to do while adapting to the changes created pressure for Jessica as she transitioned into community college. When her parents checked in with her progress in school, a lot was going through her mind, and she did not want to let them down.

The pressure from family made students feel afraid to make mistakes and feel like they were always being watched. For example, Alberto mentioned, “Everybody was looking at me, like, saying like, ‘Oh, you gotta do this,’ you know, ‘You’re gonna go to college, you’re going to do this, you’re going to do that’ … just looking around and all eyes on me.” As a result of being the first one in his family to attend college, he felt he was always being watched and was afraid to make mistakes. Given the excitement of college and the sense of hope for a better future, the students did not want to let their families down by failing a class or dropping out of college. They felt pressured to do well in school and not make a mistake.

**Legal Status.** Patricia briefly shared her background and legal status. She was born in Mexico and was eligible for DACA resources within community college. As a DACA student, she continually feels uncertain due to the changing political system and laws, which can impact her educational plans. She feels grateful for the opportunity to continue college because she did not plan to go to college when she was in high school. When she found out about DACA, she proceeded with her plans to go to college without hesitation. Patricia highlighted,
“I’m lucky enough to have DACA because it gives me an opportunity to go to college, and I wanted to take advantage of it.” However, she also shared her experiences going through the process to become DACA eligible:

The whole fact that I had to get DACA was different … I can’t get as much money as other students. I couldn’t really get like the resources when I first had to apply to college. It took more steps for them to identify me and having to go through the ID [identification] process and making sure I went to high school all those years…

Patricia learned that the transition into college was going to be different for her and that she was not eligible for as much financial aid compared to other students. She also highlighted the uncertainty she felt when Donald Trump was elected president because she thought she was not going to be able to continue her college education plans and mentioned, “I really thought that he was going to take it away, and I was just gonna have to end up working in any other job that these people pay like under the table.” Her legal status hindered her experiences due to the ongoing uncertainties within her college education. Although she feels lucky to be able to go to college, she continues to feel uncertain about the future.

**Social Class.** Social class hinders the first-generation Latinx students’ experiences during the transition into community college. This subtheme was mentioned by seven students and was reflective through their financial need and need to work while going to school. Their social class created challenges because students struggled with finding a balance between school and work given the added responsibilities during a time when they were adjusting to community college and learning how to organize their class schedules. Alisson acknowledges her background as a Latina and mentioned, “Our families tend to not really have money, or they struggle a lot to pay their bills.” Given her background and financial need, she was aware that she had to get a job while in college. Alisson acknowledged the limitations she had once she began to work and mentioned that
there was not enough time in her day for school. In addition, while keeping her work schedule in mind, Jessica shared that she had to take night classes because she worked in the mornings and afternoons. Similarly, Melissa expressed the need to plan out her course schedule carefully for her school and work schedule.

Furthermore, due to Jason’s unique background and financial need as a result of his social class, there was a time when he considered having two jobs and even dropping out of college. He stated:

I was almost homeless once and that was right in between the first three or four months that I was already in college … I either get another job or drop my classes and get, you know, a full-time job so that I can pay my bills.

The added financial demands made Jason think about the need to obtain a full-time job or drop out of college. Their social class required these students to become employed due to financial needs. However, this limited the students’ ability to solely focus on their education due to their need to work and arrange their schedule around work, creating limitations when some courses were available.

Race. A few students highlighted their race as an intersecting social identity that hindered their experience in college, which was evident through experiences of racial isolation in class and hesitancy within their selected major. For example, David stated, “I feel like I stood out all the time. I think a lot of it is because I’ve noticed that, even in my classes, my major is not very brown, for lack of a better term.” He mentioned that there were not many Latinx students who shared the same ethnic background as him or looked like him. Similarly, Melissa shared some hesitancy based on the major she selected because there were not many students within the same race or ethnicity as her:

Sometimes I felt like, oh, maybe this is not the profession I should go into because there was like a vast majority of like Caucasian or like Arab or
Asian. I was one of the very few Latinos that were in there, so I kind of felt like out of place, and I was like, dang, do I really belong here.

Since she did not see many Latinx students in her major, she questioned if that was the right major for her. Although some students questioned their major due to their race or ethnicity, students like Jason demonstrated some motivation to continue their career plans due to their race or ethnicity. For example, Jason shared that his identity as a Hispanic gave him the support to strive for change. His identity sparked some motivation to improve himself, especially after having experience working in the field. Although race created some motivation toward the first-generation Latinx students’ overall education, the students’ race also made them question their major and career choice.

Overall, pressure from family, legal status, social class, and race were external factors that hindered the first-generation Latinx students’ experiences because it interfered with their ability to focus in school due to family expectations, uncertainties in their education, social-economic status, and racial isolation in class as a result of their identity.

**Career Decisions Based on Their Experiences**

An emphasis was placed on factors that contributed to career choice, while career needs was also a theme that emerged to answer the second subquestions of career decisions based on the first-generation Latinx students’ experiences. Table 6 provides a list of themes and subthemes highlighting the first-generation Latinx student participants’ career decisions based on their experiences. A total of two themes and seven subthemes were related to this section. As a reminder, the number within the parenthesis after each subtheme indicates how many times each subtheme came up within the148 significant statements. Four subthemes identified factors that contributed to career choice: conversations with college instructors,
conversations with mom, background and personal experiences, and careers with financial stability. Career needs consisted of three subthemes: internship opportunities, connecting with professionals in the field, and career resources for selected majors. In the following section, the themes and subthemes will be discussed based on the findings.

Table 6

First-Generation Latinx Students’ Career Decision-Making Process and Their Career Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Question B: How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors that contributed to career choice</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with college instructors (6)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with mom (5)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background &amp; personal experiences (8)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers with financial stability (6)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career needs</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships opportunities (5)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with professionals in the field (5)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career resources for selected major (4)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors That Contributed to Career Choice

Selecting a major and career choice is a decision-making process that requires much guidance, support, and resources prior to making the final decision. The first-generation Latinx students mentioned that conversations with their mom at home and their college instructors in class were some of the main factors that triggered a career shift for them. Their backgrounds and personal experiences were also factors that contributed to their career choices in addition to selecting careers with financial stability. Students also expressed a preference for careers that would provide financial stability.

