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The Unguided Path: A Qualitative Study About the Vocational Identity Development of Black and Latinx Emerging Adults at a Community College

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A dissertation submitted in the partial satisfaction of the

requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Natacha Marcia Cesar-Davis

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Unguided Path:

A Qualitative Study About the Vocational Identity Development of

Black and Latinx Emerging Adults at a Community College

by

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Recent policies based on the Guided Pathways model have been implemented at numerous community college systems across the nation, including in California, with the goals of easing the decision-making process of students and increasing the efficiency with which they navigate these institutions (Bailey et al., 2015a; Eikey et al., 2017). However, absent from these discussions has been an assessment that contextualizes who these students are and how they experience making critical decisions, such as choosing their program of study. This study redirects the conversation of how community college students make decisions about their majors from one about

macrostructural processes to a microlens that explores the specific experiences of community college students. Utilizing contextual, theoretical groundings that combine developmental (Arnett, 2000) and psychological (Marcia, 1993) lenses, in conjunction with critical theory, this study examines the experiences of 26 emerging adults attending a community college in Southern California. Findings from this study indicate that several factors impact how emerging adults in community colleges make decisions about their vocational identities. These factors include past educational histories and conversations with institutional agents, and family members, as well as negative ideas about their race/ethnicity, gender, and other aspects of their identities. This study suggests the need for community colleges to adopt policy models that incorporate developmental and psychological frameworks, along with economic theories, to understand the student experience. Additionally, this study's findings challenge institutions and practitioners to critically examine their policies to avoid institutionalizing practices that mirror upper/middle-class habits and further marginalize the students they are trying to serve.

The dissertation of Natacha Marcia Cesar-Davis is approved.

Regina J. Deil-Amen

Kimberley Gomez

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University of California, Los Angeles

2020

Dedication

“Jesus Cristo es El motivo de mi cancion, otra razon yo no tengo de cantar, la melodia es El, toda mi vida esta en El.”

“Dios ha sido fiel, su fidelidad, nunca acabara, permanecera, siempre crecera, El has sido fiel.”

To my Lord Jesus Christ, without You I am nothing. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Thank you for allowing me to reach this goal. Everything I do is in your name and for your Glory. Amen.

___

For anyone who has been discarded, disregarded, or underestimated…no one gets to define who you are, your worth, or how far you will go. Keep hope and keep dreaming.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PUBLICATIONS

BOOK CHAPTERS

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- Cesar-Davis, N. & Rios-Aguilar, C. (in progress) Understanding the relational role of community college faculty teaching online classes. *New Directions for Community Colleges: Teaching and Learning in the 21sr Century Community College.*
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- *Zapata, I., Escobedo, C.S., Jacobo, S*., **Cesar-Davis, N.**, & *Rios-Aguilar, C.* (2019) Toward Asset-Based Teaching and Leaning in Community College Classrooms: A Case Study of Pedagogical Possibilities. Paper presented at the American Education Research Association, Toronto, Canada.
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- **Cesar-Davis, N.,** *Graves, D., Deil-Amen, R., Rios-Aguilar, C., & Huerta, A.* (2018) "Processing the Poor: The Financial Aid Climate at Community Colleges." Paper presented at the American Education Research Association, New York, NY.
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- **Cesar-Davis, N.** (2014) You Can Do It: Advising with the Concept of the Growth Mindset. MEOA 30th Annual Conference IMPACT, UMass Amherst, MA.

CHAPTER 1: BEYOND GUIDED PATHWAYS

> [It is not] the natural tendency of these students to be aggressive, to be astute, self-directed, and all of those kinds of strategies that the successful student is able to do. —Community College Dean (as cited in Scott-Clayton, 2011, p. 15).

Community college students are often part of historically marginalized communities that have been systematically failed by the American educational system (Griffin & Hurtado, 2010; Burdman, 2009; Anderson et al., 2015; Brint & Karabel, 1989). As evidenced by the quote above, this population is often blamed for the effects of their circumstances as opposed to having their journey and experiences understood (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2018). This study aims to unpack the developmental processes that community college students undergo, which often include a level of indecisiveness and ambivalence surrounding their decisions to choose an academic program or career. I take the position that research, policies, and practices that do not consider the developmental processes of students as well as the context of their lives lack an essential perspective needed to understand the student experience, inherently limiting the efficacy of any such policy.

Background of the Problem

In 2012, the California Community Colleges Board of Governors approved 22 recommendations originating from the Student Success Task Force ("Student Success Task Force," 2012). This task force was charged with the mission of developing innovative solutions to increase equity outcomes in the state. One of the Task Force recommendations was to increase student retention by ensuring that students declare a program of study and create a plan for completion as soon as they enroll in community college ("Student Success Task Force," 2012). Right around the same time, research from the Community College Research Center began to

promote the structure hypothesis, pushing community colleges to restructure aspects of their institution with the same goals of increasing student success (Scott-Clayton, 2011). One of these key areas was program offerings. Part of the rationale for the restructuring of community colleges was the needs of the unprepared community college student who lacked professional aspirations and the motivation to do well in school (Scott-Clayton, 2011). The recommendations from the Task Force together with the ideas around the structure hypothesis, have created the context for the nationwide adoption of the *Guided Pathways model.*

Today, the community college system in California has pledged a vast amount of resources to help implement the Guided Pathways model throughout the 112 colleges in the state ("Guided Pathways," 2019). The signature feature of the Guided Pathways model, *meta majors*, gives students the choice of a smaller number of program areas instead of all the programs that community colleges traditionally offer, to hypothetically ease the process of students deciding on a major (Bailey et al., 2015b). The Guided Pathways model is predicated on several assumptions. First, it assumes that providing students with more structured program choices will help students make decisions regarding their life and vocational goals. Second, this high level of structure in community colleges is necessary because students are mostly first-generation, low-income, minority students who are more undecided about their potential educational and career paths, coming to college at a deficit and thus needing additional guidance. Also, more choices for this population of students may not always be better since many of them lack the networks of family and friends that can guide them in their professional paths. Third, having faculty create succinct curricular paths serves as "guidance for students who may be confused as to what career path/major they need to pursue" (Bailey et al., 2015b). Finally, it assumes that community colleges (which are inherently complicated structures) will be able to implement the Guided Pathways model

without any inefficiencies (Rose, 2016). For instance, it does not account for how this model may potentially limit student choice and thus stifle the exploration students deserve to engage in while they are in college (Rose, 2016).

Although many aspects of the Guided Pathways model are commendable and will ease how community college students navigate these institutions, questions remain as to whether or not streamlining the availability of choices for a major will be sufficient for students to align their personal and professional goals. Since the Guided Pathways model does not take into consideration the individual factors that affect the decision-making process of this diverse student population attending community colleges, how can it be assumed that this model will ease their decision-making process? Moreover, given the underlying beliefs of the current policy context, which is pushing for students to make a speedy major decision, will community colleges even attempt to create a space for students, in particular those who are of traditional age, to engage in the necessary exploration of their academic and professional identity?

For the Guided Pathways model to be effective in helping students make constructive decisions about their major and future professions, it needs to also consider the individual students. This model needs an additional framework(s) that examines students, the micro/meso context of how they make decisions, and their needs. One of the relevant characteristics that has an impact on the process of how students make decisions about their professional future is their developmental stage. For the last 50 years, adolescence has been considered the pivotal moment for the socioemotional task of identity development (Marcia, 1993). Over the last 20 years, given the many changes in society, late adolescence has been further separated and defined as *emerging adulthood*. Emerging adulthood is characterized as a time of exploration and testing out possible life paths (Arnett, 2000). People in this stage express feeling ambivalent in their identity, especially

when it comes to love, work, and beliefs (Arnett, 2000). Thus, a policy, institutional environment, and institutional model that demand that students in this age group decide on a major as soon as they enroll in the college and does not provide structured opportunities for exploration is incongruent with their needs. In addition to not taking into account their developmental needs, the Guided Pathways model assumes that young adults in community colleges are blank slates, void of aspirations, instead of students who have not been socialized to navigate the postsecondary environment.

Moreover, the Guided Pathways model largely does not account for the role of faculty in the success of students, which research has consistently found to be located in their interactions within classrooms (Chang, 2005; Cox, 2009; Deil-Amen, 2011). In the Guided Pathways model, the role of faculty has been commoditized to more of an operational capacity in which their focus is on creating curricular pathways and related maps and student learning outcomes as opposed to pedagogical practices and student/faculty relationships. The role of faculty in emerging adults' exploration of their academic and professional identity is an aspect of this model that could be greatly improved and one that this study aims to explore.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to refocus the conversation on how community college students make decisions about their majors from one about macrostructural processes to a microlens that explores the specific experiences of community college students. This microview will prioritize the intersecting identities of community college students; their relationships with institutional agents, in particular faculty; their experiences in classrooms; and how the larger institutional and state-level policy context influences their process of academic and professional identity development. Additionally, this study aims to unpack the indecisiveness and ambivalence some community

college students may have surrounding their decisions to choose an academic program or career by situating this task as a vital aspect of the late adolescence/emerging adulthood period.

Research Questions

This study explores community college students' experiences in selecting an academic major and career trajectory through the lens of emerging adulthood. Additionally, this study uses a contextual approach to ground students' vocational explorations in connection to their relationships, experiences in the classroom, and the larger institutional climate. The following questions guide this study:

In what ways are emerging adults attending community college making decisions about their academic majors and/or potential careers?

- In what ways are students' intersecting identities relevant to their decisions regarding their academic majors/careers?
- What is the role of family, friends, and institutional agents in this process?

To answer these questions, I employed a qualitative design with a combination of ethnographic approaches, including interviews of students and faculty, classroom observations, document analysis, and photovoice diaries. I analyzed the data for this study using an emerging adulthood and contextual framework, in combination with the ideas that students' backgrounds, intersectional identities, and relationships influence their academic and career identity development.

