The First-Generation Student Transition Experience into the Working World

A Senior Honors Thesis

By

Samantha Buresch
School of Education and Social Policy
Northwestern University

Mesmin Destin
Primary Advisor
Associate Professor
School of Education and Social Policy
Northwestern University

Simone Ispa - Landa
Second Reader
Assistant Professor
School of Education and Social Policy
Northwestern University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

In the realms of higher education, the term "first-generation" is a buzzword and many universities pride themselves on the amount of first-generation students that inhabit their campuses. Broadly, first-generation college students are students whose parents did not attend nor graduate from a 4-year institution. First-generation students face unique challenges when compared to their continuing-generation peers and this can sometimes stem from a cultural mismatch. While there is much research done on the first-generation experience transitioning to college, there exists very little research to understand the first-generation experience transitioning out of college. This is startling as it could provide insights as to why first-generation students have difficulties finding high-quality job opportunities upon graduation. My project focused on these transitional experiences for first-generation students, as informed by eight 60-minute semi-structured interviews with recent graduates from a selective, research institution who are currently working full-time near a large Midwestern city. To make sense of the interviews, I coded using grounded theory. I decided to view my participants' words as parts to their stories with the purpose of showcasing their narratives and what it means to be a first-generation college student. My data provided insights to confirm a cultural mismatch between the values of first-generation individuals and the values of their university and workplaces. There also existed and currently exists strong knowledge gaps between the individuals and their institutions. Nonetheless, the alumni were motivated by their collective purpose and were supported by their communities, many of which were identity based. Additionally, their narratives shared they would have benefited from a stronger first-generation senior specific community. These findings can be useful for both higher education institutions and workplaces in developing inclusive strategies to best support first-generation students and alumni.

The First-Generation Student Transition Experience into the Working World

Transitions are always difficult. The transition to college is a stressful event for any adolescent leaving 18 years of familiarity. This transitional stress can be quite substantial for first-generation college students. First-generation students are students whose parents did not attend a 4-year institution; these students represent the first member of their families to attend college. First-generation students (when compared to their continuing-generation peers) score lower on measures of initial critical thinking abilities and degree aspirations, report receiving less encouragement from their family to attend college, spend less time socializing with peers, and are more likely to be devalued (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008). Additionally, these students perceive university faculty as less concerned with their well-being than continuing-generation students (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). The transitional stress does not stop once the college years begin and this stress can plague college students as they transition out of their undergraduate experiences. First-generation students may be missing the social and cultural capital needed in order to secure an internship or job after college (Oldfield, 2007). First-generation students often emphasize interdependence while higher education institutions and career organizations emphasize independence and this produces a cultural mismatch (Philips, Stephens, Townsend & Goudeau, 2016). Individuals with an independent sense of self place weight on the separateness or uniqueness while individuals with an interdependent sense of self place weight on the connectedness when describing their relationships with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Cultural mismatch theory asserts that inequality is produced when the culture in the institution does not match the culture of the underrepresented group (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson & Covarrubias, 2012).

While a plethora of research has been conducted on the first-year transition experiences of first-generation students, there is less research on first-generation students transitioning out of college. College seniors have received very little of the research spotlight as confirmed by Overton-Healy (201), in her PhD dissertation on first-generation college seniors. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze why first-generation students go to college to better understand what careers they might be interested in post-graduation. Socialization and family influences in childhood and young adulthood may affect the decisions that individuals make later in life. Family-of-origins and experiences have a profound impact on one's career development (Tate et al., 2015). Many first-generation students may not know their career possibilities as they may not have been exposed to as many careers growing up. Ayala and Striplen (2002) found that first-generation students tended to have limited career awareness and their motivation to enroll in college was driven by their desire to improve their social and economic standings. College is the key factor that many of these students see as their bridge to bring them to a better life standing. Hence, an important supportive role of higher education institutions involves aiding first-generation students as they transition from an undergraduate student to a college-educated individual who holds a lucrative career.

While around half of college students report that they use their career services office at their university, first-generation students are less likely to use these services (Gallup, 2016). First-generation students may be unaware of the potential of these services in aiding them in their post-college plans. As a case examination of this issue, I sought to understand the narratives and experiences of first-generation students at a mid-size, elite research institution that is located near a large Midwestern city, as they transitioned from the role of undergraduate student to the role of college graduate who is working full-time. I was interested in how first-generation

students navigate finding and choosing their first career after graduation. This included understanding how a student's first-generation identity and motivations affected their job prospects and the way they navigated this independent white-collar system. I sought to pay special attention to the support and lack of supports these students received during their undergraduate experience.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the narratives and experiences of first-generation students (students whose parents did not attend a 4-year institution) as they transitioned from undergraduate student to college educated person working in white-collar America. This study sought to examine the motivations of first-generation students and how they leveraged the intersections of their identity and these motivations to navigate an unfamiliar job terrain. This paper will first provide a review of literature addressing why first-generation students go to college, the difficulties faced by first-generation students, the resources that currently exist for first-generation students, interdependent vs. independent sense of self (as to examine how first-generation students tend to see themselves as compared to their continuing-generation peers), organizational recruitment structure (as to examine how firms tend to recruit their new hires), cultural mismatch theory (as to examine if there exists a mismatch in the culture of first-generation students when compared to the culture of work spaces), work conducted on seniors in college and career theories. The paper will then transition to discuss the current research project and objectives. The paper will then close with the findings from this study which includes recommendations for higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Motivations for First-Generation Students to Seek Higher Education Opportunities

College graduates have been shown to earn more in their lifetimes when compared to those who just completed high school (Goldin & Katz, 2007). Therefore, many first-generation students see higher education as the mechanism that will help them earn a high paying career and as a means that will help bring them a more secure future. It is important to note that many first-generation students also identify as low-income (Thayer, 2000). Low-income students are motivated when they feel it is possible to rise up on the socioeconomic ladder which may be why some first-generation students feel pressured to have a prestigious career (Browman, Destin, Carswell, & Svoboda, 2017). When compared to their continuing-generation counterparts, many first-generation students do not have parents that can socialize them early into academia or white-collar career life. Consequently, these students may rely on others to help them navigate the process. This work outlines that many first-generation students may attend college to make their parents proud. Indeed, first-generation students are often motivated by their families to attend college; research done at a large, flagship university in the southeastern United States, found that in regards to talking about their future careers, first-generation students often brought up their own family influences (Tate et al., 2015).

First-Generation Students Planning and Transitioning to College

The process of applying to college does not begin when one is a junior in high school. In fact, gearing towards college readiness begins as early as elementary school. In their book, Horn and Nuñez (2000), revealed that parent involvement in eighth grade determined whether the student took Algebra 1 (a college readiness and foundations course) or did not. Only around a third of first-generation students reported that their parents wanted them to take Algebra 1 in eighth grade while over half of continuing-generation students reported this. However, the researchers reported that first-generation students who did take Algebra 1 in eighth grade were

50% more likely to attend college than if they did not take the course. Therefore, course selections as early as middle school is an indication of whether or not first-generation students even attended university. Consequently, when brainstorming how to support first-generation students in college, we must also include how to support potential first-generation students still in grammar school.

When applying to college and beginning to prepare for their transition, many first-generation students feel a guilt. After analyzing group interviews that composed of both first-generation and continuing-generation students, Terenzini and colleagues (1994) discovered that the transition to college was much more difficult for first-generation students and going to college was a major "disjunction" in their life course as these students were walking a path that their parents never walked before. These students event felt that they were breaking their family traditions as opposed to continuing-generation students who stated that it was never a question as to whether or not they would one day attend university. Accordingly, many first-generation students may feel a similar type of detachment from their families when they choose to accept careers in workplaces that their family members have never crossed before.

Personal motivation to attend college has been found to be directly correlated to college adjustment for first-generation students and this was revealed from a longitudinal study conducted by Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005). The researchers had first-year ethnic minority first-year students take a survey at the beginning of their first-year and then again during their second-year. They measured motivation using the Student Motivation for Attending College (SMAU) by Cote and Levine (1997), the Family Expectation-driven Motivation, and the Personal/Career Motivation. The desire to obtain a rewarding career and to be pushed while in university were found to be strong predictors for college adjustment while strong

Personal/Career Motivation was a predictor for college commitment. Motivation and drive are needed to attend and then continue on in college. Hence, it is worth considering how motivation plays a role in first-generation students applying for and transitioning into their workplaces and how these motivations may be built into them.

Difficulties Faced by First-Generation Students

Once they enter college, many first-generation students may have more difficulty navigating the college landscape than their continuing-generation peers (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Cobarrubias, 2012). Many first-generation students may have not received the same caliber of high school education as their continuing-generation peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). This has consequences when first-generation students enter their universities. Indeed, first-generation students tend to enroll in more remedial college coursework than their legacy peers, lag behind their continuing-generation peers in credit accumulation, report lower university grades and a full one-third report difficulty in selecting an academic major (Chen & Carroll, 2005). As mentioned earlier, first-generation students (when compared to their continuing-generation peers) perceive university faculty as less concerned with their well-being (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Therefore, first-generation students may have a particularly difficult time approaching professors and asking for help and this may result in lower grades. Going to office hours is a student role that many continuing-generation students know how to play with genuine expertise (Collier and Morgan, 2008) Success in college does not just involve learning the academic material, but also requires finding and using college resources to succeed. First-generation students are at a disadvantage in that the individuals close to them may not have been useful resources for learning how to best navigate college resources.

First-generation students may also have difficulty finding a major related to their interests. Ayala and Striplen (2002) found that first-generation college students tended to have more limited career awareness and be less sure (than their continuing-generation peers) of their academic focus or major in college. Therefore, these students may be unaware of the different majors their universities offer and may be unaware of how to relate those majors to potentials careers. As mentioned earlier, many first-generation students see college as the driving force to help them find a well-paying job. This may be why the majority of first-generation student end up choosing business or the health sciences for their major while their continuing-generation counterparts are more likely to select from a variety of majors including the humanities, engineering, arts, and communications (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Many first-generation students may be drawn to majors that they have heard about before and majors that they feel will guarantee them a well-paying career. First-generation students may be reserved about choosing a major in the humanities or the arts as they may be uncertain of how these majors will translate into a reliable career.

Independent vs. Interdependent Senses of Self

The structure of higher education institutions often does not align with the values of those who are first-generation. College is a time that stresses independence – universities not only want their students to live on their own, but also for their students to learn how to differentiate themselves amongst others. Research by Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) confirmed that university administrators promoted independent norms and expectations for their students, as their universities provide students with tools to pave their own paths. The Northwestern University 2017 student guidebook, for example, states that, "One goal of a university education is to help you develop as a unique individual—to be educated as a whole

person, intellectually, emotionally, socially, ethically, and spiritually" (Northwestern University, 2017, p. 3). As mentioned earlier, many first-generation students identify as also being low-income, and therefore, these students were socialized in working class homes. Unlike their middle and upper class counterparts, working class homes often do not have the economic and social capital to socialize their family members into independence. Members of the working class are often forced to work and rely on each other as they face greater risks of uncertainty and have fewer opportunities than those in the middle class (Stephens, Dittmann & Townsend, 2017). Markus and Kitayama (1991) claimed that those who stress interdependence are attentive and responsive to the needs of others (and assume that these actions will be reciprocated). Therefore, working class contexts socialize and promote interdependence and connectedness amongst individuals, which differs considerably from the independent context being promoted at universities that promote forging an identity that differentiates oneself from others.

Cultural Mismatch Theory

There is a mismatch between individuals who are oriented more towards interdependence (including, as mentioned previously, first-generation and/or working-class students), and schools and workplaces that are oriented more towards independence. This mismatch may not only put first-generation students behind when they apply for college or for jobs, it may create stress for them once they are in these organizations. The concept of shared reality affirms that when individuals who surround themselves with people whose personalities resemble their own, they receive validation from shared experiences and this boosts their satisfaction and morale (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). A study involving more than 7,000 individuals showed that when an individual's personality matched the dominant personality of the culture, there was an increase in self-esteem and well-being (Fulmer et al., 2010). In other words, if the dominant narrative within

an organization is independent-orientated and paving one's own path, and an individual's personality is one that emphasizes togetherness and working together, this individual may find it difficult to thrive in this organization.

Some organizations have shifted their wording and approach in documentation to better cater to individuals from first-generation backgrounds. A welcome letter to new students at a university that focused on interdependence led first-generation students to have lower cortisol levels (cortisol levels are inversely related to psychological state) when compared to first-generation students that read a welcome letter focused on independence (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Philips, 2012). Therefore, instead of attempting to change the lifestyle of those from interdependent backgrounds, it may be possible to change institutional approaches and frameworks that can cater and foster to these students' interdependence.

Organization Recruitment Structure

First-generation students also face the challenges of navigating an independent world once they graduate. Independence is stressed in white-collar workplaces – a space that most college graduates seek out. These organizations are guided by the Protestant Work Ethic and the American Dream, emphasizing the importance of being an independent, autonomous, and free-self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Even during job and internship recruitment opportunities that college students take on during their school year, organizations often expect their job applicants to enact independent models of competence such as asking questions and freely expressing their preferences (Stephens, Dittmann, & Townsend, 2017). Again, this may be harder for many first-generation students to navigate as they may not have been socialized in environments that stress independent ways of thinking or speaking out.

Students growing up in working class backgrounds may not have had the economic freedom to participate in upper-middle class and resource-intensive activities – such as organized sports or group development activities. While these activities are present in university settings, possessing background knowledge about those activities is necessary to participate. In other words, these activities require a concerted cultivation that can only happen through continued investment (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). This particular setup can penalize first-generation students and individuals from working class backgrounds if job evaluators and recruiters favor participation in these extracurricular activities and accomplishments in their hiring decisions, in fact, candidates rarely received an interview if they did not participate in these activities (Rivera, 2011). A qualitative study that involved interviews with 120 employers revealed that job hiring is a process of cultural matching between candidates, evaluators, and workspaces (Rivera, 2012). First-generation students may focus on their school work over their extracurricular involvement as they believe that their school work would be the driving factor to provide them with employment post-graduation (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). Individuals from upper-middle class backgrounds may have been socialized to place an importance on out of school activities and are more likely to know that it's not just the classroom that matters for their future (Bergerson, 2007). Recruiter bias aligns with a preference for individuals they see as "fun" or "social," which is yet another obstacle for first-generation students. Evaluators also tend to prefer individuals similar to themselves, including participation in activities similar to those they have preferred. Similarity is one of the most powerful determiners of progression to the next round in job interviews (Huffcutt, 2011). Therefore, hiring represents a process of cultural matching between candidates, evaluators, and firms (Rivera, 2012), creating difficulty for first-generation college graduates.

If first-generation students are able to navigate the hiring process and obtain a career, they may continue to feel a mismatch between their interdependent self and the independence of work culture. Most organizational environments stress to employees that they need to focus on their own individual performance rather than the collective performance of the group; Amazon, for example, ranks all team members annually and those at the bottom are eliminated (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). This potentially conveys the notion that an interdependent way of thinking is inferior in university and work spaces, again putting people from first-generation backgrounds at a large disadvantage. It is difficult to ignore eighteen years of socialization that has stressed collectivism and interdependence when engaging with a culture that stresses autonomy.