Conversations with College Instructors. Six students spoke about the value in their conversations with a college instructor, which inspired them to choose the career they selected and provided them with more certainty about their career
choices. Due to the college instructor’s knowledge in the field and background, the instructor provided real-life examples of the career path. For example, David shared how his communications professor influenced him to change his career from psychology into communications after having a conversation with his communication instructor:

I was talking to my communication professor … he told me that I could get the best of both worlds with communication because there’s elements of psychology and there’s some elements of business … ultimately, I chose this degree because I realized that there’s a lot you can do with this degree.

Having the conversation with his communications professor provided David with the ability to have a conversation that helped obtain more career information and clarity on the career opportunities he would have available based on his career choice. He realized that there is more job security due to the opportunities available for communication majors and careers in public relations. Alberto shared a similar experience with his Chicano Latino Studies instructor and shared how the conversations inspired him to become a college instructor. Alberto was able to see himself doing similar things as his college instructor and felt like his instructor’s background related to his background. Alberto stated, “I talked a lot to the professor and what he does, and you know why he wants to do it. I guess [he] inspired me to do it too … Like what he knew, his life experiences, and what we learned in class.” His career choice was influenced by conversations with his Chicano Latino Studies instructor because he saw himself as a Chicano Latino Studies instructor and felt inspired.

Furthermore, Jessica mentioned that although she felt she did not receive much career guidance, her interest in criminology increased after taking a criminology course:

Juvenile delinquency was one of the classes that I did take my first year of college, and that was the one class that stood out to me … my professor
talked about her career path in juvenile and as a teacher in high school too, and that’s when I was like, oh, wow, I can make a difference too like teaching in high school and teach juvenile … she would always bring up previous stories from her life and her experiences as a college student and made me feel like, wow, she did that so I am able to do this too.

She was guided by her general interest in criminology and was able to target her main area of interest based on the stories that her juvenile delinquency college instructor shared. The realistic examples her college instructor shared with the class inspired and motivated Jessica to continue her career goals.

**Conversations with Mom.** Five students highlighted the career guidance they received through the conversations with their mom, which helped them during the career decision-making process. Patricia spoke about the value of having conversations with her mom, which contributed to her career choice. Since she was uncertain about her career choice, her mom highlighted different qualities within Patricia’s personality and aligned this to a career field that involved working with children. She shared, “It has to do with my mom … she was like, ‘You work really well with little kids, and you have the patience to work with them, and you just have like the whole package.’” The conversations with her mom were very influential in her career choice and the alignment to her personality and experiences. Since Patricia had experience working with children as a tutor and being the oldest sibling, Patricia and her mom agreed that a career in the education field was suitable for her.

Similarly, David exclaimed that his mom played an important role in his career decision. His mom also provided David with career guidance by linking his personality to his career interests. David mentioned:

So when I told my mom, I was doing communication, she was like, ‘That’s a perfect fit for you because you’ve learned to adapt to your environment, you’ve learned how to talk and approach certain people, you’ve learn what
to say and what not to say, you’re a communicator. Communication is your calling.

The conversation with his mom gave him more confidence in his career choice. Having that validation from his mom was important because she is someone who knows him the most.

Alberto’s mom also played an important role in his career decision. Having a conversation with his mom helped Alberto realize there was not much job or financial security in his initial career interest as a musician. He stated that his major was initially a guitar major and received most of the support from friends, not his mom. He stated, “She was like, okay, like yeah, that’s cool, but still to this day, says what money are you going to make by playing an instrument. So that when I started to question my future.” His mom played an important role in his decision-making process by providing him with the opportunity to reflect on realistic career goals.

**Background and Personal Experiences.** Eight students were able to highlight different ways in which their background and personal experiences contributed to their career choices. Their experiences, such as growing up translating for parents in doctors’ appointments, living in the social work system, working in the education field, and feeling confused about their current major, led to their current career choices. For example, due to not knowing what career choice to pursue and changing her major twice, Angela decided to take matters into her own hands and research careers on her own, as well as take free, mini-career assessments. By taking these steps, Angela was able to identify a career interest and make a career choice:

At first, I didn’t really know what it was, but then I did a little bit more research … I saw that it has to do with a lot of numbers, and like organization, and I was just like, oh my gosh, like I love numbers, I love organizing, so, then that’s when I took two classes that were accounting,
and I loved it, I absolutely loved it. Now I feel like that is going to be the right path.

Angela learned more about careers in accounting and align her career interests with the type of work accountants do. In addition, after taking a few accounting courses, that is when she realized she would pursue a career in accounting.

Araceli shared her experiences growing up as a translator for her parents during doctors’ appointments and being the person to schedule their appointments for them. Whether they were at the grocery stores or the doctor’s office, she always found herself being the designated translator. She eventually realizes that she enjoyed helping her parents, especially after finding herself translating for other Spanish speakers when they needed help. She stated, “I thought about Spanish because I already speak Spanish … I like helping other people … So, once I looked more into it, I decided I want to be a Spanish translator to help others with their paperwork.” Having experience with translating for others in the medical setting provided Araceli with more reassurance about her career path.

Similarly, Alisson highlighted her experiences working as a tutor within the afterschool programs. Although at the time, she only took the job as a tutor due to financial need, she realized how much she enjoyed working with kids, which contributed to her career choice as a teacher.

Jason described how his background and experiences within the foster care system influenced his career choice. He stated, “It’s mostly from my background … being a social worker is something that has just been like stuck in my head.” He feels strong ties with his major and career goals due to his background and experiences living with foster care families. Being in foster care and having familiarity and lived experiences as a young kid, he wants to be a social worker and believes he will find it fulfilling.
Last, Marcos spoke about growing up and not seeing many Latinos follow the business pathway, which was an area of interest for him. However, he mentioned that his identity encouraged him to pursue a degree in business to inspire other Latinos and prove to others that skin color does not determine who is entitled to specific positions. He stated, “I know someone in the future is going to look up and see that I am a Mexican in a suit. So, I feel that my Latino background played an important role in my career decision.” After changing his major a few times, he realized he would continue to work toward a business career and inspire other Latinos.