Contributions and Significance of Work

This study looks to provide a better understanding of the complexities of emerging adult students in community colleges by unpacking what it means for this specific group to explore their academic and professional identity. First, this study aims to center the experiences of students in

these institutions. Given that the state of California is spending significant resources to encourage its colleges to adopt the Guided Pathways model, this study will contribute to expanding the limited research that exists on the effectiveness of this model, in particular in helping students explore a major/career. Additionally, this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge that stipulates that community college student populations need to be disaggregated so that policies that are implemented can work for them. In terms of the diversity of students at community colleges, this study hopes to illustrate how students' backgrounds and multiple identities influence their major-selection process.

At the institutional level, this study will give administrators a comprehensive profile of a segment of their student population with the hopes that it can help them develop timely interventions to assist students in this stage of self-discovery. For faculty, this study will give them the opportunity to reflect on their pedagogical practices, specifically how they can leverage course content to help students engage in further exploration of future academic paths.

In terms of the field of higher education, this study will provide an example of how to use a developmental framework to understand marginalized students. Although there has been some research on emerging adulthood in the past, it has typically been conducted with the traditional student population. This study will add to the small body of literature that investigates how emerging adulthood manifests with a diverse population. The rest of this dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature on community college students and research on major and academic outcomes, faculty, and the Guided Pathways model, as well as the framework of emerging adulthood in respect to vocational identity development. Chapter 3 presents the methodology that I employed to investigate students, faculty, and the institutional climate under the Guided Pathways model. Chapter 4 is the data presentation and

findings. Chapter 5 is the discussion and implications for key stakeholders, and Chapter 6, conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GUIDED PATHWAYS, STUDENTS, FACULTY & WHAT IS MISSING

Literature Review

The study of how community college emerging adults explore their majors/careers and the role of faculty in this process requires an examination into the literature that overviews the multifaceted experiences of students and faculty alike. The majority of the literature on the sector of community colleges has the tendency to paint many aspects of these institutions (including its people) as dysfunctional (Anderson et al., 2015; Bahr & Gross, 2016; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dowd, 2003; Levin, 1998; Thelin, 2011; Townsend & Twombly, 2001). For instance, community college students are often described as lacking skills, knowledge, or motivation to be successful in academic spaces (Bahr & Gross, 2016; Bailey et al., 2015; Roderick et al., 2009; Scott-Clayton, 2011), while faculty are described as isolated from resources and overwhelmed in their roles but central to student success (Cohen et al., 2003; Grubb, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). This literature review will attempt to shift this research paradigm by illustrating how the diversity of the student population at community colleges requires that students be disaggregated in order to be better understood, and that faculty be provided more resources to better serve students. Additionally, I discuss the literature on the Guided Pathways model, in particular the *meta majors* tenet, to provide a thorough explanation of the origins of this policy and the current context that students are in. Although the Guided Pathways model (and meta majors) aims to streamline processes and may help students navigate these spaces better, the model itself is devoid of an understanding of who students are, how they think about their majors, and the role of relationships in how they make these critical decisions. In doing so, I highlight how a developmental framework such as *emerging adulthood* and identity status theory can provide an alternative lens to examine

the process students undergo to explore their major/career as well as how to leverage faculty and classrooms as a means of addressing Guided Pathway shortcomings. Thus, the five major concerns addressed in the literature review are the following: (1) the Guided Pathways model, (2) community college students, (3) major and career research on community college students, (4) community college faculty, (5) and embedded emerging adulthood and identity status theory as a framework to understand students' exploration of majors and careers. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate the importance of challenging certain aspects of the implementation of Guided Pathways and address why, given past research, these gaps must be addressed.

Guided Pathways Context

In the following section, I provide an in-depth overview of the Guided Pathways model from its origins to its current implementation in California, where this study will be conducted. In doing so, I will illustrate how this model does not provide the structure for students to explore their major. The Guided Pathways model also does not create the structure for faculty to guide students in their exploration even though they have the most contact with them. As previously mentioned, Guided Pathways has been presented as a viable solution to address retention and persistence challenges in community colleges. The Guided Pathways model aims to improve retention and graduation rates at community colleges by suggesting that these institutions reorganize their infrastructure from a cafeteria-style service model to a "structured, educationally coherent program" that streamlines the student experience, thus yielding better student outcomes. Given that state and federal appropriations for higher education have been on a decline over the last four decades (Johnstone, 2016) and it is unlikely that community colleges will receive an influx of resources in the near future (Bailey et al., 2015), these institutions need to reconfigure themselves to better fulfill the needs of their students. The cafeteria analogy illustrates the current model that

community colleges operate under as one where students experience an overwhelming assortment of academic major options, courses, and potential career paths with very little institutional guidance to navigate it. Simply put, structural issues that surround student success at community colleges stem from community colleges' mission to provide open access by offering a wide set of courses to fulfill the needs of a broad spectrum of students (Bailey et al., 2015). However, the authors of the Guided Pathways conclude that having more options does not lead to better outcomes. Instead, the cafeteria model results in community college students' facing an enormous number of decisions that negatively affect their motivation to persist in school.

Part of the evidence for why too many choices in community college harms students, thus supporting the need for these colleges to adopt the Guided Pathways model, primarily comes from the 2011 paper by Judith Scott-Clayton, *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students' Progress at Community Colleges*. This paper is a literature review (not a meta review) that compiles disparate pieces of data and focuses on the evidence (from in and out of higher education) that substantiates the structure hypothesis. The structure hypothesis proposes that students at these colleges will persist at higher rates if majors are "tightly and consciously structured with very little room for individuals to unintentionally deviate from paths that lead to completion" (Scott-Clayton, 2011) in addition to reducing the procedural challenges they have to overcome. Scott-Clayton cites evidence from the book *After Admission* (2006) by Rosenbaum et al. to highlight the procedural difficulties students encounter as well as research on choice architecture for why complex decision environments in community colleges complicate and delay students' academic paths.

The crux of Scott-Clayton's (2011) argument is that community college students are coming into these institutions with very little context of how to choose a major/career, have limited

peer/family networks in their decision-making process, and face many different bureaucratic challenges. Scott-Clayton borrows from research findings in the fields of psychology, marketing, and behavioral economics to explain how human beings make decisions in the first place, then relates them back to the community college sector. The key concepts that the author leverages to make her argument are *bounded rationality* and *bounded self-control*. Bounded rationality states that human beings make decisions that are not always optimal and may be tied to factors such as their cognitive limitations, time available to make the decision, and information available. On the other hand, bounded self-control states that even when people make the best decision for their circumstances, they still may encounter difficulties "following through" if they don't have clear-cut steps to execute their plans. These two behavioral economics concepts with respect to community college students translate to three overarching findings (Bailey et al., 2015): First, students may not be aware of their own needs and preferences and may make decisions based on inconsequential or biased information. For instance, students may be so overwhelmed with the number of decisions they have to make that they decide what courses to take randomly or based on what their friends are taking. Second, students may delay making a decision at all since they feel inadequate or unprepared to tackle a multilevel decision. An example is that students may procrastinate on making a choice or delay selecting a concentration. Finally, students may be dissatisfied with their choices and regret the decision they made or avoid making it again in the future. In other words, students may become disillusioned with the school process.

Scott-Clayton (2011) suggests several potential solutions to address the complex decision environment in community colleges. Amongst these are more holistic advising, leveraging technology to minimize bureaucratic processes, increasing learning communities, streamlining the curriculum, and narrowing major choices.

Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success (Bailey et al., 2015b) picks up where Scott-Clayton left off and presents a blueprint for how to redesign community colleges. Published through the Community College Research Center explains why the current community college inhibits student success, the rationale for narrowing student choice, and limited examples that demonstrate how Guided Pathways can fix the persistent macro issues that community colleges face. The authors of this book spend some time explaining how the cafeteria model and the Guided Pathways model compare in four different components of community colleges: program structure, intake and student supports, instruction, and developmental education.

Overall in the cafeteria model, majors are broad and undefined, providing students with flexibility but very little guidance. For example, a newly enrolled student is often presented with up to a hundred different academic major options to select from during the application and orientation process (Bailey et al., 2015). Moreover, majors and courses are not presented in a coherent sequence, leading students to be confused about their learning goals and how they connect to their future academic or professional plans. In a Guided Pathways model, academic majors are coherently mapped out by faculty and aligned to potential meaningful learning outcomes. These outcomes are built across the curriculum in ways that allow students to clearly see how certain choices can lead them into future academic and professional goals. The Guided Pathways model's signature feature focuses on having students choose "broad fields of study" that students select at the start of their enrollment. These broad program areas have built-in default course sequences that students can just follow without having to actively choose.

Coupled with these broad program areas, students are offered direct intake and student support services that help them navigate the community college environment and clarify their

academic and professional goals. Unlike the cafeteria model where the intake process is abbreviated and impersonal, consisting of brief meetings with advisors and general orientations, the Guided Pathways model focuses on integrating multiple support structures into students' experiences. In this way, students are more closely monitored from the start of their academic careers and their progress is tracked through e-advising systems (Bailey et al., 2015). In terms of instruction, the Guided Pathways model promotes faculty not only mapping courses and curricular content throughout the entire academic program, but also encourages faculty to address "student weaknesses" that may fall outside of their purview such as "[issues with] self-directions, time management, academic motivation, and other factors that affect student success" (Bailey et al., 2015, p. 14). In other words, the Guided Pathways model reframes the role of faculty and broadens its scope to include helping students develop the motivation to persist.

The final area that the Guided Pathways model aims to restructure is developmental education. In the cafeteria model, at times students are erroneously placed into remedial courses, and in other instances students are stuck in these courses for multiple semesters without making much progress. In the Guided Pathways model, students are placed into corequisite courses where they receive support to successfully complete their college-level coursework. Additionally, the corequisite courses that students take have rigorous standards just as if it were college-level coursework (Bailey et al., 2015).