The last longitudinal study that examined labor outcomes for first-generation students was conducted between 1989 and 1994 by the US Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 1998). The report found that first-generation students were more likely to be underemployed (work that does not utilize the full skills of the individual) than their continuing-generation peers. 30% of first-generation students in the workforce while 25% of continuing-generation students reported being underemployed. First-generation students were more likely to be employed in craftsman trades or clerical positions and were less likely to be employed in managerial careers. However, first-generation students and continuing-generation students revealed similar salaries at around $23,000. This does make sense as first-generation students are more likely to value improving their financial status. While this study is useful in understanding outcomes of first-generation students shortly after they graduated from college, this study is nearly 30 years old (Being a first-generation student looked much different than it does currently. In fact, there is very little research on the experiences of being a first-generation student in the

1980s). It also does not describe in depth the careers of these first-generation students and the process of their transition from undergraduate student to workforce employee.

Current Resources for First-Generation Students

Many universities have realized that first-generation students may need extra support as compared to their continuing-generation peers. This has led some universities to host summer bridge programs (SBPs) to acclimate their first-generation students to campus. A typical SBP targets first-generation, low-income students, and/or underrepresented students, providing them with additional academic support as well as information about navigating their institution (Sablan, 2014). The majority of SBPs occur for a few weeks during the summer months in which rising first-generation college freshmen go to their university to build a strong cohort with each other, to possibly take a course, and to better understand the resources their universities offer. Results of such programs have been positive, as SBPs affect the college readiness of first-generation students and participation in a SBP can positively affect students' academic self-efficacy and academic skills (Strayhorn, 2011). A previous study by Browman and Destin (2016) showed that low-income students were more motivated when the university felt like a place where resources were available to them. SBPs may serve an essential role by demonstrating to first-generation and other underrepresented students that resources are accessible to them and that they are capable of utilizing these resources. Finally, Moschetti and Hudley (2008) found that when first-generation students believed they had access to social agents (individuals and organizations who could assist them through the career process), they were more likely to believe in a better future for themselves. Programs like summer bridge programs may be essential for many first-generation students in understanding resources and individuals are available that can assist them in navigating their university.

This is not to say that SBPs are the cure for first-generation students and should be treated as such. In fact, Washington, Pretlow, & Barnett (2016) found that participation in a SBP had no effect on the number of college credits accumulated at the end of college or even persistence in college (the researchers measured persistence by measuring semester enrollment two years after the SBP). However, this study did not interview nor survey the students at hand and, therefore, did not take qualitative measures into account such as the strong community, friendships, and mentors these students may have gained from participation in a SBP. Nonetheless, this study further emphasizes that first-generation students may need extra assistance throughout the entirety of their college years (and not just support the summer before their first-year).

Mentorship and experiences with first-generation students who have successfully achieved their desired college and career outcomes are useful resources and have been shown to positively impact first-generation students. Wang (2012), citing Arellano and Padilla (1996), stated that strong mentoring relationships can help narrow the gap between first-generation and continuing-generation students. Wang (2012) interviewed first-generation students who received mentoring from upperclassmen first-generation students, finding that their mentoring messages influenced their present and future decisions. She found that common mentoring messages conveyed ideas ranging from valuing school to making decisions to increasing future potential. Moreover, Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) found that when incoming first-year first-generation students attended a student panel during orientation composed of senior first-generation students and heard their real-life stories on how their identity both positively and negatively affected their college experience, the first-year first-generation students were more likely to seek out campus resources. Hearing these real life stories improved first-generation

students' college transition and improved their psychological adjustment to their universities. While this study utilized a convenience sample as students willingly went to and were rewarded for attending this student panel, it is insightful into the power of hearing personal stories. This approach could be expanded to examine upperclassmen first-generation students and the potential effects of hearing personal stories from already graduated first-generation students in the workforce.

Braven, a nonprofit in San Jose, Newark, and Chicago, believes that leaders will emerge from everywhere and they work with first-generation college students (Braven Fellows) who attend second-tier public universities to empower them to find meaningful first careers. Braven's model consists of both teaching and mentoring. The mentoring portion relies on workforce employee volunteers to mentor college students. According to Braven's 2017-2018 Impact Report (Mission and Impact – Braven, 2018), Braven Fellows are 98% likely to persist in college until graduation (as opposed to 60% of college students nationwide). Furthermore, 76% of Braven Fellows obtained a secure career 12 months after graduation while only 54% of college students nationwide did the same. Finally, Braven Fellows were half as likely as their peers to be unemployed. Braven exposes their Fellows to their mentors early on in their college career and, therefore, these students may feel more comfortable around individuals who work in white-collar America and more comfortable navigating the interview and career systems.

First-generation students also benefit from a community that involves other first-generation students. Jehangir, Williams, and Pete (2011) studied 24 first-generation students, interviewing them three years after their participation in a multicultural learning community (MLC) their large Midwestern research university offered. This MLC served as a resource for many first-generation students and was designed to challenge the isolation and marginalization

that many students from historically marginalized backgrounds face. The MLC not only provided a supportive and challenging learning environment for these students but it also aided in the development of their identities and helped them better understand themselves (which the researchers measured using interview data that was able reveal how students were able to grapple and express their identities). The MLC affirmed and also challenged the identities of these first-generation students. Students noted that the MLC was a safe space for them, offering a place in which their lived experiences would be celebrated. Results like this show how first-generation students may benefit from a community dedicated for them. Therefore, it would be interesting to note if workplace affinity groups exist for first-generation employees and, if so, the impact of these groups.

College Seniors

While there has been a plethora of research done on college seniors, there has been much less research on first-generation college seniors. And while research has been conducted on the resources that universities provide to their seniors, there is much less work on the resources that universities provide to their first-generation college senior students. Looking at the general college senior, however, is useful for gaining insight into the lived experiences that these students face and how universities can better support their transitioning students. According to Gardner (1999), seniors must juggle the end of academic work, the onset of professional pursuits, changes in significant personal relationships, and they must begin to manage their own personal finances. Clearly, the transitioning senior faces an abundance of stressors. Many university career offices have noticed this and are providing their students with workshops to aid their seniors. Gardner (1999) reported that when universities provide senior students with resume

writing workshops and on-campus interview opportunities, they feel more confident about their transition and evolving identities.

The college senior (including both first-generation and continuing-generation) may still feel stressed, though, with respect to securing a career that is both gainful and purposeful. Research conducted at the University of Maryland indicated that seniors felt the academic advising at their school was significantly deficient, while relationships with faculty were positive. Seniors also felt unprepared to transition to post-college activities which caused them anxiety (Meyers, La Voy, Shipley & Mainella, 2000). It is necessary to note that these difficulties are more pronounced for first-generation students. As noted before, first-generation students have a more difficult time connecting with faculty. Therefore, they may miss out on the positive influences these faculty members may provide. Additionally, post-college activities may be more difficult for them to navigate as they may not have individuals close to them who have navigated the careers or academic settings these first-generation students seek to go into.

Career Theories

Previous research has studied career theories and how these theories relate to college students. Tate et al. (2015) cited Lent, Brown, Hackett (1994) to describe how Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a framework for understanding the internal and external factors that affect a person's career development. SCCT includes aspects such as family influences, self-efficacy, and physiological influences to impact one's career interests, career choice and career satisfaction. Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) emphasized how in SCCT, career interests are regulated by self-efficacy. Therefore, if individuals believe they will succeed at a task, they will likely go through with the task. However, if barriers to the task are perceived as too difficult to overcome, individuals will be less likely to go through with the task. When conducting research

on graduate students affiliated with the McNair program (a program funded by the U.S. Department of Education which assists graduate students who are both first-generation and low income), Tate et al. (2015) found that when students' self-efficacy for conducting graduate level research increased, so did their active pursuit of graduate school. While this study was limited in that they conducted research on self-efficacy on first-generation students already seeking graduate school (an environment in which research is emphasized) rather than students prior to any interest, it gives insight into the fact that self-efficacy is a key trait for first-generation students. This study could be expanded to examine how universities can promote self-efficacy among their first-generation student population.

First-generation students may have difficulty speaking to career counselors and attending workshops offered by career services. Consequently, there is a need for career counselors to utilize unique approaches when working with individuals from more diverse backgrounds. Owens, Lacey, Rawls, and Holbert-Quince (2010) looked at African American college men and advocated that they need extensive support related to career development, including having to overcome cultural factors (such as racism and disenfranchisement). The authors urged university professionals to provide career education that caters to the first-generation African American male demographic that is both culturally sensitive and includes special counseling theories. This emphasizes the need to study the career needs of college individuals who do not represent members of typical higher education institutions – individuals who fall outside of a predominantly wealthy White demographic. Ayala and Striplen (2002) recommend an early intervention strategy using a career introduction model to help first-generation students build occupational knowledge, get them connected to a resource center, and, therefore, get them involved early on in their career development. The Career Introduction Model at California State

University introduced students to the career center, had students utilize the career resource library, required students to use computerized career guides, familiarized students with the student employment area, and oriented students towards the career center reception desk. This model received optimistic and positive feedback from staff and students at California State University as it introduced first-generation freshmen to the career center, engaged them with hands-on, first person experience, and helped to motivate them to regularly visit the career center. This study could be expanded to examine how the program affected students as they transitioned out of college, as well as how this model could be expanded to target first-generation college seniors.

The Current Project

While there has been a handful of research done on first-generation students more generally, there is very little research done on first-generation seniors and recent first-generation college graduates who are now working full-time. This research is necessary as first-generation students have already been found to struggle both academically and socially while in college (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008). First-generation student struggles may be due to the mismatch between how they interact with the world and how their viewpoint differs from the dominant narrative in spaces they seek to be in. Individuals with an independent sense of self place weight on the separateness or uniqueness while individuals with an interdependent sense of self place weight on the connectedness when describing their relationships with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). First-generation students often emphasize interdependence while higher education institutions and career organizations emphasize independence and this produces a cultural mismatch (Philips, Stephens, Townsend & Goudeau, 2016). Cultural mismatch theory asserts that inequality is produced when the culture in the institution does not match the culture

of the underrepresented group (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson & Covarrubias, 2012). Therefore, in order to best support first-generation students, it is necessary to make sense of the experiences of first-generation students and note when and how they feel this cultural mismatch.

This project sought to understand the transitional experiences of first-generation student as they move from being an undergraduate student to being an employee working full-time at a white-collar organization. The study aimed to learn how a student's first-generation identity affected their job prospects and the way they navigated a white-collar terrain. I payed special attention to the support and lack of support these students receive during their undergraduate time. I interviewed eight recent first-generation graduates who are currently working full-time at a work-collar organization. All of the graduates graduated from the same Midwestern university. The goal of this work is to understand what works for first-generation students as they undergo this transition and to learn more about useful supports that are resourceful both during undergraduate and in post-college life.

Methodology

Participants

All participants I recruited were recent graduates of a mid-size Midwestern research university. All my participants met the following criteria: First, they earned their bachelor's degree sometime in 2016, 2017, or 2018. Second, all participants were first-generation college students. The definition of a first-generation student may vary from university to university, but, in this paper, I define a first-generation college student as an individual who does not have a parent that holds an undergraduate degree from a higher education institution in the United States. Third, all participants currently live and work in the Chicagoland area.

I recruited my participants through my own social network. When I was ready to interview participants, I posted my Google Interview Willingness Survey on my personal Facebook page. Once the potential participant filled out the survey, I sent them an email explaining my research project and asking if they would like to be a part of a study on the first-generation experience of transitioning from college to the workforce.

Within a few days, I had my goal amount of responses and, therefore, did not need to engage in any other outreach. Due to my previous connections with these individuals, I believe that they were more comfortable around me and, therefore, were willing to share more about themselves. Furthermore, due to our connections, the participants felt relaxed enough to drop names of people who were integral in their college and current lives. However, there were of course drawbacks to interviewing people I knew, these individuals may have been hesitant to reveal some information to me in interest to potentially not offend me (since I already had a connection with many of them and, therefore, they already knew a bit about me). Additionally, many of the interviewees may have felt the need to paint themselves in a light that they don't necessarily paint themselves in.

I ended up interviewing eight participants. One of my participants graduated in 2016, two graduated in 2017, and five graduated this past Spring in 2018. I wanted to interview more people who graduated recently as these individuals would be more likely to remember their transitional experiences as they had recently completed the process. I ended up interviewing three male-identifying individuals and five female-identifying individuals. Furthermore, six of my participants identified as a person of color and two of my participants identified as white. Two of my participants identified as part of the LGBT+ community. I mention these identities as

they came up more than once in my interviews. All of my participants also identified as coming from a lower-income background.

The majority of my participants worked for the non-profit arena in some capacity. One of my participants is a teacher, one works for a mental health organization, one works for a youth community service organization, two work in research, one works as an office admin at a physical therapy office, and two work in the communications department for for-profit businesses. I originally wanted to interview recent graduates who were also in the banking or consulting arena. I did reach out to individuals I knew who worked for these businesses, but they did not respond to me. Once looking at the data, however, I sensed that I had enough information of the first-generation experience and transitioning to not need these individuals.

Doing a case study with fewer, more diverse participants as opposed to surveying a large number of first-generation students, allowed me to hear the narratives first-hand from these individuals. Individuals' beliefs and identities can be evoked through their personal stories (Drake, Spillane, & Hufferd-Ackles, 2001). Thus, it was important to for these individuals to have the space and time to share their personal narratives as this will allow for a better comprehension of the first-generation identity.

Just by being human, I had my own inherent biases in regards to the individuals I recruited and interviewed, I was mindful of these biases and then checked them when I met with participants. I stuck strictly to the interview protocol while interviewing these participants as to help check these biases. When I coded for themes, I solely looked at the interview transcripts and my own personal notes (that only noted my participants' body languages) and this helped to eliminate any incorrect interpretations and assumptions. Hence, I did not bring my own inherent biases in my analysis.

Settings

    I originally planned to conduct all of my interviews in the office spaces of my participants. I wanted to meet my participants "on their own turf" to best observe how they interact with their spaces. I also thought that this would give me the opportunity to see my participants interact with their co-workers. I also noted the drawbacks in this such as my participants may not feel comfortable sharing what is on their minds in these spaces as they may be wary of someone potentially listening. The cultural mismatch between the background of first-generation students and the workplaces they work in, may produce a cultural conflict. Having participants note this cultural conflict while in the workplace may cause participants confusion and anxiety if they are forced to recognize that they intentionally or unintentionally code switch across spaces (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

    For this reason, I emphasized to my participants that I was willingly to meet them wherever was most comfortable for them. Therefore, if my participants were not comfortable meeting in their office space, I stated that I was open to meet them at a coffee shop or on their previous campus. None of my eight participants wanted me to interview them at their place of work. Six of my participants offered to meet me on campus while two of my participants chose to be interviewed over FaceTime so they could be at the comfort of their own homes. Therefore, six out of the eight interviews happened in person while two interviews happened over the phone. The interviews on campus all happened in a study space at a residential college. This was a comfortable space that provided an ample amount of quietness. However, the residential college is a student dorm. Consequently, on some occasions, students who lived in the dorm walked past when the interviews were going on. On some occasions, my participants looked up

and were clearly distracted by the students walking past them. However, it seemed that this did not affect their question responses.