**Careers with Financial Stability.** Selecting a career with financial stability was reflected across six participants. Stability in choosing a career that they enjoyed and a career with a good salary was important. For example, Marcos shared his interest in philosophy; however, after reflecting on the opportunities for someone with a philosophy major, he realized that he would be limited and not make a lot of money. He mentioned, “It wasn’t an easy process, because you want to find a balance between something you want to do with something that’s going to pay … salaries and opportunities and job availability were huge factors in my career decision.” Although he wanted to choose a career that he enjoys, he also considered the financial outlook of his career interest, which contributed to his career choice.

Their social-economic status and desire for financial stability were also reflected as the participants selected a career. Alisson disclosed the reasoning behind her career choice and stated, “I have struggled so much with money, my life schedule, and I really just want stability. I know that with my English major, as a teacher, I can do a lot like help others, make good money, and have more stability.” Her career selection gives her satisfaction because she likes to help
others and knows that she will be able to make a difference as a teacher while also having overall stability with her finances and in her life. Similarly, Angela disclosed:

So, we’ve always been a low-income family. So, after researching and seeing that in accounting you could make a lot of money in that field, that’s also something that has helped me pursue that major even more because I want to be able to help my family.

Choosing a career with a promising future and financial stability became more motivating because it would allow her to help her parents and make more money. Coming from a low-income family increased her interest in a career that would offer financial stability.

Overall, conversations with college instructors, conversations with their mom, their backgrounds, personal experiences, and selecting careers with financial stability were the main factors that contributed to the career choices of first-generation Latinx students.

**Career Needs**

This theme was formed based on the following subthemes: internship opportunities, connecting with professionals in the field, and career resources for selected majors. Some career needs that students expressed were the need for more internship opportunities, the desire to connect with professionals within their selected career field, and more career resources that could help increase knowledge on opportunities within their career.

**Internship Opportunities.** Four students mentioned internship opportunities as a career need that will help increase their experiences and knowledge. For example, Angela shared her desire for more hands-on opportunities to provide her with real-life experiences and increase familiarity in further detail within her selected career choice. She stated, “Something that would be definitely helpful
would be if I was to get an internship so I can really have a more hands-on feel on my career choice.” She felt that internship opportunities would provide real hands-on experience and help increase more knowledge within her career choice. Similarly, David feels that internship programs or programs in general that provide students with the ability to connect with other professionals in the field would be helpful. He mentioned that he would like to have more opportunities to obtain hands-on experiences in his degree. He would find it helpful if there were programs that connected students to professionals within their major or career fields to gain more knowledge of their selected pathways. Four first-generation Latinx students highlighted paid internship programs and general internship opportunities to increase background knowledge of careers. Melissa stated:

I think if there’s like paid internships, possibly like during the summer, that would be pretty cool. Just getting more hands-on experience, even doing just internships, you make connections, and then that’s how you go形成 the network and then those people know more people, and those people can help you to get where you need to.

Not only do internship opportunities help students increase their knowledge and background, but internships also increase their social networks with professionals in their field of interest, which could eventually open up opportunities.

Connect with Professionals in the Field. Having the opportunity to connect with professionals within their career interests was reflected among five first-generation Latinx student participants. Similar to internship opportunities, students primarily mentioned that connecting with professionals in the field would allow them to obtain more information on what to do within their career, learn about opportunities available in the field, learn about the challenges in the field, and increase their networks. For example, Nancy shared:

Speaking to someone that is already a Spanish translator, I feel that would be most helpful … I feel that if I talk to a person that has already done that
work would help me be a Spanish translator like working at an office or a school and know what’s best for me or what works.

Being able to connect with a professional within the career they aspire to and have the opportunity to ask questions and recommendations is valuable information that Nancy felt would help guide her career goals as she progresses through her career choice as a Spanish translator. Similarly, Jason shared that he would find it helpful if he had the opportunity to connect with a social worker to learn more about their experiences in the field and obtain more insight into the challenges they confront. Additionally, Marcos mentioned his desire for networking events where he could connect with business professionals within his selected career choice. Marcos highlighted that networking would allow him to apply his social skills toward his field through networking.

**Career Resources for Selected Careers.** Last, four students highlighted a desire to have more career resources toward their career option to understand their career field better. For example, Jessica shared the need for more career resources. She stated:

So, I feel some career sources that would help would be more as in someone who explained to me more in detail what criminology is or the major that I would study in. I feel like someone saying, well, this is going to happen, are you willing to study this many more years of school plus another year if you want to get paid more.

She would like someone to explain the program length and the opportunities within each level of higher education in her selected major to learn what type of employment opportunities she can have with her associate’s degree. In addition, Jessica mentioned that she would like to know if she is required to obtain a bachelor’s degree or look into graduate school. Alberto shared the desire for more career resources. He stated, “More information on knowing what you’re getting into. Like just like more elaboration.” He mentioned he would like general
career resources to understand his career options and the opportunities his major entails.

Overall, students expressed a desire to obtain more career knowledge through opportunities available within their selected careers. Their desire to understand their career at a deeper level and to connect with professionals in the field was reflected through the career needs they expressed.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the main themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews with first-generation Latinx community college student participants and within the data analysis process. The main themes that emerged were the following: (a) initial guidance and support, (b) precollege feelings, (c) what they wished they would have known (d) reasons for selecting a community college, (e) student support services, (f) postcollege feelings, (g) challenges in college, (h) reasons for pursuing a college degree, (i) internal factors, (j) external factors, (k) factors that contributed to career choices, and (l) career needs. The subthemes were elaborated in more detail within each theme. Quotes were taken from the transcribed participant interviews to provide examples within each theme. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the results, the theoretical framework, and the study’s limitations.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the interpretation of this study’s findings. The problem under investigation in this study was the disparities in degree attainment among students of various races and ethnicities within California community colleges. The degree attainment of Latinx students within California community colleges continues to be low compared to other races and ethnicities (American Council on Education, 2017). Since most Latinx students are first-generation, more research that focuses on the experiences of this student population as they transition into community college is needed. The literature review of this study highlighted the importance of the first-year experiences, given that most students drop out within their first year in college (Mertes, 2013). The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students as they transitioned into community college. This study focused on how the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx students supported or hindered their experiences as they transition into community college and how they make career decisions based on their experiences.