By systematically reforming multiple aspects of community colleges to ease students' decision making by helping them choose a program, the proposed Guided Pathways model assists students in developing an academic plan at the onset of their enrollment process, mapping the courses they need to complete their program, and structuring support so they can stick to their plan and complete these programs faster (Bailey et al., 2015). That is, if community college students

can enroll in a program as soon as they enter these institutions and create a plan, they will be more likely to have the information and nudges to complete their chosen program in a more effective way.

Both *The Shapeless River* and *Redesigning Community Colleges* identify the following three main research domains for the development and support of the implementation of Guided Pathways in community colleges: behavioral economics, organizational effectiveness, and learning theory (Bailey et al., 2015 & Scott-Clayton, 2011). It is important to note that all of these frameworks deal with high-level structural questions and not microfactors such as the characteristics of individuals and relationships among key participants. Furthermore, although the Guided Pathways model challenges colleges to adapt its practices according to their institutional context, the overarching model does not require that community colleges engage with questions of diversity of its student population or pedagogical practices, which are pertinent aspects that will also influence success of students (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2018; Rose, 2016).

Guided Pathways Model in California Community Colleges

Given California's reputation of being at the forefront of educational reforms (Bailey et al., 2015), it is of no surprise that the community college system in this state has been vigorous in encouraging colleges to adopt a Guided Pathways model. As of 2019, there are three different programs that have been implemented to help colleges adopt the Guided Pathways model: the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project, the California Guided Pathways Project, and the California Community Colleges Guided Pathways Award Program (Eikey et al., 2017). The AACC Pathways Project is part of a national initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and with the support of various national partners such as Achieving the Dream, the Aspen Institute, Jobs for the Future, and the National Center for Inquiry and

Improvement (Eikey et al., 2017). The goal of AACC Pathways is to support community colleges as they develop an integrated, institution-wide approach to Guided Pathways through the training and education of a team of faculty, staff, and administrators from the respective institution. From the initial application process, three colleges from California were selected: Bakersfield, Irvine Valley, and Mt. San Antonio (Eikey et al., 2017). The next project, the California Guided Pathways Project, is based on the AACC Pathways initiative mentioned earlier and similarly supports a "student-centered approach" to increase persistence in community colleges. Part of the goals of the California Guided Pathways Project is to serve as the umbrella framework to coherently organize other California-based initiatives such as SSSP, Basic Skills Transformation, the Strong Workforce Program, and the California College Promise, thus ensuring that all students benefit from these programs ("California Guided Pathways Project," 2019). From the initial application, 20 community colleges have been selected to receive funding for the implementation of this program. The third initiative, the California Community College Guided Pathways Award Program, gives colleges $150 million from the Chancellor's Office to implement the goals of the Guided Pathways model ("California Guided Pathways Project," 2019). So far, all 114 California community colleges have agreed to implement a Guided Pathways model at their institutions. However, implementation of this model is at varying stages depending on the institution.

More recently, the Chancellor's Office has developed additional infrastructure to support the implementation of Guided Pathways throughout the California community college system: the Vision Resource Center and regional coordinators. The Vision Resource Center is an online resource focused on connecting community members and other stakeholders currently implementing Guided Pathways in their colleges. The Vision Resource Center provides discussion boards and learning modules to help reinforce the Guided Pathways framework. Similarly, the

regional coordinators are an additional layer of support for each of the seven college districts. Additionally, coordinators are meant to facilitate the implementation of the Guided Pathways model by detecting what is not working and any challenges colleges face. The coordinators' role is to be nonjudgmental resources for the college and foster an environment of collaboration and learning (Guided Pathways News Center. (2018)).

Challenges of Guided Pathways

In spite of broad implementation across numerous state community college systems, research on the effectiveness and implementation of Guided Pathways remains limited (Bailey et al., 2015). Recent articles by Baker (2018), and Baker et al. (2017) have begun to unpack different aspects of the Guided Pathways model to test its efficiencies. Baker (2018) examined how a group of community college students in a Northern California community college "cluster" majors during their decision-making process. Her social network analysis aimed to test if the institutional way of organizing meta majors is actually helping CC students make choices about their majors or if it exacerbated this process. This study found that out of the 297 students surveyed, certain groups (male, Asian) respond better to the groupings of meta majors that the institution developed, while other student groups (Latino, White, and older students) do not benefit from the current clustering of meta majors given their ideas about how careers work. The author suggests that instead of clustering majors around subject affiliation, it would be more helpful (for certain students) to cluster them around career affiliation. This study shows that although choice architecture has the potential to ease students' decision-making process, developing this infrastructure without first understanding how different groups of students explore majors in the first place can interfere with the overarching goals of increasing student persistence and retention.

In another quantitative study, Baker et al. (2017) examined the impact of labor market outcomes on the way that CC students choose majors. Three hundred students were surveyed on their knowledge about labor market outcomes, their curricular plans, and specific information about labor market outcomes for different majors. This study found that course enjoyment and grades were the most likely predictors for students choosing a major. Also, this study found that a 10% increase in salary for a particular career is associated with an almost 20% increase in the probability of a student choosing a major. Additionally, students may prefer to choose majors with more certain outcomes even if pay is lower. The author asserts that interventions can have an impact on how students choose a major. However, this study also shows that more studies need to unpack how students explore majors while they are attending college in the first place, particularly more studies that tell us how students make decisions about majors, jobs, and careers.

Other experts have written broader critiques of the Guided Pathways model and conducted studies that expose the shortcomings of this model. Rose (2016) has argued that although this model has many merits, it overlooks critical aspects of the culture of community colleges and their students. For instance, Rose argues that implementing the streamlining of processes at these institutions needs to engage with the fundamental mission of community colleges, which is to provide open access to educational opportunities to marginalized populations. Moreover, although Bailey et al. (2015) state that institutional agents at community colleges hold similar values of upholding the "open mission" of these institutions, many of them also have prejudiced perspectives about the student population. Any reform that does not directly deal with the biases that faculty and staff have will not ultimately have an impact on the success of its students. Additionally, Rose states that this "structural fix" needs to undertake the complexities in the lives of the diverse student population that community colleges serve; in particular, the fact that community colleges, being

the default institution for students to attend after high school, have students who are undergoing a process to discover who they want to become. This process, according to Rose, takes time, and community colleges need to pay attention to how this process evolves as they are implementing any large- scale structural reform. In another paper, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2018) have found that community college students of color were influenced in their major/career decisions by their family, friends, and even their own work experiences. This study, which interviewed a sample of 107 students in a Southern California community college, highlighted the need to challenge the Guided Pathways model since it falls short of understanding the complex identities and experiences of students. In the following section, I aim to further illustrate who community college students are and why federal/state/institutional policies need to be grounded in a contextual understanding of students' multifaceted and complex lives.

Students in Community Colleges: Intersecting Diversity

To explore the context of community college students in their exploration of majors and interactions with faculty, I first describe *who* are these students and *what* the existing research says about their academic experiences and occupational trajectories. The majority of students in the United States attend a community college, making these institutions the most diverse within the higher education sector (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Bailey et al., 2015; Deil-Amen, 2015). As of 2019, 41% of all U.S undergraduates attend community colleges, including, 40% of first-time freshmen ("Fast Facts 2019," 2019). To put into context the racial/ethnic diversity, of all undergraduate students who identify as a person of color, the majority of them attend a community college: 56% of Native American students, 52% of all Latinx students, 42% of all Black students, and 39% of all Asian/Pacific Islander ("Fast Facts 2019," 2019). In some states such as California, Florida, and Texas, community colleges are likely to become majority-minority institutions

(Malcolm, 2013). Similarly to other institutions of higher education, community colleges are also predominantly attended by women (56%). In terms of socioeconomic diversity, 34% of all community college students qualify for Pell grants and 18% qualify for federal work study ("Fast Facts 2019," 2019).

Further, community college students are diverse in multidimensional and intersecting ways beyond race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, which are the typical measures in which diversity is assessed in postsecondary institutions in the United States (Deil-Amen, 2015). Deil-Amen (2015) suggests framing the diversity of community college students to take into account where they live, their sexual orientation, their enrollment status, employment status, age, tax status, whether they have dependents, and college preparedness. For instance, 40.2% of all students ages 15 to 23 in the United States for the year 2015-2016 attended public 2-year institutions, and within minority groups the numbers are significantly higher than the general average, often 10-20% above the national average. The report showed that 57.8% are American Indian or Alaska Native, 38.1% are Asian, 39.5% are Black, 53.6% are Hispanic, 62.2% are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 35.6% are White, 41.2% are more than one race, and 32.1% are international students (Espinosa et al., 2019). Similarly, for the next age bracket, 24 to 29, the majority of students in the U.S. during the year 2015-2016 (52.3%) attended a 2-year public institution. Out of this age bracket students identified in the following ways: 62.9% American Indian or Alaska Native, 53.7% Asian, 45.5% Black, 58.7% Hispanic, 51.0% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 52.6% White, 49.7% more than one race, and 41.3% international. Thus, a larger share of emerging adults of all races are enrolled in public 2-year colleges, particularly students who identify as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Hispanic (Espinosa et al., 2019).

In another statistic that highlights community college students' identities, almost half of all undergraduate students (48.3%) whose families are in the bottom quartile of income attended a public 2-year institution (Espinosa et al., 2019). From these students, 68.7% identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, 41.3% as Asian, 43.4% as Black, 54.4% as Hispanic, 73.2% as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 48.2% as White, 44.7% as more than one race, and 29.9% as international students (Espinosa et al., 2019). Besides the aforementioned categories, students might be financially independent, speak multiple languages, and even be first- or second-generation immigrants. Recent research has also highlighted that community colleges are de facto institutions for first-generation and second-generation immigrant students since they are open access, lower in costs, and offer ESL courses (Teranishi et al., 2011).