Data Collection

I collected the majority of my data through semi-structured 60 minute private interviews with each of my eight participants. I decided to interview first-generation alumni as opposed to just observe them as it allows for a more emotional, intimate view of their lives (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). My decision to interview eight individuals is consistent with other qualitative studies on first-generation students. Byrd and MacDonald (2008) chose to interview eight first-generation students in their study while Bryan and Simmons (2009) chose to interview 10 first-generation students, and Boden (2007) who chose to interview seven Latino first-generation students. Nevertheless, I chose to interview as to pay special attention to my participants' stories and to understand more in depth what made them and their experiences unique. I drew from Lamont and Swidler (2014) who promoted interviewing as it allowed them to also examine identity, imagined realities, cultural realities, and emotional states. Furthermore, interviewing allowed me to probe to gage a deeper understanding into their lived realities. The first half of the interview focused on the participant's background, paying special attention to their upbringing and their college experience. The second half of the interview focused on finding a job, transitioning, and workplace questions (see Appendix A). I categorized core questions as questions I wanted to pay special attention to, while supplementary questions were only asked if time permitted (which was the case in the majority of the interviews). I wanted to interview my participants because I wanted to pay special attention to their story and own personal narratives. Sharing personal narratives often allow individuals to begin to understand their own lives and their own struggles and successes and this in turn, I believe, allowed them to better convey this

information to me. My laptop was with me at every interview for simple question reading. I also used the notes section of on my MacBook to note any participant gestures that I had found interesting and worth noting. After every interview, I jotted down a few notes on how the interview went and how the participant seemed to respond to the interview.

I recorded the interviews on my phone using the voice memo app. This was a helpful tool to record the audio part of my interviews. This gave me the opportunity to also pay attention to the non-verbal cues of my participants as I did not have to write down everything that they had said. Once the interviews were completed, I automatically transferred the voice memos to my Google Drive Thesis folder and to the transcribing service I was using and deleted the notes from my phone. Therefore, the voice memos were stored in my password protected laptop and were there until the completion of my thesis in June 2019.

Data Analysis

I chose to utilize the Glaser (1978) steps in data analysis which is 1) begin collecting data; 2) find key issues, events in the data that become focus categories; 3) collect data that mirrors the issues; 4) write about the focus categories; 5) work with the data to discover relationships; 6) sample, code, and write with the focus categories in mind (Gardner & Holley, 2011). The data sources for this study included interview transcripts and interview notes (that includes my own personal field notes that noted participants' overall demeanor and facial expressions). After each interview, I uploaded it onto Trint, the transcription service I used. Trint is an electronic transcribing service that transcribes 60 minute interviews in minutes. After Trint completed the initial transcriptions, I went back and fixed the errors the computer transcription service had done. Once all interviews were transcribed, I conducted a close reading of the data. I used a grounded theory coding and, therefore, engaged in initial coding and then focused coding

(Charmaz, 2006). The understanding of the data is found in the data itself. As explained by Charmaz (2006) to describe grounded theory coding, I reviewed the interviews and began to make codes as I went to make meaning out of them. I was focused on formulating codes that best describe the experiences my participants went through both in college, their transition, and the experiences they are currently going through at their workplaces. This emerged a number of codes that I eventually narrowed down into four broad themes – purpose, identity, confusion and community. To get to these four broad themes, I engaged in pattern coding and it helped me see the connections between my participants. I then engaged in a second reading of my data, to add to these themes and expand them – clear patterns and experiences emerged from the data. This grounded theory approach allowed me to successfully interpret and truly understand my data. As mentioned previously, I have decided to view my participants' answer to the interview questions as stories as collectively their stories allow the chance to intimately listen to voices that have been historically marginalized. Similarly, to Wilkins (2012) findings, my findings section highlights their stories and how my first-generation alumni participants are savvy actors in responding to their hardships.

Findings

What's my purpose at college and beyond?

In order to truly understand each of my participants' intimate stories, I began each interview by asking my participants a little bit about themselves, what currently drives them, and what they find important. Nearly all of my participants spoke about their passions that centered around helping others – specifically communities that are near and dear to them - and their motives to work hard for their parents. I want to begin this finding sections by highlighting the collective purpose of my participants as I believe it paints a representative picture of what

motivates them in both their thoughts and actions. Additionally, this collective purpose highlights my participants' moral identity – an identity that drives them to give back to their family and their surrounding communities.

Therefore, the first theme that emerged in my data is what I call, "narratives of collective purpose". Six of my participants explicitly mentioned to "help people" when I asked them what got them up in the morning. Their own goals, therefore, extended beyond themselves. Ernesto, a 2018 graduate working in research at a local university, mentioned that growing up he just wanted to help people. Ernesto goes on to share, "I feel like that's kind of why I wanted to go into the medical field. Yeah, I mean I came in I was like pre-med and I just wanted to like help people." Even before he stepped foot onto campus, Ernesto's story revealed he was motivated to find a career that would allow him to help others. Ernesto shared that his parents used to always try to push him in the direction of careers that would bring him big money which naturally directed him towards medicine initially. Ernesto stated he was unaware of how he could help people if he wasn't a doctor, teacher, or lawyer. Consequently, before he came to college, Ernesto was set in the mindset that only a few careers would allow him to truly help others. Ernesto found out that chemistry was not something he was passionate enough to continue to pursue while in college, yet he says he was still driven to find a career that would allow him to be there for others. Ernesto internally reflected upon his own background and experiences when he was making the transition out of becoming a doctor. He shared that once he began to focus more on research, he was able to find his passion of using research to help people like himself.

Ernesto's characterized his current long term goals are more broad in that he just wishes to "help low income communities of color". While Ernesto has shifted from his original plan that he and his parents may have initially wanted, all parties are happy since Ernesto is now stable

and is not financially dependent on his parents. Ernesto says he doesn't fault his parents for wanting him to make big money initially. Ernesto knew that his family wanted the best for him even though they couldn't really prepare him for the "best". Consequently, Ernesto's collective purpose is also driven to make his family proud. He says that he wants to show his parents that the sacrifices they made for him and his siblings were well worth it.

Similarly, Emiliano's narrative revealed he is driven to make his family proud and to support his parents. Emiliano grew up in Chicago and is very proud of his Mexican and Chicago roots. He believes that these roots allowed him to be open to caring for others. Emiliano struggled during his college years but pushed through as he knew that his college degree would open up the possibilities to not only provide for himself, but also his family. He was driven to not see his family struggle as they did when Emiliano was growing up. Emiliano shared, "my goal has always been to help out my family move from a low-income background into a stable background". Emiliano reported he originally wanted to study economics but soon realized he did not want to "sit down and look at a computer all day and would rather help people directly". Emiliano's passions for history pushed him to study that and his passion for helping others pushed him to want to teach.

Emiliano continually revealed he knew first-hand the power of education and how that education can be utilized to push people out of poverty. He was a 2017 graduate and is currently teaching so he can teach his students to succeed not just for themselves, but also for their families. Indeed, this does make sense as Emiliano places much emphasis on his family when making decisions. He revealed he chose to stay close to home for both college and work as he wanted the option to see him family whenever he wanted. Emiliano is satisfied with his career as

a teacher as he believes that it provides him enough money to support his family and it is also a career that allows him to directly influence others.

Cesar, too, reported that he is passionate about education and furthering his education. However, despite having similar identities as Emiliano and Ernesto, Cesar did not mention directly helping others in his interview (however, he seeks to do this in a more indirect sense). Cesar studied film while in college and spent much energy on the job search that lasted around six months before landing a communications position. Cesar's other passions like more so in celebrating culture and showcasing that culture through food and the arts. His story revealed that his dream is to have the freedom to dedicate much time to a YouTube channel in which he is able to showcase Chicago's unique food scene. While Cesar's purpose isn't as concrete in the helping people sense, he indirectly seeks to do this by highlighting food. Throughout his interview, Cesar discussed how he places values on stories and how everyone has their own stories. He believes that his purpose is to highlight these stories and bring light into varying cultures that is passionately showcased in food.

Nevertheless, Emiliano and Ernesto weren't the only ones I spoke with who were outwardly passionate about helping others. Rosa, a 2018 graduate currently working at a community mental health center, explicitly stated "helping people" is her passion. Her narrative centers around learning how best to help others. Similarly, to Emiliano, Rosa knew that attending college would mean something to not only herself, but also to her parents. "My parents didn't go to college and so it was important for them that I got there. Yeah, and even for me as well". Rosa's own future was an afterthought when she was discussing her parents. While Rosa finds her own purpose in helping others, she says she also knew that her purpose was also to attend college in order to make her parents proud. Rosa's college degree allowed her to help people in a

setting that is near and dear to her – mental health. During our interview, she discussed how she has enjoyed getting to know the people who go into the clinic.

Likewise, Helen, a 2017 graduate currently working in survey research at a local university, knew since her first-year of college that all she wanted out of life was to help people. Helen recalled a short anecdote about her first-year fellowship program that centered around identity and career development and shared, "someone said I want to be a renaissance man … and when they came to me I was like I just want to help people". Helen saw her college attainment as a way in to a plethora of opportunities that her parents were never afforded. However, unlike the other participants I talked to, she did not directly mention making her parents proud or helping her parents when discussing why she went to college. Therefore, Helen's purpose was more directed and oriented towards helping others. Like Ernesto, Helen also started on the pre-medicine track. Once she, too, realized it wasn't for her, she felt that teaching was her calling and when that didn't work out, she got involved with research and didn't look back.

Furthermore, Meena, a 2017 graduate, emphasized that both of her parents placed a big importance on education. Meena shared that for her college was the only option, "It's weird because I never thought of anything else other than applying to college". During her interview, Meena mentioned that her family is important to her and she continues to place her family first. Meena says she continues to live with her family to be close to them and support them. Therefore, when her mother suggested to her in childhood that she should use her talents to one day attend college, that goal became part of Meena's narrative. The collective nature of her home life that centered around supporting and being there for one another also pushed Meena to be interested and then choose a career in which she is directly affecting and benefiting the lives of

people. Meena shared that she began to become passionate about mental health in college through her struggles with it. She has noticed that mental health often goes undiscussed in Latinx spaces and she is inspired to change that. Meena hopes to one day attend graduate school for social work to better promote mental health in Latinx community spaces. At the moment, Meena is working at a youth social services network and is forming meaningful relationships with students with whom she, too, can relate to. Celia, a 2018 graduate, got pregnant shortly after her graduation and had to rethink her career plans. She needed money right away and decided to settle on being a receptionist for an occupational therapist to learn some things related to her passions. Nonetheless, Celia says she is still driven to attend grad school one day to become an occupational therapist to help people become more mobile. While Celia reports she is not doing exactly what she desired to do, she is still happy to be given the chance to see her future career in action and interact with people seeking orthopedic services. Celia also recalled that one of her favorite college memories involved her assisting other first-generation and low-income students and helping them navigate their college campus.

Similar to Cesar, Margaret, who is currently working in social media marketing at a for-profit business, did not mention helping people directly in her interview. Nonetheless, Margaret described that people give her energy and that she truly enjoys being around people. Margaret sees her career as something that is able to provide her enough money in order to not be in the same situation that her parents were in. Like Helen, Margaret did not directly relate her parents to her purpose. This is an interesting aspect to note that will further be explored later in the paper.

The drive to help others pushed many of the recent graduates that I interviewed to pursue "helping" prosocial careers. Their moral identity narratives justified their career choices. Indeed,

six out of the eight participants worked in careers that directly or indirectly help and aid vulnerable communities. Two of the participants work in research – one working in higher education research while the other working in public health, one is a teacher, two work in community health, and one works in youth social services. These first-generation students want to find fulfillment in their work and they are driven more so by making lives better rather than the monetary income. Stability and being financially independent were important factors for these first-generation students, but not one participant mentioned making money as their motivation in choosing a career. Therefore, these recent first-generation graduates were driven by their moral identities and by their "collective purpose" in applying and then going to college.

What identities do I hold salient?

All of the participants in this study were first-generation students, meaning neither of their parents graduated from a four-year university. Consequently, all of my participants mentioned their first-generation identity during the interviews and how this identity affected the way they interacted with their university and how they currently interact with their workspaces. Ernesto described his experiences as a first-generation student at his university as "fucking terrifying". He believed that he was ill prepared for college and that his high school set him up to always feel "gifted" and was initially shocked by the "cut throat" environment at his university. Ernesto admitted that his socialization and his parents were never set up to prepare him for college life. On top of that, Ernesto felt severe pressure from his parents early on in college to pursue big money-making fields. Ernesto experienced a disconnect between him and his university, especially in the early years. He was unaware of how to even go about finding people he could talk to discuss his academic interests and to find the best program for him. Likewise, Margaret felt this similar disconnect or "knowledge gap". Margaret shared that her first-

generation experience centered around much confusion and "lack of knowledge". One critical

university navigation component that Margaret felt she was missing was interacting with

professors. She explained, "Coming into college I was unaware of how impactful it is to have

relationships with your professors even in terms of getting recommendations or for doing

research". Nonetheless, Margaret became aware of this and many other resources her university

offered much later in her college career and this put her at a disadvantage during college and

when she was deciding her next steps. Cesar also explained these knowledge gap in the sense of

not knowing what communities he should get involved in or what connections he should make

that would create opportunities for him. Cesar explained, "no one teachers you how to approach

a professor or go to office hours or know about summer internships and I felt that I had to do

double time in terms of teaching things to myself both academically and socially". Cesar and his

first-generation peers' stories revealed that they had to put in extra work to even attempt to be on

par with their peers. This knowledge gap put them at a disadvantage as they had to exert more

energy, brain power, and stress than people who had been socialized to know how to navigate

their universities and the processes in order to obtain a job. Meena says her knowledge gap

centered around not knowing when to apply to jobs or even how to go about applying for jobs.

Meena was unsure of what she wanted to do during her senior year and attempted to avoid even

thinking about the application stresses. When she began to apply to jobs, she says she was

unconfident and things never seemed like they were going well. It took months before an

organization extended her an offer.

　　　　To ease her issues with this knowledge gap, Helen emphasized the need for finding a

"tribe" or people who went through similar experiences – especially professors who were first-

generation when they were in college. In the same respect, Celia made clear that if it wasn't for

her support she received in college, she probably would have quit. Celia shared that there was just so much to not only learn, but become accustomed to (once again, first-generation students needed to do double time) and she leaned on her college friends and staff members she felt most comfortable with for the needed support and love she needed. To ease her current transition into the workforce, Helen has found a mentor at her current workplace who was also first-generation while in college. Helen highlighted that she is able to bond with individuals who were once first-generation as they just "understand". Nonetheless, the community, collectiveness, and mentorship aspect of being first-generation continues to be important to many of the first-generation students I interviewed. At the same time though, Helen stressed the independence that goes with being a first-generation college student. Helen described, "(first-generation students) chart our own path, everything we do is our own. We have our own perspectives and our own experiences but we do it together". Helen used the term "own path" to explain how her parents did not set up this path for her and that she was the one who needed to make her own decisions. Rosa talked about how first-generation students are forced to create a "unique yet enriching experiencing". The first-generation student has a unique identity both in their family setting and in their college setting and, therefore, they are forced to create their own narratives. Nonetheless, both Helen and Rosa recognizes the necessity to form a community of people who are all struggling to create their own path together and to stand in solidarity with one another.