Although some studies have highlighted intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx students, there is a need for more research that engages intersectionality in higher education to understand the disadvantages in the students’ academic and career advancement due to their background, family support, and college and career readiness (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Duran & Jones, 2019; Nichols & Stahl, 2019). This research examined how intersectionality shaped the experiences and career decisions of first-generation Latinx community college students as they transitioned into community college. This research also aimed to address the disadvantages and ways in which the first-generation Latinx
students’ intersection of race and class reflected within their experiences transitioning into community college and differed from their more advantaged, non-first-generation peers (Excelencia in Education, n.d.).

The themes and subthemes that were developed from this study created an increased understanding of the central research question: How do first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences during the transition into community college? This research also aimed to increase an understanding of two subquestions: (a) How do their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences? and (b) How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?

By drawing from the first-generation Latinx students’ own descriptions of their experiences, there were a total of 41 subthemes (see Table 4) that led to the development of 12 emergent themes to understand better the experiences of first-generation Latinx students. The 12 emergent themes were organized by the research questions. For example, to understand the experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college, themes were divided into precollege transition and postcollege transition. Within the precollege transition, four themes of initial guidance and support, precollege feelings, what they wish they would have known, and reasons for selecting community college emerged. The postcollege transition has four themes: student support services, postcollege feelings, challenges in college, and reasons for pursuing a college degree. To answer subquestion A, how their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences, two emergent themes of internal and external factors emerged. Last, to answer subquestion B, how they make their career decisions based on their experiences, two themes of factors that contributed to career choice
and career needs emerged. This chapter includes interpretation of findings, implications, limitations, future directions, and conclusions.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

To interpret the findings of this study, I will discuss how the results coincided with the literature review presented in Chapter 2 of this study. In “Mapping the Margins,” Crenshaw (1991) identified structural, political, and representational forms of intersectional analysis. The findings are interpreted through the lens of structural intersectionality, which focuses on the specific experiences of individuals by taking into account overlapping structures that subordinate and marginalize the experiences at the intersection of multiple social constructs of identities (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Crenshaw 1991). Here, I discuss the ways in which the location of first-generation Latinx students, at the intersection of race and class, makes their actual experience of the transition into community college different than non-first-generation students. The literature review and intersection of race and class confirmed the disadvantages that students confront during the transition into community college and show how these influenced the career decisions of this student population. The interpretation of findings will be discussed.

**Central Research Question**

The central research question guided this study. During the precollege transition, the findings align with the literature because the study participants show that these students received initial guidance and support from the following: high school teachers and counselors, college representatives and counselors, and family members. The literature provided evidence of the value of high school and college counselors’ roles, which is crucial during the transition into college to help
increase the overall college and career readiness among this student population (Tello & Lonn, 2017). In addition, a large qualitative study by Perez and McDonough (2008) found that Latinx high school students heavily rely on family members, peers, and school personnel for the college planning process. As a result of being the first in their family to attend college, family members are not able to provide resourceful guidance that would help with the college preparation process. However, family members provided emotional support during the precollege transition. Literature confirms how family engagement is pertinent to increase first-generation Latinx student success because they provide emotional and motivational support (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Participants mentioned that their family, primarily their parents, provided support with transportation, encouragement, and motivation.

However, due to being underprepared and little familiarity with the college culture, the participants mentioned a wide mixture of negative feelings. Some precollege transition feelings that the first-generation Latinx student mentioned were scared, anxious, nervous, and overwhelmed. The precollege experiences provide first-generation Latinx students with uneasy feelings, which supports the findings of previous researchers. For example, Clayton et al. (2019), Inman and Mayes (1999), and Perna (2013) highlighted how low-income, first-generation Latinx students are less likely to be academically prepared, have fewer financial resources, and experience culture shock. This is reflected when students mentioned that they felt scared because they thought that there was not going to be someone they could ask for help, which demonstrates their little knowledge of campus resources. Other students felt nervous about their ability to pass college-level courses or anxiety triggered by the college culture. Participants also expressed feeling overwhelmed due to the little preparation they had before the
transition into college, in addition to the financial expenses. As a result of their college preparedness, areas that the first-generation Latinx student participants expressed they would have liked to know or had been better prepared for prior to transitioning into community college were financial budgeting, academic courses and registration, and college supplies required. The students’ desired to understand prerequisites courses and general education courses based on their major. This aligns with Nomi’s (2005) study, which noted that first-generation Latinx students register for courses that create delays in their graduation goals due to course unclarity. Although financial budgeting and college supplies essential in college are not specifically represented in the literature review, these study findings extend to the existing literature to help increase an understanding of specific needs that first-generation Latinx students desire to know prior to transitioning into community college. These areas become essential components that can help advance the college readiness for this student population.

The first-generation Latinx student participants shared their reasons for selecting community college, which was due to community college being the most affordable option and a pathway into a 4-year institution. Findings from this study are consistent with the literature review because the study participants mentioned they selected community college due to financial limitations, to save money, to take more classes for less money, and to use community college as a stepping-stone to transfer into a 4-year institution eventually. This aligns with the literature study from Clayton et al. (2019), which found that first-generation Latinx community college students enroll in community college due to affordability and an option that guarantees admissions. In addition, Clayton et al. (2019) confirmed that the college choice of the Latinx student populations is influenced by academic achievement and social-economic status.
As a result of patterns of financial need and college readiness during the postcollege transition, the first-generation Latinx student participants highlighted the following student support services: financial aid, EOPS, the Dream Center, and tutorial services as institutional services they sought out for student support and resources. Based on their needs and as a result of constructs from their intersecting social identities, such as social class, first-generation, legal status, and homelessness, the study participants leveraged the student support services available within their community college for additional support. The first-generation Latinx student participants also expressed the value of the resources, guidance, and support they received. Means and Pyne (2017) confirmed that institutional support, social identity-based student programs, and academic support services enhanced first-generation Latinx students’ sense of belonging and overall experiences during their first year in college. Some participants specifically stated that college would not have been feasible without the services and resources they received from the supportive services mentioned, which all played an important role in their academic success.