In terms of their academic majors while in community colleges, it is helpful to look at field of study across race/ethnicity and gender to understand how these intersecting identities influence students' academic and professional journey (Espinosa et al., 2019). The majority of students at public 2-year institutions (20.7%) enroll in general studies and other fields. The student breakdown for field of study for the remainder of students is as follows: 19.2% health care fields, 17% manufacturing, military technology, and other applied fields, 15.6% business, personal, and consumer services, 15.2% STEM fields, 8.2% social sciences and humanities, and 4% undecided. However, if these numbers are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender, a new scenario emerges. Men who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, White, more than one race, or international students enroll in STEM fields while Black men primarily choose general studies and Hispanic men choose manufacturing, military technology, and other applied fields. For women, all but those who identify as Asian and international students primarily choose health care fields (Espinosa et al., 2019).

The diversity of the community college student population has also been widely discussed and researched, in particular in the context of how race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, amongst other factors, plays into students' decisions to attend these institutions, their academic outcomes, and their success rates (Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Bailey et al., 2015). The reasons why students attend a community college are just as multifaceted and nuanced as the students themselves. Some researchers over the last 4 decades have attempted to progressively examine these reasons from a multilayered contextual approach that includes individual, family/community, institutional, and other macrofactors (Malcolm, 2013). Individual characteristics for attending community college including factors such as concerns over cost of college, students' educational aspirations, and college knowledge have been found (Malcolm, 2013; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). However, often this research frames these motivations and rationales through a deficit-oriented perspective that characterizes students' lack of academic preparedness as the main reason why they do not attend a 4-year institution and "choose" a community college instead. Other contextual factors that may play a role in minority students' decision to attend community colleges are less academically rigorous and resourced high schools, organizational habitus, and lack of familial knowledge/networks, since many students are first-generation students to attend college (Cohen et al., 2003). Research that is framed around individual factors tends to ignore historical realities, such as the systematic exclusion of non-White people from many 4-year institutions for the majority of the history of this country and their continued reluctance to admit and support nontraditional students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Thelin, 2011).

Even further, students' deficiencies are also utilized as factors within the narrative of academic challenges and "failing" educational outcomes in community colleges (Perin, 2013; Bound et al., 2010; Karp, 2013). For instance, in a compilation of available research about

academically underprepared students, Perrin (2013) cites the many ways that these students are also diverse. In her profile of CC students that need remediation, Perin goes on to describe them as mostly Hispanic, lacking English proficiency, and likely deficient in their emotional regulation capabilities. In other words, these students also have trouble with self-regulation, self-efficacy, and academic motivation. Although Perrin does not explicitly express a relationship between students' multidimensional diversity and their ability to have emotional regulation and/or exhibit college readiness, discussing these characteristics in conjunction without providing a context to why these are realities for some students might leave the reader associating students' diversity with less-than-desired academic profiles. This practice of approaching community college students from a deficit perspective is the basis for the restructuring of community colleges around the structure hypothesis and the Guided Pathways model (Baker, 2018; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2018; Rose, 2016).

There is a need to develop a framework that understands students' diverse experiences from an asset perspective that takes into consideration their developmental needs but also makes more constructive assumptions about who they are and what they know. Additionally, disaggregating community college students according to some of the distinct categories they belong to can potentially help researchers, administrators, and policy makers develop initiatives that provide tangible and concrete solutions for subgroup populations, which has already been suggested for immigrant populations (Covington Clarkson, 2009). My study will look at emerging adults because their particular developmental stage impacts how these students explore their vocations. Additionally, my study will combine an emerging adulthood framework and identity status theory with aspects of intersectional theory because other parts of students' identity are also salient as they make decisions about their academic and professional paths.

Majors and Careers: Research About Community College Students

The literature on major and career outcomes in community colleges has partially been dominated by questions surrounding the role of institutional agents—that is, counselors or faculty—in deterring or supporting students to pursue certain academic or vocational paths (Bahr, 2008; Tinto, 2012; Karp, 2013). The seminal 1960 study by Burton R. Clark on a community college in California found that students' true academic and professional aspirations were systematically dissuaded by people within the institution. This process of "cooling-out" students' aspirations consists of a five-step process: substituting achievement, gradual disengagement, denial, consolation, and avoidance of standards (Clark, 1960). This article, which has been cited over 1,000 times, has influenced the direction of the research in community colleges, especially regarding students' career expectations. More recent research has found that instead of cooling out students' academic and professional expectations, staff and administrators tend to "warm up" or positively encourage students. However, even though institutional agents are pushing students to pursue their goals, they are doing so without giving them strategic and procedural information to help them achieve these goals (Rosenbaum et al., 2006).

Other research has aimed to look at the types of supports that might be beneficial for nontraditional students who typically attend community colleges. Luzzo (1993) found that there is a difference between the needs of nontraditional and traditional students in their career decision-making process. In this study, nontraditional students are defined as students older than 25. One of the findings of this study also suggested that community college students, no matter their age, showed lower levels of career decision self-efficacy and career maturity than other students at traditional institutions. In a more recent study, Harlow and Bowman (2016) found that there was no difference between community college students' career self-efficacy and that of students at

traditional institutions. More recently, some research has looked at the support that faculty might be able to provide to students' decision making in terms of their major and career. Leppel (2001) found that faculty encouragement may help students persist in academic majors. Additionally, faculty's projection of stereotypes and biases may discourage students from pursuing certain fields. Thus, faculty should be provided with training to help them become aware of their potential influence in students' academic/professional trajectories.

Recent research has also highlighted the need to rework advising programs to support the greater restructuring of community colleges. Karp (2013) overviews the necessity of restructuring college advising and counseling in community colleges aiming to implement the Guided Pathways model to ensure that these reforms are actually helping students explore/select a major in the first place. Given the limited funding and high demand of advising offices in community colleges, these services as they work today do very little to help students explore their major or career paths. These services need to be restructured to (1) help students freely explore their major, (2) integrate career counseling and advising, (3) administer services based on student need, and (4) situate developmental advising according to the data findings. According to Karp, this framework takes into consideration the context of community colleges, limited budgets, limited staffing, and organizational silos and "leads to a system that meets the demands of current structure reforms" (Karp, 2013, p. 26). This framework brings into perspective a problematic assumption of the structure hypothesis: Providing students with structure will help them explore their major. However, this framework, similarly to the larger pathways model (as I will later discuss), does not engage with findings that highlight that students do not have time/opportunities to spend time on campus outside of their classes (Cox, 2009; Deil-Amen, 2011, Elliott et. al., 2016). Therefore, unless counseling/advising become part of the curricular content of courses, students are unlikely

to utilize these services. Additionally, this framework and the Guided Pathways model continue the narrative that students' diversity is a challenge to be grappled with, in addition to being the main reason why these students have trouble deciding on a major. Instead, I will argue that students in the emerging adulthood phase are ambitious about their major/career because it's an integral aspect of this developmental stage. I will also argue that students need to be understood through their diverse experiences in order to help them in this process of self-discovery.

Both D'Amico et al. (2012) and Neri (2018) have conducted studies that present differing paradigms for understanding the academic and career trajectories of community college students. D'Amico et al. challenge community college administrators and practitioners to reframe the narrative surrounding employment and students. Much of the research that has been published in this area has found that employment opportunities for college students are a deterrent to their academic success. Instead, this study found that students who worked had more "career capital" than those students who did not. In this study, career capital is a three-part frame that accounts for knowing why students are in college, knowing how students can leverage their experiences in colleges and work, and knowing whom students can connect with to gain more information about career goals (D'Amico et al., 2012). In other words, students who worked were most likely to report that their career aspirations aligned with their studies. However, this study also found that even though students saw a connection between their studies and their careers, their current jobs were not aligned with these goals. Authors of this study assert that managing this process and ensuring that students have employment that aligns with their academic aspirations can be a strategy to improve student career outcomes after college. I will also add that this asset-based approach can further increase the level of exploration that is available to students while in community college.

Along a similar asset-based approach, Neri (2018) examines how students frame their career aspirations/academic interests in a career and technical education (CTE) program and the role these aspirations play in their professional pursuits. Specifically, this study found that students enrolled in a CTE program who prepared for careers in law enforcement often drew motivation from their everyday lived experiences, which at times encompassed traumatic "dark" events/relationships, as a driving force for their occupational goals. Accordingly, we learn that students not only have an economic drive to pursue their career goals but also a "humanizing" motivation to help and improve their own community. Moreover, Neri proposes that more CTE programs connect the content, curriculum, and pedagogical approaches to students' lived experiences and motivations as a means to increase persistence and completion of these programs. Together, D'Amico et. al. (2012) and Neri both highlight the necessity of aligning classroom content to promote career capital and student success. The following section provides an overview of faculty at community colleges and corroborates the idea that classrooms are the primary spaces for the development of students.

Faculty at Community Colleges: Why Faculty and Classrooms Matter

To explore the role of faculty with community college students, I provide a landscape of who comprises community college faculty, what some of the constraints they face are, and their role in support (or not supporting) their students. In some respects, community colleges have extended opportunities to underrepresented groups, while in other instances, they have maintained hiring patterns similar to other institutions. While a majority of full-time faculty in community colleges are women (more than in any other institutional sector), a majority of faculty at these institutions continue to identify as White (Twombly & Townsend, 2007). Based on recent IPEDS data, 75% of all community college faculty identify as White. For full-time faculty, 77% identify

as White, while 74% of part-time faculty identify as White (AACC Data Points, 2018). Given that community colleges are largely minority-serving institutions, and these students are likely to perform better academically with faculty that have a similar identity to them (Fairlie et al., 2014), there have been several studies that aim to understand what it would take to diversify the professoriate at these institutions. Some research has found that minority faculty are likely to choose other institutional types because of their higher pay and lighter institutional course load (Twombly & Townsend, 2007). Other research has indicated that for some faculty of color, working at a community college may have some serious implications for their self-esteem, performance, and ability for self-advocacy (Levin et al., 2006).