Margaret, like many of her first-generation peers, shared she also constantly wrestled with the fact that her friends had parents who were easily available to give their children advice and insights on how to write a resume or draft a cover letter and was sometimes frustrated that her parents didn't know about internships nor how to obtain them. Meena reported she was used to leaning on her parents throughout her life and it was an initial shock to her when she was not

able to do that in college when she was struggling. Meena shared, "I would talk to my parents but they didn't have much advice as they didn't have that experience so they didn't even know what to tell me. They were just there for moral support". This further instilled Meena's drive to achieve the college degree for her parents. They never had access to higher education and their lack of knowledge isn't their fault. Meena, on the other hand, had access to them and, therefore, felt compelled to take advantage of that access. Celia also expressed that while she did have support back home, the support didn't know what it was truly like for Celia existing at her university. Despite her "supportive and caring" motherly support, Celia experienced overwhelming feelings that challenged her beyond words, but luckily Celia found her "crew" that pushed her to continue on. It was clear that these first-generation students were frustrated by the institutional barriers that prevented their parents from going to college. This frustration was deepened when their peers received advice from their parents in regards to navigating their universities while the first-generation students were only left with moral support from their parents. Nonetheless, this served as a motivation for many of the first-generation students I interviewed and they wanted their college degree to be not only for themselves but also for their parents. Rosa even went as far to say that college was all worth it when she saw how proud her parents were on graduation day and how she set the groundwork for her siblings to also one day attend college.

Ernesto's experiences pushed his current career trajectories. Ernesto shared this his current work team exist so that they can ask (and hopefully answer) the question, "how can we address specific issues for low-income, first-generation students transitioning into college?" Ernesto stated he is motivated to make the college experience transition much smoother than what he experienced. Emiliano's early socialization also served as his motivation throughout

college and today. Emiliano explained throughout the interview that his main goal for going to college and for having a decent paying job is to help his family move from a low-income background into a stable background and then to help other students do the same. Comparably, Cesar sees being first-generation as "laying the foundation for generations to come". Cesar knows the struggles of being first-generation and how these struggles can be used into strengths. First-generation students are able to build a community momentum to stand in solidarity with one another to truly show and emphasize to each other how powerful they are.

All these experiences bring layers to the first-generation identity. However, the participants all held other identities in which they frequently thought about. The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s to bring attention to how single-axis thinking undermines experiences and makes a just society harder to achieve. Intersectionality explores the multi facets of marginalized people (Crenshaw, 2018). Therefore, it is not necessarily fair to speak towards first-generation students without speaking and bringing attention to the other identities that they may hold. Indeed, the individuals included in this study just didn't identity as first-generation, they also identified as men, women, white, Latinx, queer, young, Catholic, mixed, etc. Intersectionality pays special attention to the marginalized identities that a person holds and how these identities intersect to create a specific experience. Therefore, the experiences of a first-generation white male student are much different than the experiences of a first-generation Black woman's experience.

I asked my participants about identities that were salient to them. It is not a huge surprise that those who were a person of color thought that their racial identities were the most salient. Six of my interviewees identified as either fully Latinx or mixed (with one parent identifying at Latinx). My two interviewees who identified as white did not think about their white identity

much, but they did think about their age, gender, and athletic ability. This confirms the idea that people often think about their identities that have been historically targeted and/or marginalized as they are forced to think about them. People often do not think about identities that they hold agency in (Gillem, Cohn, & Thorne, 2001).yes, good. Ernesto identifies as both gay and Latino and he believes that wherever he goes, those are the identities that stick out. "(I think they are salient) because like I don't know I feel like it's hard to go throughout my day without realizing that those are the most noticeable ones". Therefore, Ernesto's salient identities are the ones that more easily noticeable if he or someone else were to look at him and make generalizations of him based off of his appearance. Ernesto notices these identities even though he believes that his current workplace is rather diverse and despite the fact that the head of his department holds the same salient identities as he does. Similarly, Cesar, a 2018 recent graduate interested in media, believes that his Latino identity is the most salient as that is the "first one everyone encounters". Cesar went on to describe how this identity has caused feelings of isolation, "… just feeling like an other in a mainly white space definitely I think made it salient". Hence, Cesar was forced to think about his racial identity because he was a minority in many spaces at his university and he believes that people looked at him differently due to this. Cesar also has begun to think about his sexuality more as he has stated that he is now "more open with it", but as it is still one that is not apparent or one that he is forced to think about on a daily basis, it isn't one of his most prevalent ones. Similar to Cesar, Rosa also felt this sense of "otherness". After coming from a fairly racially diverse high school, she became very aware of her "brown skin" as she puts it during her first-year. Rosa did acknowledge that she often thought about her racial identity a lot as she does identify as mixed. Rosa explains, "I am half white so like just navigating those waters … what does it mean to carry both?" Meena's racial identity also felt prevalent to her during her time as

"there were not many who looked like her". She was forced to think about her different visible racial identity in her classes because, in some cases, she was the only Mexican Latina in the space. All of these individuals attended a university in which being white was the norm and being Latinx was considered in the minority. Therefore, when they were going through the transition process from college to working, they did not have the same amount of people (who were in their same positions) to potentially look up into and to help guide them and let them know of any insights in regards to applying and working.

These participants also discussed how their racial identities continue to be prevalent in their current workplaces. Emiliano revealed that in a former workplace of his all the teachers were white and that he was the only Latino teacher. Therefore, his Latino identity became salient to him in the school space when he interacted with other teachers. However, Emiliano believes that he is better able to relate to his students (as the majority of them are Latinx) and he can even "identify" with them. Emiliano wasn't the only one who felt that he can relate or identify to people he shares similar experiences with. Meena also feels that her Mexican Latina identity continues to remain prevalent in her workplace as she has the ability to speak Spanish with the students that she works with. Like Emiliano, she believes that she is better able to connect with these students because of the language and racial connections. Furthermore, Cesar continued to think about his racial and ethnic identity when applying to jobs. Cesar explained, "for a lot of companies, you are really like the only person of color there and you're getting interviewed by white people". Cesar went on to explain that this contrast forced him to think about his brow-ness whenever he entered an interviewing space. Therefore, ethnic identity as a salient identity was a trend as my participants were forced to recognize this identity because they have felt isolated by it and because they feel that this identity allows them to better connect with others.

Margaret and Helen were the only two fully white identifying participants that I interviewed (both Celia and Rosa identified as mixed). Interestingly, Margaret and Helen did not talk about their racial identity when discussing salient identities that they hold. For Margaret, age is currently a salient identity for her as there are not many people at her workplace that are around the same age. This stands at a sharp contrast to her college years when she was mainly surrounded by people who were the same as her. Chelsea explained, "I feel very much like wow I am young and I don't have a ton of experience as my co-workers do". Therefore, she feels that her age sometimes leads her to feeling inexperienced. Margaret also mentioned that she thinks about her female gender identity and if the decisions she makes is based off of her gender. However, she mentioned that about 80% of her marketing department is female and, therefore, this identity "is not as big of a deal". This continues to confirm the idea that individuals often think about their identities in which they are the minority in or in which they feel marginalized. While Margaret feel that her age is in the minority at her workplace, she does not feel that her gender is, and she, consequently, places more thought on her age. Helen did mention her whiteness in the interview, but admitted that she does not think much about it. Helen though about her previous identity as an athlete a lot. Helen was recruited to her university to fence and fenced throughout her first-year before realizing that it was too much. She said that she discussed this identity of hers in job interviews as it was an easy one for people to "latch onto" and being an athlete is synonymous in some environments with "working hard". This makes sense as many recruiters and interviewees are probably more comfortable talking about athletic ability than talking about race or gender. Helen also believed that while in college and when she was on the fencing team people saw her as mainly a fencer or mainly just an athlete. Helen shared that due to this people made assumptions on her such as she could "never have hardships". This

eventually pushed Helen to quit the fencing team as felt that she was "living a lie". Accordingly, Helen felt marginalized by her athletic identity early on in college and continues to hold great weight to it to this day. Interestingly, Helen also used this identity to her advantage while applying to jobs. Therefore, while some environments may marginalize identities, other environments may celebrate these same identities.

While all of my participants had earned their college degrees at the time of the interviews, only one thought about their newfound college degree as an identity of theirs. Rosa believed that her college degree and, therefore, college educated person identity now granted her many privileges in society…privileges that her parents were not afforded. Rosa went on to explain, "not only just the degree but where I go it from you know that has been sort of in the back of my mind too". Since Rosa's parents were unable to ever achieve a college degree, Rosa sees this new identity in her family – that stands in contrast to her parent's identity – as salient. While it is not a marginalized identity, she often thinks about it with pride.

Six of the participants also explicitly mentioned that their low-income identity was salient in some part of their college or current lives. As Celia mentioned in her interview, "I guess just like coming from a low-income background, it's more of a possibility that you're going to be a first-generation college student". Celia explicitly mentioned that her low-income identity came into fruition once she became ingrained in her university and it became really obvious that people came from much different backgrounds than she did. Helen also began to take note of this identity in college. For Helen, it was the first time to reflect upon her identities as she had never given space before to reflect on being first-generation and low-income. Helen explained, "it wasn't until I met with (the FGLI advisor) and she asked me what it was like to be FGLI and I didn't know what to say as no one had asked me that before". If Helen was never asked about her

identities, she may have never noticed them and may have been unaware of potential causes of her suffering and may have even suffered in silence. Margaret was very aware of her low-income identity in college as she was unable to participate in internships that weren't paid or even go purchase concert tickets with her friends. In her current workplace, this identity continues to be pronounced when people from her workplace discuss experiences they had while growing up or even their current decisions and mannerisms. Margaret went on to clarify, "They (my co-workers) do thinks or ask things and my early socialization becomes salient because like oh my parents didn't teach me that". Margaret alluded to the idea that people from wealthier backgrounds are socialized in different ways and that continues to be noticeable even when one reaches their workplaces. Similarly, those from lower-income backgrounds continue to be influenced by their own socializations in how they interact with the world.

Indeed, the first-generation students I interviewed continue to take note on their previous low-income identities and how this identity has motivated and continues to motivate them. One of the reasons why Ernesto said he wanted to become a doctor initially was because he wanted the stable income it would provide. Ernesto says he continues to be motivated by this previous identity by currently working in research that specifically examines low-income populations to better prepare them for college and beyond. The financial security of going to college and rising out of a low-income bracket also motivated Cesar and Emiliano to attend college. Emiliano emphasized that his goal was to always move out of a low-income background to help his family out. Emiliano expounded, "My motivation to apply to college was my parents. I wanted a different type of lifestyle. I mean making a low-income salary wasn't enough. I needed to go to college to make a positive impact on my family". Consequently, whenever times got tough in college for Emiliano, he reflected upon why he was there in the first place – to gain enough

monetary income sufficient enough to move away from a low-income lifestyle. While Emiliano also thought about his low-income identity when surrounded by individuals who had more than him, his low-income identity was important because it was a motivator and the force he needed to remind him of why he was doing what he was doing and continues to do what he does. Just getting to college is critical and the end all symbol of achievement for many low-income families. Cesar explained, "A lot of times (for low-income, first-gen, or immigrant households) there's like the idea that college is kind of the end all and once you get to a good university you're set". Cesar used this quote to emphasize the misunderstanding between what is actually needed for a successful job search (networking, connections, etc.) and what some people believe is all that is needed (just going to a good school). Nonetheless, Cesar was too motivated to go to his university to raise himself out of poverty and he thought about this motivation often while in college.

What confusion did I have in college?

My participants' narratives revealed that they faced a lot of confusion in regards to navigating their own college campus. Much of this confusion is rooted in the fact that they exist and walk on unfamiliar territory. This unfamiliarity often began when my participants entered college and became more profound when they attempted to navigate aspects of their university. Margaret rightfully proclaimed, "there was a lot of knowledge gaps around what I needed to do to be successful in college". Margaret and her peers more often than not say they did not know how to interact with their institution to get the most out of it. Margaret confirmed that the only information she had on college was through books and movies as she was not able to rely on her parents to socialize her into the college environment. Margaret and other first-generation students are unaware of how to go about interacting with their professors, university staff, or

even their peers. Emiliano described one of the first clubs he attempted to join that centered around dance of his "culture" but had mostly white individuals take space in it. During the interview this pushed Emiliano to say that he just didn't feel he was welcome in the space for whatever reason and this brought him discomfort. Additionally, when Meena found herself wanting help, but not knowing how to go about asking for it or breaking out of her shell in order to ask for it, she suffered in silence. Meena says she was afraid of feeling "dumb" and did not have the confidence to go ask individuals in power for the help she needed. Meena goes on to confirm that she believes many first years from marginalized backgrounds come in not knowing how to find help and there, therefore, is a gap.

Ernesto described his few weeks on campus as just wanting to "throw up" as he had never been in an environment that was so cutthroat or competitive before. Ernesto says he was made to feel uncomfortable at his university because of the individualistic orientations (?) of the other students at his university. Clearly, Ernesto's university valued independence – norms that stressed the importance of rising to the top and being the best. Ernesto mentioned his parents frequently in his interview and acting in a way that would pay some homage to his parents. Therefore, it is safe to say that Ernesto values collectivism or interdependence to an extent. When making decisions, Ernesto didn't just think about himself, rather he also thought about his parents. This may have caused some of his initial disgust – he did not know how to navigate this terrain that stressed independence rather than togetherness. Similarly, Rosa shared that she felt that she was going through much of her college years "alone" while Celia mentioned she felt really out of place at the beginning and she felt that "she was going to make it". Both Rosa and Celia shared the struggles of not having their parents or anyone above them explain to them what college was like and this forced feelings of isolation once they entered the institution. However,

once Rosa and Celia found people similar to them who they could experience college with, this aided them in their experience. Celia mentioned how she would have dropped out her first-year if it wasn't for a pre-orientation program she participated in her first-year geared towards marginalized students. Celia said, "because of (pre-orientation program), I had those spikes, those support systems". Rosa found community in her residential college and this assisted her. She described her residential college as one that was "inclusive" and one that valued "diverse cultures" and this caused her to feel at "home" and this made her college experience more manageable. While strong communities didn't make their confusion go away, the collective nature of leaning on one other made their universities easier to exist in as they could count on one another for help. The help that resources may have failed to provide them.

While there are a resources that are specific for first-generation students, such as Student Enrichment Services, or resources that are specific for their other identities, such as Multicultural Student Affairs, some of my participants felt that these resources were hard to come by and that they were unaware of these resources. Some students found about resources through unfamiliar means later in their college years and others found these resources through friends rather than the institution itself. Ernesto, for example, found about his major of social policy through members in his fraternity. Margaret found out about critical resources, such as financial resources, only after going through residential assistant training. Meena wasn't introduced to the multicultural community until her sophomore year – a community she would eventually hold to her highest regard. Meena explicitly stated, "And I think there has to be something that helps kind of like minorities be aware of these resources". Nonetheless, all of my participants knew that their university had a career services office. However, not all of them made it to career services despite knowing that career services may give them the skills they were lacking. Career services

offices advertise that they offer resources that range from resume building skills to interviewing and networking skills to job search skills. Students that I interviewed knew they needed to get better at interviewing or networking, but didn't travel to career services in order to gain those skills. Ernesto admitted, "not knowing how to interview was definitely one of the things that scared me". Ernesto later realized that he only got better at interviewing after interviewing and he just wished he would have realized earlier in his college career that he should have been practicing how to interview. Like Ernesto, Margaret was unaware of what she needed to focus during her earlier years in order to be well prepared for the job search. Margaret admitted, "I was not aware of how impactful networking and like making connections could be… I wasn't even sure of what one would get out of a career fair". Cesar didn't understand the importance of networking until later on during his junior year. These interviewees did not connect the skills that they were confused about and the skills they knew they were lacking to the career services office. Interesting. This seems like valuable information that you could share with the university.