Postcollege feelings that participants mentioned were feelings of confusion and being overwhelmed. Upon the transition into community college, students remained confused by their inability to identify their academic adviser, did not understand what courses to register for the following semester and felt overwhelmed due to college course demands. The first-generation Latinx student participants expressed unique challenges primarily related to adjusting to college courses, transportation, and finding a balance between school and work. Perna (2013) highlighted the low-income, first-generation Latinx students and college access issues that make this student population less academically prepared for the transition into college. Furthermore, literature confirmed this study’s findings,
which were reflective of the first-generation Latinx students’ belief in their ability to work long shifts and balance a loaded course schedule (Cunningham et al., 2012; Inman & Mayes, 1999).

During the transition into college, first-generation Latinx student participants also experienced many changes that required adaptation within their environment. The study participants expressed feeling stressed when they identified challenges adjusting to college courses as a result of the workload and time required for each course outside of class. The challenges especially stood out for those student participants that had a job. For example, first-generation Latinx students that had to work during their first year in college highlighted the complexity of their schedules and time constraints due to transportation as an area that created more barriers for them because they depended on course availability, their work schedule, and their parents’ work time and availability for transportation. Based on their need to pay for rent or tuition, help their parents, or cover college expenses increased their financial barrier challenges in finding a balance between school and work. This made it difficult to align their work schedules to course availability and vice versa while also making sure to carve out time to complete assignments and study for tests. As a result of their busy schedules with school, work, and time constraints, they were less involved in campus activities (Strayhorn, 2018).

The first-generation Latinx student participants mentioned that pursuing a college degree was to prove themselves to others and for social-economic change. Although most students pursue a degree in higher education to obtain a career or advance in their current career, some factors unique to first-generation Latinx students from this study are believing they have to prove themselves to others, primarily their parents. One student mentioned he wanted to prove himself to his
boss; however, most students mentioned the desire to prove to their parents that their efforts, sacrifices, and hard work were worth it and paid off. Additionally, as a result of coming from a low-income, working-class background, they see college as an opportunity to change their social-economic status through the opportunities that their education will provide. Although not much research specifically highlights reasons why first-generation Latinx students pursue a college degree, these study’s findings extend to the existing literature to help increase an understanding of why this student population pursues a college degree.

**Subquestion A**

Seven subthemes of pressure from self, cultural expectations on gender, English as a second language, pressure from family, legal status, social class, and race were categorized into two main themes of internal and external factors. These themes resulted from conducting this study and in response to subquestion A. Figure 3 is an intersectional perspective of first-generation Latinx community college students, which attempts to provide a visual representation of the study’s findings to demonstrate ways in which the micro, meso, and macro social constructs intersect with each other based on the intersecting social identities of first-generation Latinx students. These micro and macro levels were evident in the social contexts within the meso level of the first-generation Latinx students’ intersecting identities that hindered their experiences in community college. This figure depicts how the intersecting social identities of the first-generation Latinx student participants interact at its core and influences the students’ overall experiences like a ripple effect in the water.
The core of the first-generation Latinx student’s identity shows the micro level, or personal influences, such as first-generation status, age, English learner, race or ethnicity, national origin, and gender. The meso, or social norms, of appearance, culture, social class, legal status, career interests, and experiences are represented in this level. At the macro level, or institutional constructs, is the educational system instructors, counselors, and support services such as the Dream Center, EOPS, financial aid, Cal grants, and tutorial services. Corlett and Marvin
(2014) examined how multiple social identities intersect at the micro level of experiences and result in social inequalities at the macro-structural level. Castro and Cortez (2017) also highlighted the complexity of intersectionality of identity and experiences among students due to the range of multilayered experiences in higher education. When students were asked to talk about their experiences as first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college, the students emphasized aspects of their identity, such as social class, cultural expectations based on their gender, and linguistic barriers.

Internal factors, such as pressure from self and cultural expectations on gender that the first-generation Latinx student participants mentioned, hindered their overall experiences in community college. Since the student participants are the first in their family to attend college, they were very hard on themselves and were afraid to make mistakes because they did not want to let their parents down. The first-generation Latinx student participants also experienced judgments based on their gender and cultural expectations because they went against the gender norms on traditional gender roles and decided to pursue a degree in higher education. English as a second language was also mentioned; however, it hindered their overall experiences due to their confidence level speaking English, and supported their overall experiences because they highlighted that being bilingual was an advantage within their current job and will help them in future employment opportunities. First-generation Latinx student characteristics to consider during the transition into community college are their cultural background and social-economic status because these impact the overall college experiences of this student population (Cunningham et al., 2012; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999). In this study of first-generation Latinx student experiences during their transition into community college, the pressure that first-generation Latinx
students placed on themselves stemmed from their desire to succeed in school and prove to their parents that their hard work and sacrifices paid off. The cultural expectations reflected their families’ cultural viewpoints on gender roles, such as women are homemakers and traditionally stay at home to care for their family, while men are the breadwinners and have to work. Although English as a second language was not specifically represented in the literature review, these study findings extend to the existing literature to help increase an understanding of ways in which being bilingual supported and hindered the overall students’ experiences of this student population.

The intersecting social identities that were reflective through the external factors and hindered the experiences of this student population were pressure from family, legal status, social class, and race. As a result of being the first one in the family to attend college, the participants expressed feeling pressured by their family. Based on the pressure from family, the study participants felt like they were under a microscope and were afraid to make mistakes. For one student, social and political events made her feel uncertain about her educational decisions and opportunities as a result of her legal status. The first-generation Latinx students’ low-income and working-class was evident in their financial concerns they expressed throughout this study. Scanlan (2019) highlighted the need for more emphasis on the intersecting social identities of first-generation college students during their college experience. These intersecting identities impact the students’ experiences and opportunities because their intersecting social identities interact with each other and create disadvantages and challenges in higher education (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Harlow and Bowman (2016) confirmed that first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds need to maintain a
full-time workload while attending community college, which creates disadvantages since they cannot focus solely on their education.

Some first-generation Latinx student participants also experience racial isolation in their classes due to being one of the few Latinx students within their courses. In Figure 3, although race or ethnicity is placed under the micro level, race or ethnicity also influences the meso level of the first-generation Latinx student participants’ experiences. This study’s findings reflect the literature while also reflecting the barriers confronted as a result of the intersection of race and class. Means and Pyne (2017) stated that race and ethnicity shape student experiences and mentioned that low-income and working-class students struggle more with fitting into the college culture.