Besides issues relating to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity of faculty at community colleges, another big factor is the percentage of faculty that are hired on a contingent basis (Bahr & Gross, 2016; Eagan et al., 2015; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). As of 2014, 58% of all courses in community colleges are taught by part-time faculty (Fain, 2014). The high percentage of part-time faculty teaching courses at community colleges affects students' likelihood of forming pivotal relationships that influence their trajectory at these institutions (Kezar & Maxey, 2014). In addition to this, part-time faculty are often marginalized and left out of the traditional decision-making bodies within community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2011). Yet, despite these constraints and challenges of the community college context, faculty can create a substantial impact in the classroom.

In her study, Cox (2009) examined the role of faculty members in mediating fears and anxieties students feel when enrolling/attending community colleges. Cox found that despite students feeling compelled to enroll in community colleges to fulfill their educational and career aspirations, most of them felt and expressed fear while in these classrooms. This fear of failure

had the potential to undermine their educational and professional goals. In particular, their fragile new identities as "college students," given their past educational experiences and the context of community colleges, posed a threat to their potential success. Thus, active interventions from faculty members are the only way these students will not end up failing in school (Cox, 2009). Cox found that professors who maintained high expectations by assigning college-level work, provided explicit instructions for every assignment, and resolved to have a personable relationship with students helped diminish students' failure. Additionally, faculty who actively addressed students' fears at the beginning of class and provided high levels of validation throughout the duration of the course stood out to students.

Similarly, Deil-Amen (2011) found that faculty in community colleges play a significant role in creating socio-academic integrative moments that deter students from dropping out of these institutions. Deil-Amen explains that interactions with faculty provide social and informational benefits to students, enhancing sense of belonging, college identity, and college competence. Students identified optimal interactions with faculty as ones where the faculty member demonstrates approachability, flexibility, and availability. In particular, in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences where faculty members provide strategic guidance and support for processes like registering for classes, changing a major, or completing any other process decrease the likelihood of a student dropping out. Deil-Amen's concept of socio-academic integrative moments fuses academic and social integration, two concepts that Tinto's model (1993) conjured as separate components of students' commitments to their respective colleges/ universities. This research, along with Cox's (2009) findings, highlights how faculty-student interactions in community colleges play a vital role in the persistence and retention of students—and requires more examination and study. The current study will look to explore how faculty's teaching

potentially influences/fosters students' vocational identity. In the following section, I explain the lens this study will use to examine the embedded process of academic and professional identity development for emerging adults attending community colleges.

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned throughout my introduction and literature review, my study will use the concept of emerging adulthood in addition to identity status theory as a lens to understand students and their needs. Besides this concept, every study has assumptions, presumed relationships, and key factors that inform how the research is carried out (Maxwell, 2014). In the following section, I will first explain the theoretical groundings that influence the construction of this study: developmental contextualism and intersectionality (Crenshaw et.al., 1995). Second, I will cover in-depth the origins of the emerging adulthood framework and the need to continue to expand/understand how this concept is understood within marginalized populations. Third, I will explain why, given past research on the central role of faculty in the success of students, it may be necessary to leverage community college classrooms in the process of academic and professional identity development of students. This framework aims to leverage different social and psychological theories to address problematic assumptions about community college students that undergird the structure hypothesis and the rationale for Guided Pathways. Together, these ideas form the lens for my study, as shown in Figure 2.1.

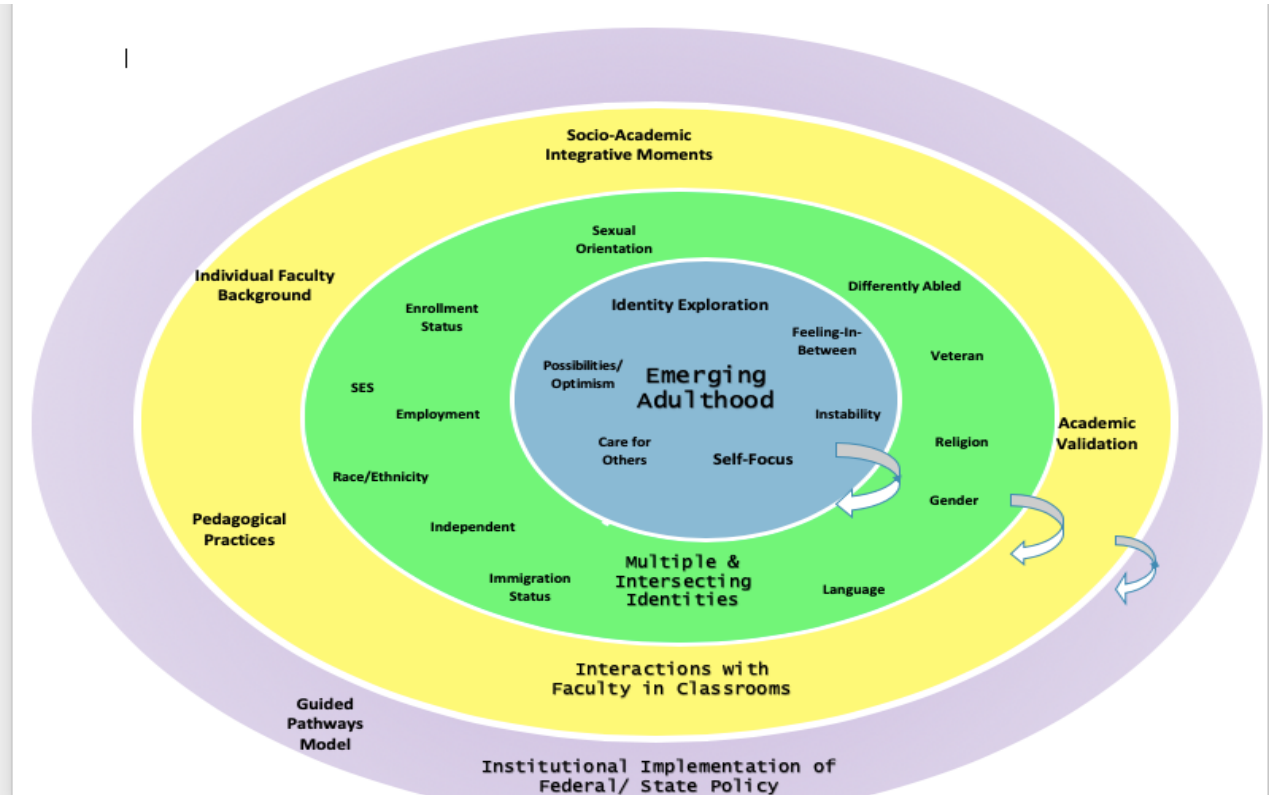


Figure 1.1

Theoretical Groundings

Before describing the main theoretical framework of emerging adulthood, I first acknowledge the theoretical groundings of this work, which relates to the importance of developmental contextualism and intersectionality. First and foremost, this study assumes that every process of growth and change that humans undergo is inextricably and reciprocally linked to the multiple contexts of individuals' lives (Lerner, 2002). In other words, development of human beings depends on neither the environment nor the individual alone, but is contextual, where everything that is taking place at the moment needs to be considered. Thus, development is embedded in multiple levels that are interrelated. Organisms exist but can only be understood in relation to or in transactions with the context that they are in. Relationships between the structural

and functional characteristics of the organism and the features of the organism's context create opportunities and constraints (Lerner, 2002). Additionally, context produces alterations in development, but context is also influenced/constrained by the organism's characteristics. The interaction between an organism's individual characteristics and its environment is reciprocal and dynamic. An individual's multiple and intersectional identities are situated within interrelated systems of power that shape their lives, decisions, and trajectories (Lerner, 2002). Therefore, when we think of a students' academic and professional development, how they make decisions about who they want to be, we have to consider the multiple contexts of their lives, their multiple identities, how these identities intersect through contexts the individuals are embedded in. I use the embedded emerging adulthood framework as my main lens because it captures a significant segment of students attending community colleges and summarizes key developmental aspects of this period: identity exploration and instability, which directly impact students' search for their vocation.

Emerging Adulthood Framework

Emerging adulthood is a developmental phase to describe the life changes in people ages 18-27. According to Arnett (2015), emerging adults vary greatly across national, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts, but are similar (to differing degrees) in terms of five features. These five features are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. Arnett has written about the advent of this new developmental phase, emerging adulthood, for the past 20-plus years. According to Arnett, similarly to the emergence of adolescence in the early 20th century, emerging adulthood is a phenomenon that arose due to changing economic and societal shifts that have led to a prolonged transition to adulthood for young people who live in developed and to a lesser extent developing countries (Arnett, 2000).

Arnett attributes the rise of emerging adulthood to four "revolutions"; these are the technology revolution, the sexual revolution, the women's movement, and the youth movement. The technology revolution refers to the changes in the American (and, for that matter, global) economy that have transformed the bulk of jobs from the manufacturing sector to the service and technology sector. In turn, the percentage of jobs in the service sector has propelled more young people to see going to college as a necessity to gain the skill set in order to thrive in the modern economy. The sexual revolution and the women's movement have allowed for women and men to wait longer to get married and given women alternative paths for careers. For Arnett, these four revolutions have altered the level of education young people need to have a well-paying job, changed the age pattern that young people enter marriage and have children, switched the role of women, and, finally, normalized young people exploring their future for a longer period of time. All the changes that are brought about by these four "revolutions" have created a different and longer stage between adolescence and young adulthood.