All of my participants struggled with navigating the university as it related to helping them find a post-graduation opportunity. They were confused as to how to extract the most help from their universities. Many of them also say they had a chip of fear on their shoulder as they took space in their universities their final months. Ernesto described the entire process as "scary" as it seemed that he was applying to places cold. Ernesto was most afraid of not having a post-graduation opportunity. He believes that part of this fear just stemmed from his university's super competitive environment. Likewise, Helen confirmed that she felt alone in applying and navigating the space because she felt that "(my university) didn't know how to deal with people who are not consultants". Therefore, Helen believes that the support was there for students wanting to go into the consulting industry, but not necessarily there for people wanting to go into

industries not related to it. She too did not want to end up being the unemployed kid. This feeling became more concrete when she was close to being that unemployed kid. During her interview, Helen mentioned how she applied to nearly 50 jobs during her senior fall quarter, but didn't get any of them. "Like I was definitely like kind of just like going through the motions…what the hell was I doing wrong?" Helen questioned herself and her desires while going through the process. Unlike some of the other interviewees, Helen did find herself at career services, but did not feel that she was getting anything out of the experience. Therefore, she still felt alone and confused while going through it. It is also important to note that Margaret, the only other self-identifying white individual I interviewed, also admitted that she went to career services and did not think twice about going. The other interviewees, who all self-identified as people of color, either never found their way to career services or didn't feel comfortable there. Nonetheless, however, none of the interviewees felt they got much out of career services and this is an institutional failing. Rosa, a self-identifying mixed person, didn't ever make her way to career services because of her "shyness" and "fear". Therefore, it is an institutional failing that many students were unable to feel comfortable even taking space at the career services office. While Rosa didn't understand why she didn't feel comfortable, it is necessary to remember that she was a marginalized person on campus and her marginalization as a first-generation student and a person of color most likely led to her feelings of hesitance when interacting with spaces that were unfamiliar and intimidating. Rosa was forced to navigate much of the job search on her own and it goes without saying that this led to much confusion in the process.

Some of my participants also felt a sense of doubt in their abilities while going through the process – especially when they had already graduated and still were not getting positive news. Cesar shared that the uncertainty of it all made him uneasy. "You just send in your application

and then you might get no response at all and get ghosted by the recruiter and everything. That does a lot to a person". Cesar emphasized that rejection never got any easy and instead he just got used to it. Cesar eventually accepted the first job offer he got. The job searches and the uncertainty of not having a job seemed to be a constant weight on the shoulders. Celia hated this feeling so much that she decided to just settle for the first job that she was offered (however, it is also important to note that she felt pressure to find a job quickly as she needed the money). When Meena was not getting positive results from her job search, she turned inward to feel frustration towards herself. Meena explains, "I didn't know where to start. I didn't know what I really wanted. And so I think that was frustrating. I was frustrated at myself". Similarly, Meena accepted the first job offer she received. An unfavorable job search would take a toll on anyone. However, for individuals who are going through the process with little guidance from their kin, the process is even more confusing, isolating, and challenging. Despite the fact that they had a respectable college degree, some of my participants felt that they had to settle and they take the first offer they received.

What confusions do I have at work?

The interviewees' confusion often did not stop once they left college. Indeed, they faced confusion in how to navigate and exist in often white-collar spaces that their parents never inhibited. From when they first transitioned to currently, many of these first-generation college students often feel that they need to tread on thin ice – whether that be not knowing when to take a lunch break or being afraid be oneself when they interact with management. This uneasiness more often than not stems from still feeling the need to prove themselves and also existing in spaces in which they are still the minority.

Much of my participants' confusion stemmed from unclear and unstated norms. These norms were either deeply rooted in society or rooted in the specific organization. Margaret and Emiliano faced confusion and apprehension at the job when they were tempting to alter their current position. When Margaret was applying to a better job within her first job out of college, she recalled that they interviewed her but eventually went with a more experienced external hire. Margaret described this as "frustrating" and it pushed her out of that company as there was "no clear career path to go down". Margaret felt disappointment when her organization did not seem like it was investing in her potential. She also felt betrayed to an extent when the company went with someone externally. Margaret believed that her company would treat her as "family" and felt betrayed to an extent when they went with someone else. Margaret's collective or interdependent nature forces her to place greater weight on togetherness while her organization may have placed greater weight on whomever, in their eyes, would help bring them the biggest profit. This experience pushed Margaret to quit and choose a different job in which she thought she would be more valued. Similar to Margaret, Cesar often found that what he valued was not necessarily apparent in the application process. Cesar confirmed that his confusion stemmed from not knowing what he was doing wrong and why he wasn't getting hired. Cesar explained, "you end up getting ghosted by the recruiter and then not even receive feedback on what you could improve on or why they went with another candidate…that was frustrating". Cesar did not feel like he was receiving the support from the recruiters that he would have appreciated. Cesar felt almost as if recruiters were inhumanely treating him to an extent by not following up with him or not giving him advice on how to improve his interviewing skills in order to secure another job. Therefore, what Margaret and Cesar placed weight on during the interview process did not coincide with what the recruiters placed weight on. This caused a mismatch between the

collectiveness and wanting to help people out that Margaret and Cesar placed weight on and the independence that the recruiters placed weight. This mismatch inherently caused confusion for both Margaret and Cesar.

Once they existed in their job spaces, my interviewees also faced confusion in what was considered normal and how they should go about asking for money or interacting with their co-workers. Ernesto who currently works for a research poverty lab at a local university is unaware of how to go about interacting with his boss…so much that he dreads it. As an openly gay man, Ernesto almost feels that his boss, who is also gay, wants him to leave a part of himself at the door. Ernesto explains talking to him, "it's been so intimidating and I feel like sometimes he judges me for being more gay or something…he doesn't share his personal life and that's so off putting" Ernesto shared that he desires to get to know the individuals that he worked with on a more personal level and that it doesn't feel right to only talk about work while at the office. While Ernesto believes that his work has been a valuable experience thus far, he still feels that he doesn't align perfectly with his current job. Ernesto values getting to know his peers more than he values of just keeping it business or professional all the time. Ernesto remains confused and unsure of how to interact with his boss and other people in his office who seem to only want to talk about work. Meena, who is currently working at a youth social services organization, also struggles with interacting with her bosses and she noted this as her main source of confusion. Additionally, Meena felt alone when first navigating how to go about her job. She shared that her supervisor did not provide her much guidance in regards to how to go about her job. Meena found this especially frustrating because her role involves her working with small children. Meena also is unsure of how to go about questioning her supervisor. She shared that she doesn't necessarily agree with some of the current activities her supervisor has her do with the children.

Meena stated that, "each kid is different and has different needs" and this stands at a contrast to the lump sum activities that her supervisor has her do with all the children. Meena says she is motivated, therefore, to bring what is best to the children that she works with and she sometimes feels that this stands at a disconnect to what her supervisor tells her to do.

Rosa's confusion at the job also centered around relationships – specifically how to navigate personal and work relationships. Rosa currently works at a health center in Chicago. Her aunt is the director of the center and is the individual who was able to connect her to the center and encouraged her to get involved in their activities earlier in Rosa's college career. In this way, Rosa was already connected to the center and this would eventually set her up for employment. While Rosa believes that her job is great and the transition was great, she also is struggling with navigating having a family member being her boss. While Rosa's situation is unique to Ernesto's or Meena's, it still is able to emphasize the weight that these individuals are putting to their relationships and how navigating these relationships continues to be at the center of their concerns and confusions.

Like Ernesto, Helen is also working at a local university. She is currently focusing on public health survey research. She, too, is having difficulties in knowing what is appropriate at the office. This stems from an experience at her previous workplace* and as Helen described it "having working-from-home parents who are self-employed". Helen admitted that she may come off and is eccentric in regards to her work and may even be too "thorough" at times. Nonetheless, Helen is confused as how to understand the culture of her workplace. Helen admits that she currently does not feel comfortable taking lunch breaks and she cannot pinpoint the reason behind why. Unlike Ernesto, Meena, and Rosa, it does appear that Helen is placing greater weight on her work than her relationships or, in other words, her independence rather

than her interdependence. This may also stem from her identity as a white woman which stands at a contrast to Ernesto's and Meena's Latinx identity and Rosa's mixed identity. Margaret who currently works as a social media specialist for a mid-size business also faced confusion similar to Helen's - confusion that didn't necessarily have roots in interdependence but actually independence. Margaret's confusion stemmed from money, mainly. Margaret shared that she didn't understand the power of negotiating when she was going through the interview process and only found out she could negotiate vacation time through a current workplace friend. Her confusion in her workplace also was rooted in dress code and etiquette. Regardless, Margaret described her interaction with her workplace as "imposter mentality", she feels that she has to pretend and "fake it until she makes it" to an extent. This imposter mentality is rooted in her lack of knowledge around whether to ask for reimbursements or how long she can take for lunch or even taking the day off.

*Helen spent a good portion of her interview discussing an experience she had at her first job and the job she held before her current role. Helen spent the first few months of post graduate life as a grant writing at a prominent nonprofit in Chicago. After only working there for a few months, she essentially was told that she messed up and that they needed to let her go. This caused much confusion and uneasiness for Helen as she strongly (still to this day) believes that she did nothing wrong. She was able to squander an extra month at the place but to this day she couldn't explain why she got fired. The fear of unemployment also made this a very difficult time for Helen. She expressed, "I was going to lose health insurance and I was just kind of like losing my mind". It is essentially to bring up that Helen was unsure and, therefore, didn't go about asking the right questions to her previous office to understand why she got fired. Since Helen

was navigating unfamiliar territory, she went with the flow and did not interrogate her previous

supervisors as much as she rightfully should have.

Who was my community?

Both previous research and my participants' words have emphasized their value on their

relationships and for this reason I asked my participants about community – both the community

they held in college and the community they currently possess. I was interested in learning about

their communities as these may have been the individuals and institutions that assisted them in

their transition to the workplace and the individuals who may have comforted them once the

transition occurred. I was also interested in understanding the types of communities that my

participants felt at home. It is not a surprise that many of my participants found community in

their identity groups – whether that be ethnic, religious, or first-generation status. Celia, Rosa,

Emiliano and Meena talked heavily on how they found their sources of community through

multicultural student life. Celia met her friends and support group through a summer program

geared towards assisting non-white students to college life. Celia recounted about the program,

"I met a lot of other students from similar backgrounds as me and that was nice to come in with

that support system and stay within that group of friends". Celia was impacted so much from the

program that she decided to come back as a counselor for 2-years to support incoming freshmen.

Rosa did not participate in said summer program and, therefore, did not come in with a strong

group multicultural group coming into college. This may be one of the reasons why Rosa

described her freshman year as a "mess". She was trying to figure everything out…alone.

However, Rosa believed that during her second year things turned around in part because she

found multicultural student affairs and was able to have a resource in it and build community

from it. Meena, too, discussed how she didn't feel at home at her university and strongly

considered transferring until she joined a Latina affiliated sorority who then introduced her to the greater multicultural community. Meena described her experience with the university before she met her multicultural base, "I felt like I didn't fit in. I didn't really know about the multicultural community…and then I met them (at the end of sophomore year) and it changed everything. I loved it". Hence, Meena found home when she met people who were like her – people who she can be herself around and people who understood some of her past experiences and current experiences. Emiliano felt at home by taking space in a Latino-based cultural club and his Latino fraternity. He felt that the most significant role he played on campus was through these organizations. It is not a surprise that the most salient identity of both Meena and Emiliano was their Latinx identity. Margaret noted her Christian identity throughout the interview and for this reason it was nice a surprise that she found her Christian group on campus to be her biggest source of community. While she had also mentioned her sorority being a community, Margaret felt a discrepancy. "The background of a lot of the women in my sorority had felt kind of different to me" Margaret shared as she explained why she felt her sorority wasn't a bigger sense of community. Margaret felt like she could be herself and did not have to hide a part of her identity while sharing space with the other individuals in her Christian group. Margaret also affirmed that she wished she had a community like Quest Bridge (a nationwide financial and community support for first-generation and low-income students). Previously in the interview, Margaret mentioned that she never applied to Quest Bridge as her parents and college guidance counselor thought it was a scam. Therefore, Margaret's main source of community came from her religious identity. However, she wished she was able to form a stronger community with others who also identified as first-generation and low-income.

While none of my participants mentioned their affiliation with Quest Bridge, many did talk about the office on campus that works with first-generation and low-income students as being a part of their community. Hence, my participants not only appreciated the help they received from this office, but also something that was close to them. Emiliano remembers that the office provided him with the monetary financial support and a jacket when he really needed it. Helen talked about the office as being "instrumental" to her college experience by also providing both the monetary support and the counseling and advising when she needed it the most. Additionally, Cesar discussed how the office is really doing a lot of great work for first-generation and low-income students and how he wishes that he played a larger part in their community while in college. This may stem from Cesar's lack of knowledge in regards to the office earlier in his college career. Indeed, many of the participants felt that they did not know about the office and, consequently, the office's resources until near the end of their college years. Meena admitted that she did not even know the office existed until the end of her junior year. Meena extended empathy to many new students who struggle because, like her, they don't know that a first-generation and low-income office exists. Meena stated, "I think it's hard because like a lot of the freshman…they don't know who to go for help and there's like a gap". This knowledge gap of sorts may be why none of my participants mentioned the first-generation and low-income community as being their MAIN source of community. None of my participants mentioned their first-generation and low-income identity as their first community source.

Who is my community?

I also wanted to take note on the community that my participants currently felt that they had and if they noted any major changes in their community as they transitioned from college to their workplaces. Not surprisingly, my participants felt that their communities had drastically

changed. As Ernesto mentioned, "so it's very different from college in that you aren't constantly around friends". My participants struggled with finding their place in their workplaces and leaving their college support groups. As noted previously, many of my participants found their community through their identities – whether that be ethnic, religious, etc. In some of my participants' workplaces, sheer diversity seems to be difficult to come by and with that being said so does community. At his first teaching school, Emiliano felt out of place when compared to the other teachers. Emiliano explained, "all the teachers were white and I was the only Latino teacher and all the students were students of color, low-income and the teachers came from the middle class". Emiliano goes on to confirm that he was able to relate to his students because of their shared identities, but was unable to relate to the other teachers to an extent and this is why he notes that his work community also includes the students. This community probably stems from the fact that he was in his students' shoes just a few years ago. He feels that he is able to form close connections with his students and sees his students almost as family extensions to an extent. He constantly acts as a mentor to his students by sharing with them that he went through the same thing and that "everything will pay off". Hence, community for Emiliano is related to whether he can personally connect with the people that he is sharing space with. Emiliano recently transferred schools and he feels much more comfortable at this school as there is more of a diverse group of teachers. He even goes on to say that the teacher identity is "pretty much the same" as his university where you are able to see people with different backgrounds. While Emiliano still doesn't feel that he has the same solid community group amongst the teachers as he did with his college friends, he does feel comfortable at his new school and amongst the teachers and this does stem from the sheer diversity amongst the teachers and Emiliano is able to see individuals like him and consequently his overall work experience has improved.