**Subquestion B**

Intersectionality in higher education has been viewed as a foundation to actively challenge inequities and show how the intersection of social identities create limitations in the students’ academic and career advancement due to their background, family support, and college and career readiness (Castro & Cortez, 2017; Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Understanding the intersection of social identities of first-generation Latinx students will help increase our knowledge of social constructs that support or hinder this student population’s overall experiences and career decisions. To answer subquestion B: How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?, seven subthemes of conversations with college instructors, conversations with mom, background and personal experiences, careers with financial stability, internship opportunities, connect with professionals in the field, and career resources for the selected major were categorized into two themes of factors that contributed to career choice and career needs.
In this study, factors that contributed to the first-generation Latinx students’ career choice were conversations with college instructors, conversations with mom, background and personal experiences, and careers with financial stability. The first-generation Latinx student participants mentioned the value in conversations they had with their college instructors and their mom as factors contributing to their career choices. Their college instructors provided more insight into their career interests and either inspired or motivated the student to pursue their career choice of interest. The conversations with their moms provided the participants with more reassurance and validation on their career choice. Tate et al. (2015) supported this finding when he stated that family influences for first-generation college students are a dominant factor in their career development process. Although conversations with their college instructors were not represented in the literature review, this study’s findings extend to the existing literature to help increase an understanding of factors that contribute to the career choice of this student population.

Additionally, the first-generation Latinx students’ backgrounds and experiences also contributed to their career choice. Participants in this study mentioned diverse factors that contributed to their career choice, such as translating for parents in doctors’ appointments, living in the social work system, working in the education field, or feeling confused about their current major, which led to their current career choice. The participants also mentioned that careers with financial stability were a factor that contributed to their career choice. They desired to obtain job security through a career where they can be financially stable. Due to the first-generation Latinx students’ background, limited exposure to careers, limited parental guidance, and family can influence the career choice, which also influences their overall career development process (Harlow &
Bowman, 2016; Olson, 2014; Tate et al., 2015). Low-income, first-generation Latinx students aspire to obtain a steady and secure job where they will make a lot of money as a result of financial instabilities (Nomi, 2005). Based on the first-generation Latinx students’ background and social-economic status, the financial outlook of their selected career played an important role. Although conversations with college instructors and conversations with their moms were not specifically represented in the literature review, findings from these subthemes extend to the existing literature to help increase understanding of factors that contributed to the career choice of first-generation Latinx students.

These first-generation Latinx students’ expressed career needs are internship opportunities, the ability to connect with professionals in the field, and career resources for their selected majors. Students desire more internship opportunities where they can obtain hands-on, real-life experiences. They would also like opportunities to connect with professionals in the field for more insight and advice from someone already within the field. Having more career resources toward their career option is also a career need that the participants mentioned because they want to understand better their career field. Much literature from this study supports these findings of career needs for first-generation Latinx students as they highlighted the importance of their career development influences based on their exposure to careers, professionals in the field, and social and cultural capital, which influence how students make career decisions (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Nomi, 2015; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Tate et al., 2015). Understanding this student population helps increase an understanding of how this student population approaches the career decision-making process.

Overall, subquestions A and B were intended to provide more details from the overarching central question for more specificity on important areas of the
first-generation Latinx students to obtain a better understanding of how their intersecting identities influence their overall experience during the transition into community college and how they approach the career decision process. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) played an important role in this research because it demonstrates the importance of understanding the student’s unique needs based on their experiences stemming from the intersection of their social identities. This study responds to the need for more research on first-generation Latinx students’ experiences and needs during the transition into community college. Additionally, this study contributes to the value of career development and the need to increase knowledge on how students make career decisions. Overall, this study brings light to the social constructs of the students’ identity, their influence on their experiences, and the career development process based on the students’ experiences.

**Implications**

For this study’s implications, I highlighted four practical implications. The practical purposes of this study contributed to the first-generation Latinx community college student population and highlighted the transition into community college to help increase an overall understanding of the students’ academic and career needs during the onboarding process. The findings that resulted from this study will contribute to student-level practices, institutional practices, and programmatic practices for ways in which higher education professionals can respond to the needs and outcomes of this student population.

First, this study provides higher education professionals with critical insights on the value of increasing culturally sensitive curriculum in the classroom. Students will benefit from culturally sensitive curriculum in the classroom through rich conversations where they can see a reflection of themselves by having the
opportunity to connect with instructors that understands their background. Culturally sensitive curriculum will also help first-generation Latinx students apply relatable experiences to the content and curriculum taught in their courses. In this study, the conversations with college instructors where a power factor that contributed to the students’ career choice because it inspired and influenced the students’ career choice. It also allowed this student population to see a reflection of the instructor’s background and challenges in themselves and became encouraged to pursue their career choice. The power to connect with their instructors and share relatable experiences that the students confronted made the first-generation Latinx students feel inspired by their career choices and made their career goals more attainable. Based on the disadvantages and challenges that result at the intersection of identities, it is important for college instructors to analyze their student-centered practices for more culturally sensitive curriculum to increase student success with equity, access, and inclusion.

Second, re-evaluating current orientation practices at the programmatic level is crucial to provide students with a smooth transition into community college, where they gain knowledge on the supportive student resources, campus events, and student opportunities. This will help students understand how to leverage on-campus resources and support that is available for them. The first-generation Latinx student participants in this study expressed confusion in identifying their academic counselor, understanding the course sequence of the general education courses and major requirements, and struggled with navigating the college environment. Reevaluating the current orientation structure and implementing more clarity on student concerns will help students transition into community college and facilitate career planning.
Third, increased visibility of the career center within the community college is important to help first-generation Latinx students in their career goals. In this study, the first-generation Latinx students did not mention that community college’s career center as a sources of career support that they utilized to learn about their major, career choice, and career support available. To increase the career center visibility, higher education career counselor professionals must be more proactive in their outreach approach towards students and overall proactive in career initiatives available. This will help students understand where they can go to obtain more career exploration.