As mentioned earlier, Arnett (2015) describes five features of "emerging adulthood" that people during this stage of life exhibit to differing degrees: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism. Unlike Erik Erikson (1994) , who stipulated that identity exploration is a central task of adolescence, Arnett asserts that true identity exploration only begins in adolescence, but it is fully executed during emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is the ideal stage for identity exploration, in particular in regard to love and work, because for the first time in their lives, these individuals have greater independence from their parents and even other past relationships while also not fully participating in traditional roles that would signal adulthood, such as parenthood, marriage, or a long-term job. Arnett believes that emerging adulthood is the time to "clarify their sense of who they are and what they want out of

life" (p. 9). Given all the different ways emerging adults explore their identity, possible careers, and education, this stage is also characterized by instability and moving pieces and a great amount of self-focus. According to Arnett, this is the time that emerging adults turn inward and try to figure themselves out. Although they might feel like they are in between many different life roles, the endless possibilities fuel their enthusiasm and propensity to keep exploring.

For Arnett (2015), the American higher education system is the most appropriate environment for emerging adults since it potentially provides them with optimal space to explore their identity, especially their future academic and professional paths. Arnett states that 4-year and 2-year colleges alike are designed to allow emerging adults to systematically approach the type of job/major that would best fit their abilities and interests. One of the reasons for this is that emerging adults are given the opportunity to deliberate on their academic major during the first 2 years of college. At times this exploration can even take place during the 3rd year of college. This switching of majors gives emerging adults the opportunity to try out different paths and possibilities, perhaps even challenge the career aspirations they held prior to arriving at college and the careers their parents wanted them to pursue. According to Arnett, the American college environment optimizes emerging adults' search for their identity.

It is important to note that Arnett's (2015) blanket statement about all colleges providing emerging adults with the "space" to explore their academic and professional identity does not distinguish between 2-year colleges and 4-year colleges. Moreover, much of the criticism about emerging adulthood is around the idea that research on this developmental stage has been conducted on a middle-class White population. In a study of emerging adults of different racial, ethnic, and immigrant origins attending community colleges, Katsiaficas (2017) found that participants in this study had many characteristics that aligned them with how emerging adulthood

is theorized. For instance, students in this sample were still living at home, partially depended on their parents for support, and did not have children (Katsiaficas, 2017). However, participants in this sample contrasted in one of the key aspects from emerging adulthood theory, the pillar of self-focus. In this study, participants discussed taking part in social responsibilities as a key component of what made them an adult. According to Katsiaficas, this shows that for this diverse sample of community college students, social responsibility is a salient aspect of what it means to become an adult. Moreover, findings from this study together with past research contribute to the idea that there should be a sixth pillar in emerging adulthood theory, *caring for others* (Katsiaficas, 2017).

Related to these six pillars of emerging adulthood and the idea that students' intersecting identities are critical aspects of how they make decisions about their careers, I want to turn this discussion to the context of community colleges. Specifically, I want to integrate the faculty interactions with students in classrooms and funds of identity as additional ways of understanding the embedded process of academic and professional identity development in community college students.

Identity Development: Key Concepts and the Four Status Theory

Another theory that is useful for our understanding of how students find a major/career is the concept of identity itself and the theory of identity status. This framework provides us with a guide to locate students' commitment to and exploration of their academic and occupational paths along a spectrum. Erik Erikson (1994) first conceptualized identity development as one of eight psychosocial growth processes within the lifespan (Marcia et al., 2012). In the process of identity formation, the ego begins to synthesize its past experiences in an effort to make sense of the world and their own future role (Marcia et al., 1993). This process of identity integration first takes place

in adolescence, but it is not static and reemerges throughout the lifespan, especially during young adulthood.

During middle childhood and early adolescence, human beings increasingly become aware of their own characteristics and their conferred identities. Conferred identities refer to social categories such as race, country of birth, and gender, as well as their memberships in religious and other social groups. As individuals reach adolescence and emerging adulthood, they begin to make more decisions regarding who they are, their group affiliations, and their value systems, thus beginning the process of identity construction.

Erikson (1994) describes middle adolescence and late adolescence (what Arnett (2015) refers to now as emerging adulthood) as the time for a moratorium, or exploration, for youth in certain societies where they are allowed to not join the workforce and take time to "find themselves." As emerging adults reach college, they are in the midst of deepening their understanding of their conferred identities while also continuing to form a self-constructed identity (Marcia et al., 1993). Decisions about academic and occupational trajectories are the primary areas that contribute to young people forming a self-constructed identity.

However, not all young people are able to reach a self-constructed identity, for a variety of reasons. For some adolescents/emerging adults, the period of exploration is shorter, given their social class and familial obligations. For these young people a "time-out" is a luxury that is not viable given the demands of daily survival. Thus, for these young people, reaching a self-constructed identity is an increasingly difficult task. Additionally, during economic downturns, it may be impossible for young people to have choices when it comes to their academic and occupational opportunities; thus, the idea of exploration and commitment become incongruent with their circumstances.

James Marcia (1993), a student of Erikson, further stipulated that whether or not someone reaches a self-constructed identity is a product of their ability to explore different aspects of themselves and commit to them. Marcia et al. (1993) describes exploration and/or commitment behaviors and thinking patterns through a range of criteria that aim to measure the absence, presence, and degree of exploration and/or commitment.

In terms of exploration, there are four different criteria to assess it: knowledgeability, actions toward gathering information, consideration of alternatives, and desire to make a decision. For a young person to engage in a level of exploration during college, they need to have an understanding of their personal needs and abilities as well as a realistic picture of available societal opportunities. Additionally, they must have an understanding of their own career and academic path that goes beyond superficial ideas of what it is like to be in that trajectory. For instance, if they want to pursue being a therapist, they should know that they need more than a bachelor's degree to enter this profession. Young people should also understand alternative paths to arrive at their vocational goals. They should have a plan to gather pertinent information. They do not have to abandon childhood dreams, but they should consider these aspirations in the context of what they now know about their abilities and circumstances, and weigh them in contrast to potential paths. Finally, a big part of exploration entails young people understanding that exploration must be guided and have goals (Marcia et al., 1993). The goal of exploration is to reach a decision and/or determine alternative paths that are a good match for someone's aptitudes, needs, and societal opportunities.

Commitment has four more additional criteria: emotional tone, identification with significant others, projecting one's personal future, and resistance to being swayed. Commitment refers to the process of making a definitive decision in the context of many available choices and

not being easily swaying from that decision. To make a commitment to an academic path or career, the young adult needs to have in-depth knowledge about the area that they are entering, engage in activities that are consistent with their goals, and clearly articulate why they have these vocational goals and how they plan to accomplish them. For instance, if an emerging adult is committed to becoming an accountant, they need to understand the credentials they need, be able to articulate what accountants do and where they work, plan to have an internship or experience in an accounting firm or related organization, and have an active plan to reach their goal. Additionally, their tone needs to be one of self-assuredness regarding their commitment.

Beyond having role models that inspire them to pursue their vocational goals, the young person needs to be able to identify and discern the positive and negative characteristics of that occupation. Therefore, having mentors or people who have experience in the occupational path they desire is an effective way of having a well-rounded perspective. They also need to have a realistic vision for the future, with a doable plan; that is, as they accumulate experiences in their area of interest, they are also able to better understand what are feasible goals that can be met. The last criterion of someone who has made a commitment to an academic path or career is to have certainty around this decision that is not easily influenced. When a young person has made a strong commitment to their vocation, they are able to acknowledge the possibility of change and express how this change may present advantages and/or disadvantages, but ultimately be reluctant to change to this alternative path unless there are some drastic circumstances that push them to do so.

Based on this spectrum of exploration and commitment, the process of identity development can result in four different fluid identity statuses: identity achievement, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity diffusion (Marcia et al., 1993).

Identity achievement describes the point when a young person has achieved a self-constructed identity. Both commitment and exploration are present in this identity status. For the most part, this young person has explored an alternative path in either cognitive or behavioral terms. For example, this person has research in depth various career paths and/or had experience volunteering or working in this area. They have also begun to embody aspects of their vocational goals and begun to incorporate them as part of their self-definition. They can articulate why they have chosen their academic path and have a plan for how they will complete this path. They also actively seek out experiences that will help them achieve their occupational goals. At the same time, they are flexible in their plans to reach their goals and understand there might be multiple ways to get there. They have a level of self-assuredness in regard to their plans that comes from their accumulated experiences, research in this area, and comfort regarding how it matches up with their talents.

Identity foreclosure status is where the young person has made a strong commitment to their academic or vocational path early in their life with minimal to no exploration of alternative paths. At times, the person has made this commitment given the influence of a parent or authority figure. Something they may say is, “Well, my mom always told me I should be a lawyer because of how I talk, and this is stuck with me and that is what I want to do now.” In other words, the person may not admit that their parent or authority figure has influenced their decision, but it is the same or very similar to their parents’ wishes. They also are not verbalizing much about their trajectory in this career or a specific path they want to go into; they are rigid about exploring any other alternatives. When they are presented with other alternatives, they are adamant about their decision and are reluctant to engage in the possibility of change.

Identity moratorium status is when there is an absence of commitment to the vocational decision but there is active exploration of alternative paths. When a person is in the moratorium stage, it does not necessarily mean they are exploring aimlessly; often they are just deciding on alternative paths in one area. They may also seem anxious or intense about settling on a career path but can often articulate in depth the pros and cons of their decision-making process. Their tone is one of uncertainty.

Identity diffusion status is when a young person has no commitment to an area and has done little exploration or is not actively exploring alternatives. Identity diffusion can take on three different forms. One of the forms is the person who is ready to commit to a career or academic path with low barriers to entry but also easily swayed into other opportunities. For instance, this person may see that becoming a real estate agent is sometimes a profitable career option, so they are ready to commit to this occupation without doing an assessment of how this career is a match for their interests and/or abilities or knowing much about the day-to-day activities of this profession. Another manifestation of identity diffusion is the person who altogether is not engaging with the process to explore or commit to any vocational paths. The last type of identity diffusion status is one where the vocational path is not congruent with the reality of the person's academic preparation or occupational experiences, and thus their aspirations are more based on a fantasy.