Regardless, some of my participants do not feel that they have formed a community yet at work. Margaret's community still stems from her church friends and while she feels that she has friends at work with whom she can eat lunch with, she also knows that people at her work are in a different life stage than she is. Margaret shared that she is hesitant to ask people to hang out outside of work as many of them may "need to go home and take care of their toddler". Therefore, Margaret is finding some difficulties in finding people who share her similar age identity. While this was an initial shock to Margaret, she is currently more adjusted to it. Moreover, Meena is also having a difficult transition because of this. Meena noted that the majority of people in her office were in their 30s and that this makes her feel like just a "student" at times. Nonetheless, she noted that everyone in her office was quite nice. Meena believes that her lack of community may be her own fault as she never wants to grab drinks with her co-workers as she knows she has a long commute ahead. Meena admitted, "I'm pretty bad. Yeah they always invite me to hang out (after work) but I haven't and it has a lot to do with my long commute". Meena still lives at home to be close with her family and travels more than an hour one way to her workplace. Accordingly, it is difficult for her to dedicate time to building relationships with her coworkers outside of work. At the moment, Meena is continuing to value her family and her overall well-being over established closer connections with her coworkers. While Helen's office has a plethora of recent graduates, she too, is having difficult relating to them. Helen joked about how many of her coworkers were in sororities and, therefore, come from families with money. Helen then went on to discuss how her closest friend at work is also first-generation and low-income and another friend isn't but he "understood the plight and, therefore, he's good". Hence, Helen is placing value on individuals who either have went through similar experiences or are openly empathetic and compassionate towards them. Other

than that though, Helen feels that her community network is not that substantial at work yet, but she is continuing to try to find greater sources of support. However, this makes navigating adult life somewhat challenging for her.

Some of my participants felt comfortable in their workplaces, but did not that the relationships did not extend far beyond being friendly to one another in common spaces or asking about each other's days. Celia didn't say much beyond that her co-workers and her all get along and that they try to do something nice for birthdays. Celia knows that she does not want to stay at that workplace long term and, therefore, is not as interested at fostering an established community. On the other hand, Rosa believes that with time, the community at her workplace will become concrete. She shared that it is hard for her to tell if she is really fitting in but she is getting used to the people there. It is also interesting to mention that Rosa and Emiliano also mentioned that there work community extends beyond just their co-workers but also the people they are serving (in Rosa's case that is the people in the community and in Emiliano's case that is his students). Likewise, Ernesto believes that community will become more set with time. He believes that most people in his office are very different than him. Ernesto uttered, "like I need to be with real people with like problems and just not always talk about data". While Ernesto believes that he has made a few friends at his workplace, he also stated that many of his coworkers just have "very flat affects". Thus, Ernesto feels that he is not able to form a close emotional connection with anyone at his office just yet. He does have hope though that this will come with time. This tone may also be set by Ernesto's boss with whom he is intimated by as his boss comes off as someone is unable to relate to.

What do I wish?

I thought it was important to ask my participants directly what they wished. I left the question broad to allow my participants the freedom to answer however they wished – these

wishes ranged from personal wishes stemmed from their past to aspects of what they wished their universities had provided them. Many of these wishes stemmed from their own personal struggles whether in college or the job search. Only three of my participants focused on the job search while two of my participants focused on their experiences as a marginalized student, two stemmed from resources they wished they would have taken advantage of during college, and one wish stemmed from just knowledge surrounding help. I have outlined these wishes from each of the participants below:

Ernesto: *"I think finding a job in policy can be hard. Especially at a university not known for policy…it's really hard to familiarize yourself with this space when you're so unfamiliar with it and when everyone around you is to … (I wish) that there were career advisors that worked specifically towards helping students interested in policy."*

Helen: *"I wish there was better preparation for the job application process. There was an element missing because I got my resume checked over multiple times from various different people and everyone said my resume was fine. I did all these prep things and I sent out like over 50 applications and I didn't get one job offer."*

Margaret: *"I wish I could have asked my parents for more advice on looking over my resume and going into interviews, even how to dress for an interview."*
"I wish I would have known about applying to grad school and the scholarships attached to it. Maybe (if I would have known) it would have changed what I did. (Maybe) I would have sought more of an education."

Therefore, for Ernesto, Helen, and Margaret their top concerns centered around the job navigation processes. All of these individuals were heavily involved in the process during their senior year of college (and all found themselves at standstills at some point) which makes sense

as to why they focused in on this time when they were discussing their wishes. These individuals wished that they were better prepared for what lay ahead of them and all of them felt that they were lacking in knowledge and support in regards to finding and knowing their options. Even though these individuals sought out support, they still felt that this support wasn't sufficient enough to truly get them what they desired. Ernesto, Helen and Margaret were left feeling that the career advancement office was not sufficient enough and that there were elements missing – whether that be a specific person focused on policy or guided students towards graduate school or someone who truly knows what recruiters are looking for in resume and cover letters.

Emiliano: *"I really wish they had like panels for students in the summer, specifically students of color…like student designed panels to help them make that transition because many come from high school into college not knowing what to expect."*

Cesar: *"(I wish) there was maybe like a social club for first-gen and low-income students that you know just another place where you can hang out with like-minded individuals and be around another peer network that way when students are going through similar things they have a more established community."*

For Emiliano and Cesar, they felt that their university could do a better job at supporting marginalized students, in general. Their wishes alluded to the idea that they did not have sufficient knowledge in regards on what to know to expect and how to extract the most resources from the university to their benefits. Emiliano's panel and Cesar's organization would have been able to serve these students by not only feeding them information, but to also serve as a support system for younger students. This community would be able to lean on each other for advice and opportunities. This type of community would have made the transition easier on Emiliano and

Cesar as they would have heard directly from people who have been in their shoes or individuals who are also going through a similar process.

Rosa: *"I wish I would have taken advantage of the career advancement office."*

"The rejections upon rejections (in applying to jobs) was rough and I wish I had gotten more feedback and I wish I had been more motivated to network."

Celia: *"I wish I would have studied abroad. I really wanted to do it. I think I was just holding myself back because I was scared to go so far away and knowing that I can't easily hop on a plane and come back home."*

As for Rosa and Celia, their wishes were more internalized. To a larger extent, the two of them both regarded not using certain university provided resources – career services and studying abroad. While Rosa also wished that she received some feedback throughout the process, she also believes that career services would have provided her at least a better foundation in regards to setting herself up for transition and job navigation success. While it is difficult to say if studying abroad would have impacted the college to career transition for Celia, studying abroad would have definitely expanded her horizons to some extent and would have gotten her out of her comfort zone. She may have then taken this experience with her to better understand what she wanted out of her career and she may have felt more comfortable to push herself rather than to "settle" as she described it.

Meena: *"I wish I would have known where to go for help or that it is okay to ask for help or even that I was going to struggle."*

"I think there has to be something that helps minorities be aware of resources…especially those going into hard sciences like pre-med or math."

Meena verbalized what probably all students in general may struggle with – finding the courage to initially ask for help. As mentioned earlier, Meena went in detail in her interview discussing how she really struggled finding her place at her university during her early college years. Meena was unaware of what resources were offered and how to even go about finding a strong community. Meena wishes that future generations do not go through the same things that she did and wishes there existed a concrete system to ensure that students are aware of these necessary resources. Once Meena became aware of the resources offered, such as those related to multicultural student life, or on being low-income, or even on post-graduation plans, her life drastically improved and she no longer had the urge to transfer as she once had. It goes without saying that transitions are easier when one feels supported and that support comes from resources and community. While there are some pre-orientation programs that exist that introduce students to some resources, not everyone who is eligible for a pre-orientation program participates in one and, consequently, some students are left with no knowledge of resources once they get to their university. At first, Meena wasn't even aware what she was missing out on. While she was luckily able to eventually find resources and a community, the original illiteracy still made an avoidable harmful impact on her. When Meena was getting ready to transition out of college, she yet again, was left at a standstill and didn't really know how to apply to jobs and where to go to for help. Even though she eventually figured it out, she still felt alone going through the process. While every university has resources that are in place to support these transitioning students, there seems to be once again a lack of knowledge around them – especially for first-generation students who are still learning how to navigate their university well into their senior years.

LIMITATIONS

This study is not without its several limitations. To begin, all of the students I interviewed attended the same private university nearby a large Midwestern city. The university is research focused and is considered "elite". All of these students took four years to graduate and all attended their university directly after finishing high school. Therefore, these students attended college from the ages of 18-22. A 2017 report from the Institution of Education Sciences found that 20% of first-generation college students obtained their Bachelor's degree 10 years after their sophomore year of high school. The report also found that 54% of these first-generation students left college without a degree (Redord & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). My study didn't include individuals who took time off of school nor individuals who took longer to complete their degree nor individuals who waited a few years after high school to obtain their degrees. However, the fact that I only interviewed people who went directly from high school to university may also be considered a benefit to this study and this study may, therefore, be used to implement changes and programs geared towards first-generation students as more selective institutions. Future studies should compare first-generation students who complete their degree in four years to first-generation students who may take longer to complete their degrees. Furthermore, since all the participants that I interviewed attended a four-year selective research institution, it also would be worthwhile to compare their experiences with students who attended less selective institutions that didn't focus on research (this would be even more worthwhile as many of the students I interviewed took part in research sometime during their college careers).

By interviewing only eight individuals, the study is not representative of all identities. With a smaller sample size, full intersectional analyses were impossible. While the individuals who participated in this study were not homogeneous across racial, gender, sexual orientation, or monetary lines, they also did not represent all identities and, therefore, we cannot say that these

findings extend to all first-generation students at a four-year selective research university near a large Midwestern city. Additionally, since the study took place at only one university, it is also not representative of all geographical locations. The location of the university (and where these participants chose to say) was near one of the largest cities in the nation and, consequently, the students at this university have different experiences than students at a more rural location. Future studies may explore and compare the varying experiences of first-generation students across universities and cities.

My choice to only interview first-generation students emphasized their experiences in regards to transitioning from being an undergraduate student to working full-time. There is also little work done on college seniors transitioning in general. Therefore, future work should examine the experiences of continuing-generation students to their first-generation peers. This future work would be able to pinpoint if the first-generation student transition experience is truly unique to this group.

Furthermore, like any human, I went into the research project with my own biases. I chose the questions that I was interested in and also chose to highlight the answers and themes that I have found were most important. My opinion in importance is obviously a result of my own experiences as a first-generation college student who attended the same university as my participants. While I obviously went into each interview not knowing what my participants would say nor attempting to direct them to say one thing over another, I think it is still worth mentioning that all researchers go into interviews and then their writing with some bias – bias that is not capable of leaving them. I think it is also necessary to mention that I knew all of my participants before interviewing them. As mentioned earlier, I posted an interest form on my personal Facebook page to find participants. The eight individuals that I interviewed ranged from

friendships to one-time acquaintance. While I do believe it was a strength to know my

interviewees ahead of time, as they felt comfortable around me and, therefore, may have shared

more, it may also be a limitation. My participants may have extended the truth a bit or may have

avoided sharing some details in an attempt to not ruined the perceived image that they may

believe that I have with them.

DISCUSSION

This study was originally set to explore the experiences of first-generation students as

they transitioned from their undergraduate experiences at a selective, research institution near a

large Midwestern city to their current experiences working full time near the same large

Midwestern city. However, this study turned into one that more broadly explored the experiences

and feelings of first-generation students both at their high education institution and their current

work institutions. I looked closely at the identities of these first-generation students and how

their backgrounds and socialization affected the way they interacted with these institutions. I

examined what these students found important and how they went about navigating institutions

that were not made for them. I was motivated to figure out how first-generation students went

about leveraging the struggles they had with these institutions and systems to then create their

own narratives of success. In this section, I summarize my findings and interlace these findings

with additional literature on first-generation students and more broad institutional failure

research. I also offer recommendations as to how these institutions can be more inclusive

towards those who may be first-generation.

Interdependence Motivation Combined with Identity

First, I argue that first-generation students lived past experiences causes them to place

greater weight on interdependence rather than independence and this influences their current

decision making and how they interact with their world. Many of my participants sought out careers and are in careers that explicitly seek to make a difference – such as teaching, researching, or working in a community center. These individuals didn't want a career that would force them to sit at a computer all day, but instead a career that would allow them to "help people directly". Six out of my eight participants did explicitly mention that helping people was what motivated them and six out of my eight participants were doing just that in their day to day working lives. Additionally, my participants mentioned their parents frequently in their interviews – both in a sense of wanting to monetarily help their parents out in bringing them from a low-income background to a "more stable" background and by making them proud by graduating college in their honor. Therefore, it may be argued that these first-generation students placed greater weight on interdependence rather than independence. They sought out careers that would cause them to help people directly and emphasized helping out their parents and doing things for their parents (such as graduating college) over acting only for themselves.

Despite existing in their higher education institution for four-years that stressed independent ideals, such as being encouraged to make choices that would benefit oneself (Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013), these my first-generation participants continued to stick with their interdependent ideals. This finding is consistent with Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, and Goudeau (2016) whom found that social class differences remain consistent in college and, therefore, first-generation students will not adapt a more independent mindset once they enter and then take space in their higher education institution.

In this section, it is also necessary to discuss in further detail the various identities of my participants and how these identities also interlace with their first-generation identity to then paint who they currently are. My participants weren't just first-generation, many of them also

held identities such as being Latinx (six explicitly stated this) or being of lower socioeconomic status (all explicitly stated this). This aids to confirm that first-generation students are more likely to hold other marginalized identities. Many first-generation students identify as low-income and come from a working class background (Thayer, 2000). Students from working-class backgrounds have been found to be influenced by relationships and, therefore, interdependence. These students place a much greater weight to interdependence than their upper and middle class peers (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011). Additionally, Latino culture has been rooted in communalism and interdependence and social relationships are often held to the highest regards. One value – *personalismo* – centers around a desire to trust people and have a genuine interest in them rather than and over institutions (Hill & Torres, 2010). Latino culture is also one that stresses familial relationships and strong parental involvement in their children's lives (Hill & Torres, 2010). Accordingly, other marginalized identities (such as being low-income or being of a marginalized ethnic background) intersect with the first-generation identity to create values that place a greater emphasis on people, family, and relationships.

While none of my participants stated that they came from a middle or upper class background, two of my participants identified as white and multi-generational American Therefore, they came from homes that stressed more western ideologies. While two is a very small sample size, it may also shine some light into how a person's racial identity intersects with their first-generation identity. Interestingly, these participants differed in their responses than their Latinx counterparts in regards to their motivations and how they interacted with their world. The western basic norm is to become independent, unique, and to be able to differentiate oneself from peers (Chung & Gale, 2006). The Bowen family system model was born out of the experiences of white middle class families and it has widely been used in family therapy

research. The model argues that self-differentiation is related to lower levels of anxiety (Bowen, 1978). The two white participants that I interviewed did not mention their parents as a motivation for them to attend college nor a motivation for them to graduate. These participants stressed that they were going to college to improve their positions in society (a more independent stance than many of the Latinx participants who emphasized that they were going to college not just for themselves but for their parents).

Furthermore, both of my white participants emphasized that they were socialized to work hard while growing up and one even mentioned that she continues to place emphasis on being the "hardest worker" and her desire to just work harder than everyone else. One of these participants works in research and she stated that she appreciated the "independence" that came with her job. The other participant works for a smaller for-profit business, and she mentioned that one of her main reasons for going to college and then obtaining a job was to be "independent" and to not rely on others for her well-being. While these two white participants did talk about the importance of helping others in their interviews, it also did seem that they acted for themselves before they acted for anyone else.