Last, a closer analysis of career initiatives is necessary to provide students with more career clarity, confidence, and direction through hands-on experiences. Since first-generation Latinx students expressed a desire for internship opportunities within their career, the ability to connect with professionals in their field of interests, and more career resources, students that understand ways in which the career center in their community college can support their career goals will be more successful in achieving their goals.

The implications for practice were based on the conclusions I drew from this study as I examined the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students during their transition into community college. This study creates an opportunity to open dialogue on the community college orientation practices and onboarding student needs of this population. The results of this study affirm previous research on the need to increase an overall understanding of first-generation Latinx students’ needs during the transition into community college.

**Limitations of the Study**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, some limitations to this study were our global pandemic, transferability of results, and role of the researcher within the
community college selected. Since all educational instruction is online due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, students were impacted in diverse ways that may have interfered with the ability to meet face-to-face for interviews. In addition, given the extent of online meetings and instructions, recruiting student participants for this study was a challenge due to their interest in a virtual interview, which added to virtual exhaustion. Also, the transferability of my results may cause some limitations due to my role and involvement as the researcher within the community college and reported similarities between the potential participants’ background and me. This could’ve influenced participants’ responses within the interviews and some biases within the data analysis. However, I maintained a reflexive journal that I utilized to reflect and bridle my preconceived assumptions and experiences after each interview to maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of this study. Due to the nature of this research study, the interpretation of results was analyzed using one theoretical lens of intersectionality. Last, the accuracy in the participants’ shared experiences was examined retrospectively given the wide range of their academic status (e.g., first semester, first year, third year, or last semester, last year). This may have interfered with the ability for the participant’s to accurately remember their experience transitioning into community college.

**Future Directions**

This study focused on the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students and their transition into community college. A focus on the students’ intersecting social identities and career decisions was examined to understand their experiences. Since first-generation Latinx students are the most diverse group among racial ethnicities within the United States, the literature in this study highlighted a need to increase awareness of marginalized student experiences and
focus on identity development and career aspirations to implement culturally responsive practices (Duran & Jones, 2019; Macias, 2013; Nunez, 2014; Olson, 2014; Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). From this study, I was able to appreciate and recognize the evolving needs of first-generation Latinx students and increase more awareness of how intersectionality shapes the experiences and career decisions while they transition into community college.

Since this study examined the experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college, by employing the conceptual framework of intersectionality, I recommend the following: 1.) to examine the experiences of first-generation Latinx student post-COVID, 2.) use a Qualitative and Quantitative student to examine the lived experiences, 3.) Consider other frameworks as a lens to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students, and 4.) conduct a longitudinal study to capture the feelings and experiences of this student population with more accuracy.

As the researcher of this study, I recommend examining the experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students post-COVID. The data collection of this study took place during the pandemic may have influenced the participant’s responses based on ways in which they were impacted by the pandemic. Therefore, the experiences of first-generation Latinx students after the pandemic may differ for those participants that experienced the transition into community college during the pandemic. Next, the use of Qualitative and Quantitative data collection methods to examine the student experiences is also recommended. Using a mixed methods approach can expand the findings by having multiple data sources available for analysis.

Additionally, considering other frameworks as a lens to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students can also expand the findings and
overall understanding of the experiences of first-generation Latinx students experiences and career choice (e.g., Critical Race Theory, Latino/a Critical Race Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory). Critical Race Theory and/or Latino/a Critical Race theory provide further understanding of the first-generation Latinx student background and experiences. Through an analytical lens of social cognitive career theory, career counseling professionals in higher education would gain in-depth knowledge that informs culturally sensitive career counseling practices. By considering the students’ academic and career interests and educational and career choices, first-generation Latinx students will achieve their academic and career goals with the correct guidance and support tailored to their needs.

Lastly, I recommend conducting a longitudinal study to capture the feelings and experiences of this student population with more accuracy. An example of a longitudinal study would be to collect data by conducting interviews with participants during their last year, last semester in high school, during the summer before community college, during their first year, first semester in community college, through their last year, last semester in community college. This would help capture the first-generation Latinx students’ feelings and experiences holistically.

This study contributes to existing literature on first-generation Latinx community college students’ experiences, intersecting social identities, and career decisions. My hope is that this study serves as a fundamental approach that highlighted areas that are critical to understand and expand on through further research on this topic. Since there are many things to consider and plan for during the college planning process, first-generation Latinx students need to be better equipped and increase their college and career readiness. By understanding the
overall lived experiences of this student population that interferes with their education, students will achieve better outcomes through innovative institutional practices that facilitate student’s college onboarding process with equity, access, and inclusion.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the major findings that emerged from the interview data. The complexity in understanding the intersecting social identities of marginalized student populations and how their career decisions are influenced were evident in this study that associated the experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college. The findings of this study increase an understanding of first-generation Latinx students’ backgrounds, intersecting identities, and career decisions as described through the lens of intersectionality, which plays an important role within student experiences. As a researcher, I valued the opportunity to connect with the participants in this study and bring their unique experiences and needs to light as they transitioned into community college. Listening to the diversity in their experiences and backgrounds allows higher education professionals to develop culturally sensitive practices, programming, and policies that honor the needs of this student population. I end with advice from a fellow first-generation Latinx student to another: “Identify your passion and establish goals. The future is in your hands, and you have the power to pave your own path toward success through an investment in your education that will last a lifetime.” - Angelica Gil
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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

**Subject Line:** Participate in research and receive a $20 GIFT CARD

Dear (Student Name),

My name is Angelica Gil, and I am an Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate at California State University, Fresno. I am recruiting first-generation Latinx student participants, who are 18 years or older, for my dissertation research study.

As a first-generation Latinx student in college, there were many challenges I confronted, and I believe that it is important to share our experiences to help higher education professionals understand the types of support first-generation Latinx students need in order to thrive in college.

The aim of the study is to understand better how first-generation Latinx students describe their experiences during the transition into community college and to understand how their career decisions are made based on their experiences.

There will be a total of two interviews held at different times with each participant. The first interview will range between 45–60 minutes. After the first interview, the participants will be invited for a second interview that will range between 30–40 minutes. All interviews will be conducted via Zoom. The first 12 participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 visa gift card upon completing both interviews.