Together with emerging adulthood theory, identity status theory provides a basis to examine where students are in their identity development process. Additionally, aligning students according to these identity statuses helps us evaluate the type of interventions and supports necessary to help them reach their academic and occupational goals.

Classrooms as Central Spaces for Students' Academic and Professional Identity Development

Since the vocational identity development of community college students is an interrelated and embedded process, it is necessary to examine classrooms and their relationships with faculty to understand how this process unfolds within these institutions. As previously mentioned, community college students are often commuters and have an assortment of responsibilities like part-time jobs and family obligations; therefore, they spend the majority of their time at these institutions in classrooms (Chang, 2005; Deil-Amen, 2011). Thus, faculty become their primary contact with the institution (Cox, 2009; Deil-Amen, 2011; Rios-Aguilar et.al., 2018). Any institutional model that does not address the role of faculty and/or classrooms in the improvement of student outcomes neglects to understand the main institutional contact that potentially influences how students develop in the first place. This study aims to focus on the role of faculty in the development of students' academic and professional identity to fill in this research and policy gap. Utilizing a *funds of knowledge* approach, this study will observe faculty, their teaching practices, and their interactions with students. Funds of knowledge is an asset-based approach that aims to identify the "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 36). In this case, it is the funds of knowledge of faculty and students that interact and create a dynamic space that influence how students develop. My study will aim to discover how faculty leverage their own academic and professional identity development, students' own vocational aspirations, and their classroom content to further help students discover who they are and who they want to become.

Although the framework of emerging adulthood has not been widely used in higher education, in particular with respect to community college students, it can present a different lens

to understand students as complex human beings who need understanding and guidance during this stage in life. By unpacking why students may struggle in deciding the major/career they plan to undertake, this lens will allow me to delve into what resources, moments, and events students need to help them along the process of self-discovery. This, together with an intersectional frame, can help develop a profile of students, their backgrounds, the ideas that have led them to college, and how they connect their majors with their future careers. By centering students in connection to their relationships with faculty and experiences in classrooms, I will highlight how vocational exploration needs to be approached holistically. By doing so, I hope to show why a policy-driven model like Guided Pathways needs to consider who community college students are, what specific factors influence their choices, and what ways faculty and classrooms can encourage this developmental task of discovering who they are.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is qualitative. with ethnographic features and an action research portion. The data for this study comes from a community research partnership at Resilient Community College located in Southern California. This qualitative study with ethnographic approaches employs classroom observations, interviews with students, interviews with faculty, and document analysis. The study also employed the use of photo journals with the aim of expanding the role of participants to take on the role of coinvestigators through asking participants to keep photo journals about their own beliefs and thoughts regarding majors and careers. Combined, an ethnography and photovoice methodology captured as closely as possible students' perceptions and understanding of major and career decision processes (Storesund & McMurray, 2009; Kessi, 2013). This study is guided by the following questions:

In what ways are emerging adults attending community college making decisions about their academic majors and/or potential careers?

- In what ways are students' intersecting identities relevant to their decisions regarding their academic majors/careers?
- What is the role of family, friends, and institutional agents in this process?

The following sections of this chapter will present specific information about the research components. In particular, I discuss ethnographic and photovoice methods, participants and research site, data collection strategy, and coding and data analysis, as well as my positionality, the study's triangulation, and its limitations.

Research Site

Resilient Community College (RCC)* is the third-largest community college in the United States. It is located in the San Gabriel Valley about 11.9 miles away from Los Angeles. Founded in 1924 with an enrollment of 267 students, it now serves an estimated 41,360 students as of the 2017-2018 school year. RCC offers 124 associate degree programs, 88 certificate of achievement programs, and 41 noncredit certificate programs. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 break down race, age, and gender of the student demographics for the college. Figures 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 present a breakdown of faculty, staff, and administrators, including ethnicity and gender, as of fall 2017. As this data shows, students ages 18-27 compose a large segment of the student population, thus showing how important is to understand the specifics of how these students explore their academic and professional journey. This is very important for my study because I am studying emerging adults' academic and professional identity with the hopes that the findings could help practitioners and administrators in their work with this population. Additionally, having so many students who fall into this age group means that I will have access to interview potential study participants.

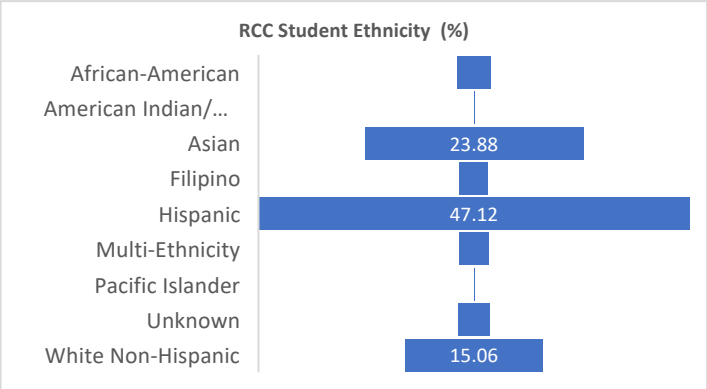
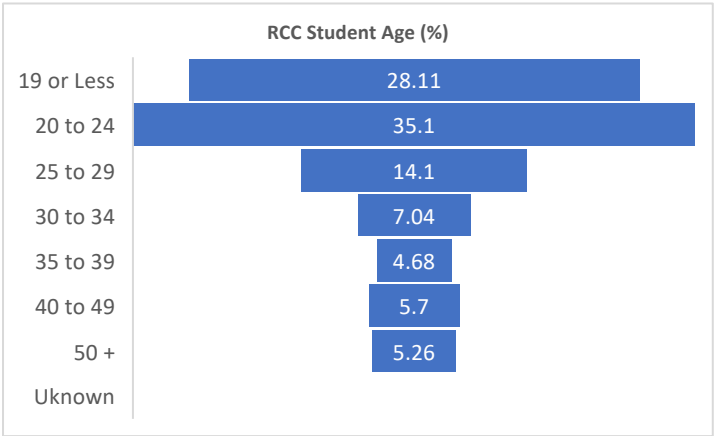


Figure 3.1

*Resilient Community College (RCC) is a pseudonym



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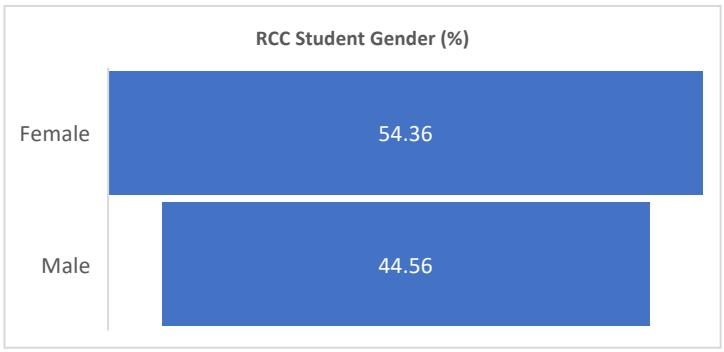

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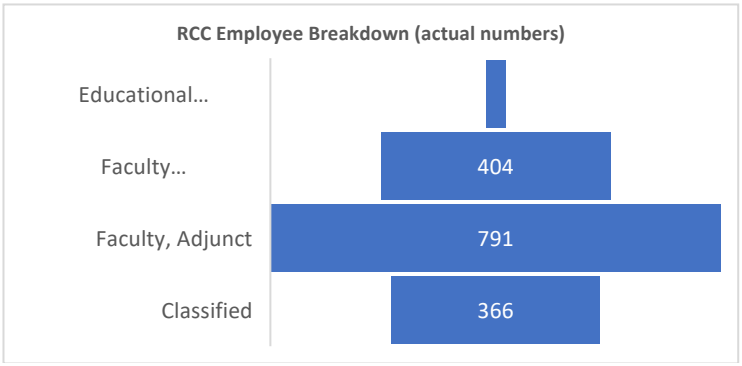

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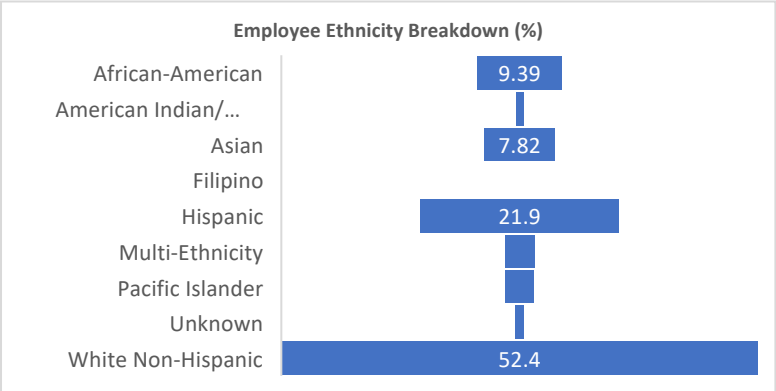

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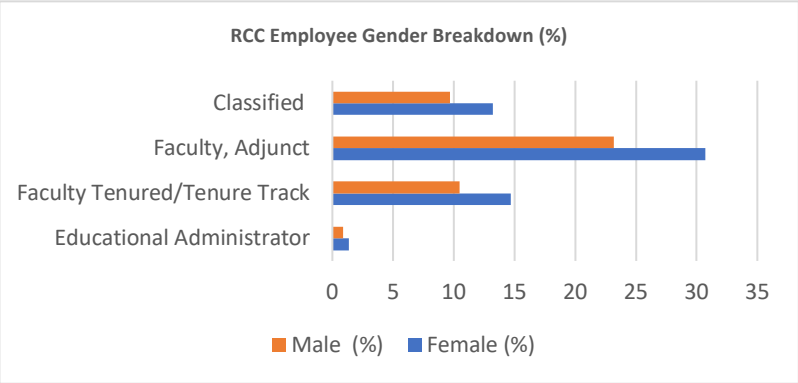

Figure 3.6

Access to Research Site

I gained access to the research site through my advisor Dr. Rios-Aguilar. Dr. Rios-Aguilar has had research practice partnerships with RCC for the past two years. Her projects have centered on the occupational outcomes and career pathways of students at RCC. I participated in various portions of these projects, conducting interviews with students during 2017 and 2018. Additionally, I have been a part of the larger research team meeting between UCLA researchers and RCC administrators and students. During meetings with key administrators, we discussed questions that remained regarding how students explored majors; in particular, questions focused

on (1) unpacking what "exploring" academic major/ professional careers means to RCC students, (2) understanding more about the role of meta majors/career areas in this exploration, and (3) the role of faculty in helping students explore their major. From conducting interviews with students and faculty as well as conducting classrooms observation, I hope to illustrate how emerging adults do this and how it relates to their experiences in the classroom. The creation of this project stems partially from the research gaps identified during earlier projects and subsequent meetings with administrators. This research project focuses on a single institution in order to ensure that the larger context for students and faculty remains the same. However, it is my goal that findings from this study will result in action items that can be explored with emerging adults and faculty at other community colleges.