Therefore, it is also necessary to bring other identities constantly into the conversation. Indeed, intersectionality confirms that race, class, sexuality, gender are not stand alone, mutually-exclusive entities but instead need to be constructed together to understand how they are intertwined to shape social inequality (Collins, 2015). While being a first-generation college student is a marginalized identity, this experience (and their outcomes) looks much different depending on other marginalized identities held. For the most part, the first-generation students I interviewed were compelled to give back, to help people, and to pay it forward in some capacity. However, this looked different depending on their other identities. The white participants that I

interviewed did hold independent ideologies that seemed to be intertwined with their interdependent ideologies – such as working harder than anyone else in order to be in positions in which they could help others. The Latinx participants more so valued making it through and then being there to help others similar to them also make it through – further confirming their interdependent ideologies.

Institutional Failures and Knowledge Gaps

Second, I argue that first-generation students have a difficult transition both to their higher education institution and to their workplaces as there exists multiple forms of oppression that are both experiential and structural. As Lamont and Swidler (2014) have previously discussed, the awareness of a person's story does not provide an explanation for the situations they may find themselves in. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the structures and institutions that are in place that continue to only work for a few. The knowledge gaps that inherently exist by not being socialized in elite, college-educated environments are an oppressive form of social marginalization and this interacts with the oppressive structural marginalization acts of the institution. Indeed, McLean and Syed (2015) discussed how social marginalization is linked to structural marginalization and how intersectionality needs to be discussed in both the experiential and the structural. McLean and Syed (2015) also bring up the necessity to bring the idea of power into these conversations and how marginalized communities face a loss of power to a larger extent in these elite higher education and work institutions as there are not many people with the same experiences as them and, therefore, they may feel a loss of power and a sense that they do not belong. Consequently, it is important to keep in mind that there are many oppressive angles that marginalized communities continue to fight against and, in most cases, it is on them to change this oppressive nature of spaces they inhabit as those in positions of power often do

not put in this work. Despite the personal struggles many first-generation students need to overcome both at their higher education institution and their work institutions, they still put in extra work to change the structure of these institutions in an attempt to make them less oppressive for generations to come.

Throughout their interviews, all of my eight participants discussed their own "knowledge gaps" that they were forced to overcome during college or ones that they are currently overcoming. Ernesto, for example, discussed how he was unaware of how to even go about finding policy jobs and how he is currently unaware of how to approach conversations with his boss. Margaret discussed how she was uncertain on how to navigate university resources and how she is currently unaware of how to negotiate and ask for more vacation days. Emiliano faced uncertainty when he wanted to transfer to another school to teach and he didn't know how to go about having that conversation with his principal. Helen faced much uncertainty and confusion when she got laid off from her first job after not knowing what exactly she did wrong. Cesar's long job finding process caused him to constantly question himself and what he was doing wrong and why he was not getting any offers. Meena didn't know where to go at her university when she was feeling alone. Celia thought she was going to drop out early in her university years because she felt that it was just too much. Similar to Cesar, Rosa also faced much uncertainty during the job search and was uncertain on how to go about finding her community while in college. Having said all of this, at one point or another, these first-generation college students felt that they were missing something, that they weren't prepared for what they were experiencing, and that they were different. For the most part, these knowledge gaps centered around a lack of mentorship and guidance. While these knowledge gaps may exist because these individuals were socialized in households that were not college-educated and more

often came from a lower socioeconomic background, these knowledge gaps continue to exist BECAUSE of the institution. Furthermore, society is forced to think of these marginalized students as having "gaps" (rather than celebrating their strengths) because of what is normalized and expected at the institution. Consequently, there is a values and experience mismatch between what is valued by first-generation students and what is valued by their institutions.

It has already been established that first-generation individuals (keeping their other identities, specifically their low-income and racial identities in mind) tend to value interdependence over independence. These individuals place much greater weight on their community, doing things for others, and their genuine interest in people. This stands at a stark contrast to the independent model of higher education institutions and professional workplaces. Higher education administrators often share that the cultural norm of their institutions allows students to pave their own path, to express themselves, and to learn for their own personal interests (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). The independent higher education model is similar to what is valued by many professional workplaces; a large, popular investment banking website emphasized, too, that their bank was a great place for the "self-starter, for someone who relishes a lot of autonomy, and who seeks to do things the way they think is best (Stephens, Dittmann, & Townsend, 2017). When these first-generation students take up space in these institutions that value independence rather than interdependence they feel less able to perform up to their potential and they face increase stress and discomfort with higher cortisol levels (Stephens, Townsend, Markus & Phillips, 2012). Furthermore, it has been found that the consequences of this cultural mismatch can and will persist all four year of colleges (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, & Goudeau, 2018). While it has not been shown how long this

mismatch can last in professional workplaces, it may be contemplated that the mismatch will continue for at least quite a few years, if not, forever.

While some individuals eventually become accustomed to their higher education and professional workplaces, it goes without say that the transition is difficult and becoming used to a place much different than oneself takes time. Nonetheless, however, many individuals learn to exist in these institutions by finding a strong community. Due to the more limited resources growing up, these individuals were socialized to lean on one another for support and that is why these individuals are more likely to thrive when they are able to enact interdependent models of self in these very independent settings (Stephens, Townsend, & Dittmann, 2019). They understand they have even less power in these independent institutions when they are facing it alone and they, therefore, feel a sense of comfort when they can go through experiences and struggles with others in similar predicaments. Helen shared that she finds solace in one of her current bosses because she was also first-gen while in college and that some of her closer friends in her workplace are either first-gen or "understand the plight". This community makes them feel at home and this community may even help them with the knowledge gaps they experience. Celia, for example, owed her not dropping out of college to a summer program she did before college. She found her community in this summer program geared towards first-generation and low-income students and she sought out being a counselor for this program to help to build a strong community for the next generation. Meena, Rosa, and Emiliano found strong communities in their multicultural outlets while in college. They appreciated being surrounded by individuals with similar experiences as they felt that they could trust and lean on these individuals.

Unfortunately, in some cases, this community is hard to find. Meena and Rosa had much difficulties finding the right communities while in college and it took them years to find their fit.

In their professional workplaces, Ernesto, Helen, Meena, and Margaret are still trying to find their fit. While these individuals do have friends at work, they still feel that the strong community aspect is missing and this makes work life more difficult than it needs to be. Furthermore, and, most importantly, just telling marginalized individuals to find a strong community is not nearly enough. Instead, higher education and professional workplaces should make changes and adapt their institutions to be more welcoming to those from diverse backgrounds. In fact, recent research has shown that professional workplaces are beginning to value more collaboration and this is evident in workplaces adapting open layout areas and are centering many of their projects around teams (Cross et al., 2016). While first-generation students have many knowledge gaps when it comes to navigating their higher education and professional workplaces, these knowledge gaps partially only exist because these institutions value independence over interdependence. It is an institutional failing that higher education institutions and professional workplaces do not value interdependence as much as they should. Nonetheless, by shifting towards a more interdependence landscape – whether that be by changing brochure descriptions or shifting the mission statements to value collaboration – those from more marginalized backgrounds may feel more power, more at home, and more ready to contribute to their best potential and help others also contribute to their best potentials.

What it would be, what it could be, what is should be

Finally, I argue that stronger institutional programming that centers on mentorship, networking, community, and career-building opportunities would be quite beneficial towards first-generation students transitioning out of college. All of the participants who participated in this research had some strong feelings towards what their experience had ought to be and what they wished existed and/or what they wished they took advantage of. Some students wished that

they had stronger support in regards to the job navigation process and this was evident when

Ernesto stated that he thought finding a job in policy was "hard" especially when career advisors

weren't specialized in that or when Helen said that she wished she had "better preparation" in

regards to applying to jobs or even when Margaret said that she wished that she could have asked

her parents for advice in regards to "going into interviews or knowing how to dress for them".

Therefore, some students wished that someone would have provided them a better foundation so

they would have been more prepared in regards to applying to jobs and then subsequently

transitioning to those jobs. Other students were more specific in their wishes. These students

called out their university and they wished that their university would have done a better job

supporting marginalized students throughout their college experiences, more specifically these

students wished that marginalized students would have had a stronger community on campus.

Emiliano wished that there existed "panels for students of color" while Cesar wished that there

were "social clubs for first-gen and low-income students to build a strong peer network". While

it is, of course, possible for marginalized students to create their own communities, these

students wished that there existed some organization and support from the university. This

organized support from the university may have also helped and assisted the students whose

wishes stemmed from their own lack of action. Maybe if the university had an organized support

network with faculty, staff, and other students, Rosa would have been more comfortable "taking

advantage of the career advancement office" or Celia would have studied abroad or Meena

would have known where to ask for help and would have been comfortable asking for that help.

Words are nothing without action and keeping the participants' words and wishes in

mind, I will conclude this section of the paper by discussing concrete action that the university

may take to best support first-generation students in college to empower them when they are still

in college, when they are transitioning to the workforce, and once they are settled in their workforces. I will tie in theories and previous research for evidence on some of these recommendations. Schlossberg (1995) in her Adult Transition Theory goes in depth to discuss how first-generation seniors need skilled and focused help to equip them for the workforce. While there exists a plethora of resources on assisting first-generation first-years transitioning to their campus (from summer bridge programs to orientation week to a specific program for first-generation new students) there exists very little resources geared specifically towards assisting first-generation seniors transitioning out of college.

While it is worthwhile to continue to foster the first-generation community (that may have been instilled during summer bridge programs) throughout the students' four-years, it may be necessary and worthwhile to create a senior specific first-generation community that would discuss topics ranging from how to write a cover letter to how to network to how to best transition to post-grad life and would also give students an important community of individuals going through a similar phenomenon combined with individuals (university faculty, staff, and alumni) who have already went through that phenomenon. Gardner (1999) showed that when universities provided this organized job navigation help to senior students, these senior students felt more confident about the transition to the workforce. This first-generation senior community may also include panels from recent students who have successfully gone through the process. Stephens, Hamedani and Destin (2014) have previously shown the strong, positive effects of first-generation first-years listening to a panel discussing first-generation life (that also specifically addressed strategies on overcoming social class adversity) from older and more experienced first-generation students.

Therefore, a first-generation senior panel with recent first-generation graduates may help ease the job navigation and transition process for many first-generation seniors. This endeavor may also expand the networks for first-generation students. To create strong connections and mentor-mentee relationships, it is necessary for this community to also university staff, faculty, and alumni who were first-generation while in college. Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Slavin-Miller (2007) shared that relationships with university affiliated individuals is beneficial as it compensates for the cultural capital that first-generation students may be lacking. Most importantly, this first-generation senior community may provide these students with the feelings of belonging, especially because they get to see firsthand that many students are going through the same transitional struggles as they are. Baumeister and Leary (1995) previously have proven that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation that is linked to health, adjustment, and psychological well-being. While by the end of college, these first-generation students had found a stable community, all of them still felt that the first-generation specific community was lacking and that they could have found solace in this community. As Cesar mentioned, this community could be "just another place where you can hang out with like-minded individuals going through similar things and have a more established (first-gen) community".

Further, the university needs to do a better job at making resources more easily seen, inclusive and accessible. Many of the participants noted that they found out about a good number of resources during their later years of college and others shared that while they did know about resources, they chose not to take advantage of them for whatever reason. This had severe negative consequences on these students as they felt a lack of community sometime during college, struggled academically during some part of their college experience, and had difficulties asking for help. Ostrove and Long (2007) have found that academic success and retention is

correlated to knowledge of resources both before college and after matriculation. Since some revealed that they didn't know how to ask for help or were too scared to ask for help, it may be assumed that some students did not take advantage of resources because they were afraid to ask for help. Previous research has manifested the importance of parents (Destin & Svoboda, 2017) and peers (Destin, Castillo, & Meissner, 2018) reinforcing that resources are available to students. Having said this, it is necessary for universities to be in communication with parents of students, especially first-generation parents, in regards to their resources and how their students may take advantage of these resources. Many of the participants wished that their parents knew more and that they could go to their parents for advice. While parent knowledge of resources won't replace the knowledge gap of them not going through college, it would provide some more additional support that was wished by their students. Moreover, first-generation specific programming would be a good outlet in which first-generation students learn more about resources geared towards them. This programming could be college year and topic specific as to not repeat information that students may already know. The key to all of this, however, is to have first-generation specific university staff that would connect with students very early on in their college career. These staff members would stick with their students as they progress throughout college and would serve as the student's point person for first-generation programming and resources. This not only would help to get students more comfortable with staff members and their university, it also would help to compensate for the potential lack of cultural capital.

Nonetheless, to emphasize, marginalized students feel more motivated when they are made to feel that resources are available to them (Browman & Destin, 2016). By reinforcing these resources, marginalized students are able to improve their academic trajectory and fit into their universities. By feeling this fit, these students would feel more comfortable asking for help

and seeking out the resources in place that would help them navigate the job navigation and transition process.

Seeing these interviews as stories

Finally, I decided to view each of the eight interviews I conducted as stories. I did this to not only shine light on the importance of each of their individual stories and experiences, but also to understand how my participants were creating collective and unique narratives in their first-generation identity. Viewing these interviews as narratives has also made this study much more personal and familiar. This research conveyed what it meant to construct a narrative as a first-generation student and now alumni. The first-generation alumni that I interviewed used their stories to showcases themselves as strong, powerful, caring individuals who are deserving of their successes. Similarly, Wilkins (2012) found that the use of interracial stories did not so much express concerns about the intimate lives of black college women as much as it broadly conveyed what it meant to construct narratives of what it meant to be a black college woman. Wilkins (2012) emphasized that taking interracial stories at face value oversimplifies the identity dilemmas embedded in them and it is critical to see how people are cultural actors responding to their disadvantageous positions. Likewise, it is not appropriate to take these first-generation stories at simply face value. By allowing these first-generation alumni to share their stories, we are giving the microphone to those who have been marginalized. By listening to their stories, we are able to attempt to understand their emotions, reasoning, and actions. By more closely examining their stories, we are able to appreciate the authentic stories of these first-generation alumni and how they were able to overcome their disadvantaged situation to get to their current career positions. We can also see how the eight authentic first-generation stories intersect and

parallel each other and how these stories are different from the stories of those from continuing-generation backgrounds. This may serve as a call to action to political actors within institutions to enact change that values these voices and experiences.

CONCLUSION

The 2013 College Board report on Student Aid found that there are around 1.2 million college students who identify as first-generation or low-income. However, only 1 out of 4 of those students will graduate college with a high quality opportunity. In other words, around 75% of the first-generation or low-income college students that graduate every year are unemployed or underemployed (College Board, 2013). While the report did not go more in-depth of the more qualitative aspects (such as feelings of belonging), it has previously been shown that first-generation students have a more difficult time in college (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008) and even once they transition out of college and into their workplaces (Rivera, 2012). Many of the struggles and difficulties stem from a cultural mismatch between the independent values of higher education and work institutions and the interdependent values of many first-generation students (Philips, Stephens, Townsend & Goudeau, 2016). The quantitative and qualitative research on first-generation students and alumni show that American universities have been failing this group. To make matters more concrete, there has been very little research done on first-generation seniors and how to best support this group.