This study is completely voluntary. If you are a first-generation Latinx student who is 18 years of age or older and would like to participate or have further questions about the study, please respond to this email (xxxxx@mail.fresnostate.edu).

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Angelica Gil, M.S.
Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate
California State University, Fresno
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Verbal Consent (if needed):
Before we get started, I will ask for your verbal consent by reading the statement within the consent form I sent to you via email. “To voluntarily agree to participate in this study, you must provide your consent. If you choose to participate in this study, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by providing verbal consent. By providing your verbal consent, you agree that you are 18 years of age or older; you have read the entire consent form, give permission to record the interview; and have had all of your questions answered.” If you agree to this, please state, “I agree.”

Script for Opening:
Thank you for taking the time to join me in a discussion about your experiences as you transitioned into community college. I have a list of questions that I will be asking you. All of the questions are open-ended, so feel free to answer however you please. There are no right or wrong answers. And just as a reminder, I am audio recording the session because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. I want to remind you that your name will not be included in any part of my dissertation, and your comments are confidential.

Opening Questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
   a. What is your major, and how far are you within your program?
   b. What are your academic goals?

Research Question 1: How do first-generation Latinx college students describe their experiences transitioning into community college?

2. What was your experience like when preparing for the transition from high school to community college?
   a. Was there anyone that what most helpful? If so, in what ways?
   b. What type of things did you have to think about when planning for college?
   c. What were your feelings? Thoughts?
3. What led you to select a community college?
   a. What were your initial thoughts about community college?
4. What were the major changes you needed to make to prepare for college?
   a. How did this change your daily routine? Your lifestyle?
5. What role did your family play during the transition into community college?
   a. Is there anything that stands out the most during the transition into community college?
6. Describe some challenges you confronted during your transition into community college.
   a. Was there anything that was most stressful for you?
7. What was most helpful as you transitioned into community college?
   a. Where did you go for help?
      i. How were you connected with resources?
      ii. How were you connected with student support services?
8. Is there anything you wish you would’ve known during the transition into community college? If so, how would this have helped?

**Research Question 1a: How do their intersecting social identities support or hinder their experiences?**

9. I’d like for you to tell me about your experience as a first-generation college student.
   a. What is unique about being a first-generation college student?
   b. What are some of the challenges that you experience as a first-generation college student?
10. As a result of being a first-generation college student, describe some of the rewards or benefits.
    a. How were these beneficial or rewarding?
11. Tell me about your experience as a Latinx (o/a) student transferring into a community college.
    a. What was unique about being Latinx?
    b. What are some of the challenges that you experience as a Latinx (o/a) student?
12. As a result of being Latinx (o/a), describe some of the rewards or benefits.
    a. How were these beneficial or rewarding?
13. Overall, is there anything that stands out about being a first-generation Latinx student as you navigate the transition into a community college?
    a. Did you experience any differential treatment as a result of being a first-generation Latinx student?

**Research Question 1b: How do they make career decisions based on their experiences?**

14. Describe your experience with the career decision-making that you took to select your major.
    a. What kind of guidance or support did you receive when selecting your major? School and home during the transition into community college?
    b. How did you decide what major was the right one for you?
15. What contributed or led you to your career choice?
a. What kinds of things did you consider during the career decision-making process?
   b. What was most helpful during the career decision-making process?

16. How did your experiences help you make a career decision?
   a. What was most helpful?

17. In what ways has your first-generation Latinx (o/a) background supported your career choice?
   a. As a result of being a first-generation Latinx student, is there anything that influenced you to make your career choice?

18. In what ways has your first-generation Latinx background challenged your career choice?
   a. Is there anything that has discouraged you from making that career decision?

19. Describe your needs related to your selected career?
   a. What kind of support do you feel would be most helpful?
   b. What kinds of career-related resources do you feel would be most helpful?

20. What actions have you taken to better prepare yourself to achieve your career goals?
   a. What kind of changes have you had to make?
   b. How do you feel about your selected career?
   c. Where would you go for career support and resources?

*Interview questions are tentative.*
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

**Title of the Study:** Understanding the Experiences of First-Generation Latinx Students During the Transition into Community College

**Principle Investigator:** Mariya Yukhymenko, Ph.D.
**Student Investigator:** Angelica Gil, M.S., Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate

Angelica Gil is currently working toward a Doctorate in the Education Leadership Program under the supervision of Dr. Mariya Yukhymenko.

**Study Description:** The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of first-generation Latinx students during the transition into community college to understand how the realities of race, gender, sexuality, and social class support or hinder the transition into community college and how their overall experiences support or hinder their career decision-making process.

Upon obtaining consent, you will be asked to participate in two virtual interviews via Zoom, where you will be asked a series of questions by Angelica Gil, Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate. The first interview will take approximately 45–60 minutes of your time. After completing the first interview, a day and time will be set for a second interview. The second interview will range between 30–40 minutes. Both interviews will be recorded.

**Risks or Benefits:** Risks that you may experience from participating in this study are considered minimal. Your participation will help higher education professionals learn valuable information about the experiences of first-generation Latinx community college students.

**Confidentiality:** All information collected from you is completely confidential, and participants will not be identified. The primary student investigator will be the only one transcribing the recorded interviews to protect the participant’s identity. Interview recordings will be saved and stored to protect the identity of participants. No names will be revealed at any time. Pseudonyms will be utilized. All audio and video recordings will be de-identified upon transcription. All data from this study will be saved on a password-protected computer and deleted within five years after the study. Only the student investigator will have access to the information.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. You are free not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with California State University, Fresno.
About the Study: For more information about the study or study procedures, contact Angelica Gil, M.S. at xxxx@mail.fresnostate.edu. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Dr. Jennifer Randles, IRB Chair, CSU Fresno, at xxxx@csufresno.edu or (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Research Participant’s Consent to Participate in the Research
To voluntarily agree to participate in this study, you must sign below. If you choose to participate in this study, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older; you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits; given permission to record the interview; and have had all of your questions answered.

________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant __________________________ Date

Principle Investigator
I have given this research participant information about the study that is accurate and sufficient for the participant to fully understand the nature, risks, and benefits of the study.

________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name (Principle Investigator/Student Investigator)

________________________________________________________________________
Signature (Principle Investigator/Student Investigator) __________________________ Date
Fresno State

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