This is unfortunate as senior year represents a critical transition for students. It is the job of the higher education institution to provide these transitioning seniors, especially first-generation seniors who have not been socialized for the process, with the needed guidance and support. While this research was originally set on just examining the transitional experiences of first-generation alumni, it turned into a larger discussion on the narratives of first-generation

students throughout their times in college to their current lives. The findings of this study brings light into how first-generation students struggle in regards to finding and leveraging resources and building strong communities while in college. Furthermore, these students struggle finding a job and struggle adapting to their new work environments. Time and time again, the first-generation alumni that I interviewed brought up knowledge gaps. These knowledge gaps ranged from not knowing how to ask for help when one needed help while in college to not knowing how to write a cover letter to not knowing how to network to not knowing how to go about finding jobs to not knowing what is appropriate in the workplace to not knowing how to find and build a strong community in the workplace.

Nevertheless, this research brings attention to how motivated first-generation students are in regards to doing something meaningful in their lives – for their parents, themselves, and the next generation. This moral identity motivated my participants to choose careers that would allow them to give back to their families and to their greater communities. Despite not knowing about many resources, these first-generation students made their experience work and are becoming more and more comfortable in their work environments. These now alumni were supported and continue to be supported by their strong identity-based communities and want to make life a bit easier for those who will come after them. These individuals want to help younger students, they morally believe they need to, and, therefore, these first-generation alumni should be leveraged by higher education institutions.

I hope this research serves as a call to action for both higher education institutions and work environments who preach "diversity" and "inclusion". Higher education institutions may adapt first-generation senior communities and may tailor some resources specifically for this population group to better prepare them to apply, transition, and enter the job force. Work

environments may seek to make their environments more inclusive to those who value

collectivism, interdependence, and togetherness and they may do this by allowing employees to

work in teams more or creating more open office spaces. During this process, I was able to hear

the experiences of eight first-generation recent alumni (six identified as Latinx while two

identified as white). I hope this research inspires further research that would examine and look

more closely at the experiences of Black, Native, and Asian first-generation students and alumni.

Furthermore, additional research may examine if there are any more significant, concrete

differences in how various first-generation ethnic and racial groups go about their college and

transitional experiences. First-generation students and other historically marginalized groups are

taking up more and more space on campus and, consequently, in work places that have been

previously not representative of them. Therefore, it is imperative that first-generation students

feel supported and included in these institutions.

Works Cited

Aud, S., Hussar, W., Planty, M., Snyder, T., Bianco, K., Fox, M., & Drake, L. (2010). The condition of education 2010 (NCES 2010-028). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education.

Ayala, C., & Striplen, A. (2002). A Career Introduction Model for First-Generation College Freshmen Students.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological bulletin*, *117*(3), 497.

Benet-Martínez, V., & Haritatos, J. (2005). Bicultural identity integration (BII): Components and psychosocial antecedents. *Journal of personality*, *73*(4), 1015-1050.

Bergerson, A. A. (2007). Exploring the impact of social class on adjustment to college: Anna's story. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *20*(1), 99-119.

Boden, K. (2011). Perceived academic preparedness of first-generation Latino college students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *10*(2), 96-106.

Bowen, M. (1978). Family therapy in clinical practice. New York: Jason Aronson.

Browman, A. S., & Destin, M. (2016). The effects of a warm or chilly climate toward socioeconomic diversity on academic motivation and self-concept. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *42*(2), 172-187.

Browman, A. S., Destin, M., Carswell, K. L., & Svoboda, R. C. (2017). Perceptions of socioeconomic mobility influence academic persistence among low socioeconomic status students. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *72*, 45-52.

Bryan, E., & Simmons, L. A. (2009). Family involvement: Impacts on post-secondary educational success for first-generation Appalachian college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *50*(4), 391-406.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Chen, X., & Carroll, C. D. (2005). First-generation students in post-secondary education: A look at their college transcripts. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Cho, S. J., Hudley, C., Lee, S., Barry, L., & Kelly, M. (2008). Roles of gender, race, and SES in the college choice process among first-generation and non-first-generation students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *1*(2), 95.

Chung, H., & Gale, J. (2006). Comparing self-differentiation and psychological well-being between Korean and European American students. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, *28*(3), 367-381.

College Board. (2013). Trends in Student Aid 2013.

Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. Annual review of sociology, 41, 1-20.

Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, *55*(4), 425-446.

Crenshaw, K. (2018). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989]. In *Feminist legal theory* (pp. 57-80). Routledge.

Cross, R., Rebele, R., & Grant, A. (2016). Collaborative overload. *Harvard Business Review*, *94*(1), 16.

Destin, M., Castillo, C., & Meissner, L. (2018). A field experiment demonstrates near peer mentorship as an effective support for student persistence. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *40*(5), 269-278.

Destin, M., & Svoboda, R. C. (2017). A brief randomized controlled intervention targeting parents improves grades during middle school. *Journal of adolescence*, *56*, 157-161.

Destin, M., & Svoboda, R. C. (2018). Costs on the Mind: The Influence of the Financial Burden of College on Academic Performance and Cognitive Functioning. *Research in Higher Education*, *59*(3), 302-32

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of college student development*, *46*(3), 223-236.

Drake, C., Spillane, J. P., & Hufferd-Ackles, K. (2001). Storied identities: Teacher learning and subject-matter context. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *33*(1), 1-23.

Engle, J., Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). Straight from the Source: What Works for First-Generation College Students. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*.

Fryberg, S. A., Covarrubias, R., & Burack, J. A. (2013). Cultural models of education and academic performance for Native American and European American students. *School Psychology International*, *34*(4), 439-452.

Fulmer, C. A., Gelfand, M. J., Kruglanski, A. W., Kim-Prieto, C., Diener, E., Pierro, A., & Higgins, E. T. (2010). On "feeling right" in cultural contexts: How person-culture match affects self-esteem and subjective well-being. *Psychological Science*, *21*(11), 1563-1569.

Gallup (Firm) Purdue University. (2016). Great jobs, great lives: the value of career services, inclusive experiences and mentorship for college graduates.

Glaser, B. G. (1978). Advances in the methodology of grounded theory: Theoretical sensitivity.

Gardner, J. N. (1999). The senior year experience. *About Campus*, *4*(1), 5-11.

Gardner, S. K., & Holley, K. A. (2011). "Those invisible barriers are real": The progression of first-generation students through doctoral education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *44*(1), 77-92.

Gibbons, M. M., & Shoffner, M. F. (2004). Prospective first-generation college students: Meeting their needs through social cognitive career theory. *Professional School Counseling*, 91-97.'

Gillem, A. R., Cohn, L. R., & Thorne, C. (2001). Black identity in biracial Black/White people: A comparison of Jacqueline who refuses to be exclusively Black and Adolphus who wishes he were. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *7*(2), 182.

Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2007). *The race between education and technology: the evolution of US educational wage differentials, 1890 to 2005* (No. w12984). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Hardin, C. D., & Higgins, E. T. (1996). Shared reality: How social verification makes the subjective objective.

Hill, N. E., & Torres, K. (2010). Negotiating the American dream: The paradox of aspirations and achievement among Latino students and engagement between their families and schools. *Journal of Social Issues*, *66*(1), 95-112.

Horn, L., & Nuñez, A. M. (2000). *Mapping the road to college first-generation students' math track, planning strategies, and context of support*. Diane Publishing.

Huffcutt, Allen. 2011. "An Empirical Review of the Employment Interview Construct Literature." International Journal of Selection and Assessment 19:62–81

Jehangir, R., Williams, R., & Pete, J. (2011). Multicultural learning communities: Vehicles for developing self-authorship in first-generation college students. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *23*(1), 53-73.

Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2007). Living–learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher education*, *48*(4), 403-434.

Lamont, M., & Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology*, *37*(2), 153-171.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and society*, *32*(5-6), 567-606.

Lundberg, C. A., Schreiner, L. A., Hovaguimian, K., & Slavin Miller, S. (2007). First-generation status and student race/ethnicity as distinct predictors of student involvement and learning. *NASPA Journal*, *44*(1), 57-83.

Kantor, J., & Streitfeld, D. (2015). Inside Amazon: Wrestling big ideas in a bruising workplace. *New York Times*, *15*, 74-80.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological review*, *98*(2), 224.

McLean, K. C., & Syed, M. (2015). Personal, master, and alternative narratives: An integrative framework for understanding identity development in context. *Human Development*, *58*(6), 318-349.

Meyers, J.L., La Voy, S.A., Shipley, D., and Mainella, F. (2000). Exploring the UM senior experience through academics, diversity and transition. University of Maryland.

Mission Statement & Learning Outcomes. Retrieved from: https://www.northwestern.edu/enrichment/about-us/mission/index.html

Model and Impact – Braven. (2010). Retrieved from: https://bebraven.org/model-and-impact/

Moschetti, R., & Hudley, C. (2008). Measuring Social Capital among First-Generation and Non-First-Generation, Working-Class, White Males. *Journal of College Admission*, *198*, 25-30

Northwestern University. (2017). *Northwestern Student Handbook.* Evanston, Il: Author.

Nunez, A. M., & Cuccaro-Alamin, S. (1998). *First-Generation Students: Undergraduates Whose Parents Never Enrolled in Postsecondary Education. Statistical Analysis Report. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Reports*.

Oldfield, K. (2007). Humble and hopeful: Welcoming first-generation poor and working-class students to college. *About Campus*, *11*(6), 2-12.

Overton-Healy, J. (2010). First-generation college seniors: A phenomenological exploration of the transitional experience of the final college year.

Owens, D., Lacey, K., Rawls, G., & Holbert-Quince, J. A. (2010). First-generation African American male college students: Implications for career counselors. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *58*(4), 291-300.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(3), 249-284.

Phillips, L. T., Stephens, N. M., Townsend, S. S., & Goudeau, S. (2016). Access is not enough: Cultural mismatch persists to limit first-generation students' opportunities for achievement throughout college. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Redford, J., & Mulvaney Hoyer, K. (2017). First Generation and Continuing-Generation College Students: A Comparison of High School and Postsecondary Experiences.

Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms. *American sociological review*, *77*(6), 999-1022.

Rivera, L. A. (2011). Ivies, extracurriculars, and exclusion: Elite employers' use of educational credentials. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, *29*(1), 71-90.

Sablan, J. R. (2014). The challenge of summer bridge programs. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *58*(8), 1035-1050.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. Springer Publishing Company.

Somers, P., Woodhouse, S. R., & Cofer Sr, J. E. (2004). Pushing the boulder uphill: The persistence of first-generation college students. *Naspa Journal*, *41*(3), 418-435.

Stephens, N. M., Dittmann, A. G., & Townsend, S. S. (2017). Social class and models of competence: How gateway institutions disadvantage working-class Americans and how to intervene. *Handbook of competence and motivation: Theory and application*, 512-528.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., & Markus, H. R. (2011). When choice does not equal freedom: A sociocultural analysis of agency in working-class American contexts. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *2*(1), 33-41.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *102*(6), 1178.

Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological science*, *25*(4), 943-953.

Stephens, N. M., Townsend, S. S., & Dittmann, A. G. (2019). Social-Class Disparities in Higher Education and Professional Workplaces: The Role of Cultural Mismatch. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *28*(1), 67-73.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *55*(2), 142-159.

Tate, K. A., Caperton, W., Kaiser, D., Pruitt, N. T., White, H., & Hall, E. (2015). An exploration of first-generation college students' career development beliefs and experiences. *Journal of Career Development*, *42*(4), 294-310.

Tate, K. A., Fouad, N. A., Marks, L. R., Young, G., Guzman, E., & Williams, E. G. (2015). Underrepresented first-generation, low-income college students' pursuit of a graduate education: Investigating the influence of self-efficacy, coping efficacy, and family influence. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *23*(3), 427-441.

Terenzini, P. T., Rendon, L. I., Upcraft, M. L., Millar, S. B., Allison, K. W., Gregg, P. L., & Jalomo, R. (1994). The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in higher education*, *35*(1), 57-73.

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher education*, *37*(1), 1-22

Thayer, P. B. (2000). Retention of students from first generation and low income backgrounds.

Wang, T. R. (2012). Understanding the memorable messages first-generation college students receive from on-campus mentors. *Communication Education*, *61*(4), 335-357.

Wathington, H., Pretlow, J., & Barnett, E. (2016). A good start? The impact of Texas' developmental summer bridge program on student success. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *87*(2), 150-177.

Wilkins, A. C. (2012). Becoming Black women: Intimate stories and intersectional identities. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *75*(2), 173-196.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Core Questions (questions that I focused on)

General Questions

1. To start off, I would like to know a little about you. What is your name? Where did you grow up? What are you passionate about? What gives you energy?
2. What values were installed into you by your guardian?

College Experience Questions

1. What was your experience like as a First-Generation student?
2. How would you describe the role you played on your campus during your college years?
3. What resources did you take advantage of during your college years?

Finding a Job Questions

1. How was the job navigation process like?
2. What was unsettling/frustrating to you during the job navigation process?
3. What successes did you have during this process?
4. What motivated you to choose your current position?

Transitioning Questions

1. Think back to when you first transitioned to your workplace. How was the adjustment? Who eased your transition? Was this transition easy? Why or why not? Sources of support (felt or didn't feel)?
2. How did you prepare for your current role?

Workplace Questions
1. Where do you current work? What is your current position? What does your day to day look like?
2. What identities (whether that be socio-economical, ethnic, racial, gender, sexuality, etc.) are most salient while at your workplace? What role do these identities play in your workplace?
3. Have you found a community here yet? If so, how and with whom?
4. What does it mean to be you here?

First-Generation Status Questions
1. What was your motivation for applying to college?
2. What successes and/or challenges did you talk about on your college application?
3. What major did you choose when you applied to college? What major did you end with?

Supplementary Questions (that I asked only if time permitted)
General Questions
1. What was your home life like growing up?
2. What is your most profound childhood memory?
3. Would you like to add anything else?

College Experience Questions
1. Describe your relationship with your university (as a whole) during your college years?
2. Did you or did you not feel like you fit at your university? Can you tell me more about that?
3. Can you please share a success you had while in college?
4. Can you please share a challenge you had while in college?
5. Where did you build community in college?
6. How did you go about doing this?
7. What impact did you have on your campus?
8. What identities were most salient to you on your campus? How did these identities influence you? How important were these identities? How did you celebrate these identities? What made you uneasy about these identities?
9. What resources do you wish you would have taken advantage of?
10. What resources do you wish existed?
11. How were you perceived by others on your campus?
12. Did you ever participate in something that made you uncomfortable?
13. Would you like to add anything else?

Finding a Job Questions
1. Did you have any internships during college? What were they? How did you find them?
2. When did you begin to look for full time positions?
3. What industries were you interested in going into?
4. Who helped you navigate finding a job?
5. What identities were salient to you during the job navigation process? How did these identities influence you?

FIRST-GENERATION EXPERIENCE

6. Would you like to add anything else?

Workplace Questions
1. How has your experience been at your workplace so far? What were your expectations at this workplace? Were they met?
2. Has anyone particularly influenced you during your time here so far? How?
3. How do you feel you are perceived by your coworkers and management here?
4. How is the cultural fit at this workplace?
5. What are your short and long term goals while working here?
6. How satisfied are you with your current workplace?
7. What is your dream job? Why?
8. Would you like to add anything else?

First-Generation Status Questions
1. What classes did you take in high school?
2. What was applying to college like?
   o How did it feel to apply to college?
   o Is there anything you know now that you wished you knew when you were applying?
   o Who supported you throughout the college application process?
3. What does being First-Generation mean to you?
4. Would you like to add anything else?