Recruitment

Students and faculty in this study were recruited in a two-pronged approach. Faculty during the spring 2019 term were selected with help from key administrators at RCC. During preliminary meetings with two administrators, they suggested working with the Speech Communication Department because faculty in this department would likely be receptive to being part of the study and because this department offers several general education classes that would enroll students from various departments and majors. One of these administrators, who works as a liaison and trainer for new faculty, sent an email that was crafted by me to all of the faculty members in the Speech Communication Department inviting them to be part of the study. Once faculty were recruited, they were asked to send a flier that I created, asking students to be part of this project. From this first effort, I recruited two full-time faculty from the Speech Communication Department and 12 students who attended their classes. However, given the limitations that recruiting from a single department posed for the larger goals of the study, I shifted the order of

interviews and the recruitment of faculty of students. During the fall 2019 term, I began to recruit students to be part of the study by being on campus and spending time at different students' hotspots such as the quad, cafes, dining halls, and hallways of different buildings. Based on the interviews I conducted with students, I began to recruit faculty who students brought up during their interviews as people who had helped them in their vocational identity journey. Besides students and faculty, I also interviewed key administrators who were involved in the implementation of Guided Pathways at RCC.

Study Sample

This study utilizes purposeful selection and snowball sampling design. Purposeful selection (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was utilized to identify two faculty members teaching in the Speech Communication Department and 12 emerging adult students attending RCC. During this phase, the only parameter to recruit faculty was that they teach in the Speech Communication Department. For students, the parameters for participation were that they (1) be enrolled at RCC as a full-time or part-time student, (2) be enrolled in a speech/communications course, and (3) identify between the ages of 17 and 27 years old. For the second round of the study, I employed purposeful and snowball sampling methods (Creswell, 2014). In terms of students, I only interviewed students who identified between the ages of 18 and 27 years old. I also tried to make sure that I sought out students who were Black and/or Latinx since during the first round I did not speak to many students from this background. From this effort, I interviewed a total of 13 students and three faculty members whom students identified. When interviewing the faculty, I maintained student confidentiality and never disclosed the name of the student who mentioned them.

As mentioned, a total of 35 RCC students were interviewed. The students ranged from 17 years old to 27 years old, all enrolled at RCC for various lengths of time, and had a variety of

majors. Below is a breakdown of their age, gender, program of study, and race/ethnicity. For the purposes of the analysis of the data and given the request from the college to be able to learn more about serving this population, I am only including students who identified as, African American, African, multiracial, and/or Latinx.

Full List of RCC Student Participants (in order of interview dates)						
Name	**Age**	**Gender**	**Program of Study**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Date of Interview**	**Length of Interview**
Mai Pei	20	F	Math	Asian (Vietnamese)	5/13/2019	46 minutes
Dahn Pho	25	F	Hospitality	Asian (Vietnamese)	5/13/2019	40 minutes
Maria Rodriguez*	19	F	Communication	Latina (Mexican)	5/14/2019	37 minutes
Lisa Klein	18	F	Math	White	5/15/2019	54 minutes
Meghan Collins	19	F	Nutrition	White	5/15/2019	56 minutes
Anush Terzian	22	F	Business Administration	White (Armenian)	5/15/2019	63 minutes
Adriana Fermin*	18	F	Criminal Justice	Latina (Mexican)	5/16/2019	54 minutes
Chris Phan	18	M	Theater	Asian (Vietnamese & Chinese)	5/16/2019	70 minutes
Iliana Hernandez*	18	F	Speech Communication	Latina (Mexican)	5/16/2019	45 minutes
Jennifer Chen	21	F	Business	Asian (Chinese)	5/17/2019	58 minutes
Ryan Lewis*	19	M	English	African American	5/21/2019	50 minutes
Diego Sanchez*	20	M	Fire Science	Latino (Mexican)	5/23/2019	58 minutes
Miles Stephens*	20	M	Theater	African American	5/23/2019	54 minutes
Shariece Brown*	24	F	Communication	Multiracial (African American & White)	5/23/2019	40 minutes
Jamal Perry*	22	M	Communications	African American	5/27/2019	69 minutes
Nikki Smith*	20	F	Communications	African American	5/28/2019	84 minutes
Alejandro Montes*	22	M	Business	Latino (Mexican)	5/31/2019	60 minutes
Lorenzo Tate*	22	M	Electrical Technology	African American	9/16/2019	46 minutes
Nia Brown*	19	F	Biology	African American	9/16/2019	46 minutes
Eli Robinson*	19	M	Computer Science	African American	9/16/2019	38 minutes
Ramon Quintanilla*	23	M	Biology	Chicano	9/16/2019	30 minutes
Guadalupe Lopez*	24	F	Spanish	Latina (Mexican)	9/16/2019	27 minutes
Elise Abioye	27	F	Business	African and Swedish	9/17/2019	50 minutes
Cooper Wyatt	22	M	Computer Science	White	9/17/2019	40 minutes
Javier Garcia*	27	M	No Major	Latino (Mexican)	9/17/2019	39 minutes
Dewayne Freeman*	18	M	Theater	African American	9/17/2019	33 minutes
Tanya Clark*	18	F	Nursing	Multiracial (African American & Cambodian)	9/17/2019	32 minutes
Margarita Alma*	20	F	Studio Art	Latina (Mexican)	9/17/2019	30 minutes
Tamika Miller*	19	F	Business	African American	9/17/2019	29 minutes
Veronica Amor*	18	F	Education	Latina (Mexican)	9/17/2019	23 minutes
Satisha Erics*	20	F	Communication	African American	9/18/2019	45 minutes
Ashante Lee*	19	F	Undecided	African American	9/18/2019	44 minutes
Yabani Kelechi*	19	M	Business	African American & Nigerian	9/18/2019	44 minutes
Jessica Robinson*	17	F		African American	9/18/2019	39 minutes
Melissa Phillips*	17	F	Political Science	African American	9/19/2019	28 minutes

***Denotes students included in the analysis**

Table 1 Full List of Participants

RCC Faculty Participation					
Name	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Gender**	**Academic Discipline**	**Date(s) of Interview**	**Classroom Observation**
Guliver Travis	White	M	Communications	2/27 & 4/2	Yes
Stephanie Johnson	Multiracial	F	Communications	4/19/19 & 5/21/19	Yes
Thomas Rhett	White	M	Theater	10/25/19	No
Sue Chiu	Asian (Chinese)	F	Business	11/1/19	No
Gerardo Perez	Latino (Mexican)	M	Business	10/25/19 & 11/1/19	No

Table 2 RCC Faculty Participants

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected during the spring semester of 2019 and fall semester 2019. The data is a combination of interviews, classroom observations, documents, and photovoice diaries. The goals for the data collected were to understand the visible and invisible ways that emerging adult students at RCC explore their major and the role of faculty in this process.

I used semi-structured, three-part phenomenological interviews to ensure that each participant (faculty and students alike) had the opportunity to focus on particular aspects of their experiences and reflect on their meaning and context accordingly (Seidman, 2013). The first interview focused on faculty and students' life history to understand as much as possible the context of their lives (Seidman, 2013). The second interview concentrated on specific instances that reconstructed aspects of students' major exploration. In the case of faculty, the second interview asked them to reconstruct instances where they have brought up any aspect of major or career decision-making process during class (Seidman, 2013). In particular, I asked faculty to elaborate on the instances where conversations about majors and careers took place in the classroom, how these conversations began, if they took place in a small group or with the whole

class, and the extent to which the curricular content played a role in the conversation. The last interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning of some of the past experiences of instances that they had mentioned during the prior two interviews. For example, if a faculty member discussed the importance of being part of students' major decisions but has not been able to help students in this area, I asked them why they think this has been the case. In doing this, students and faculty made connections between their own lives and the specific experiences that they selected as examples, thus making sense of them (Seidman, 2013). The length of each interview for students range from 23 minutes to 84 minutes. For faculty, interviews ranged from 90 minutes to 220 minutes. For some, interviews were conducted on two or three separate occasions.

I was able to conduct four classroom observations for two of the faculty in the study. These observations took place during the spring 2019 term. The goal of these observations was to learn more about their pedagogy and how they interweave aspects of major and career decisions during their classes. In addition to observing their classes, I collected syllabi and relevant course assignments from three of these faculty members that might be applicable to major and career exploration. Besides observing classrooms, I spent significant time at the college, at the career center and , RCC Pathways Office cafeterias, cafes, quads and other key locations, in order to learn about how students explore their academic and future professional identities in these settings.

Besides interviews, data for this study comes from photovoice digital diaries that a subset of four students completed over the course of the study. Photovoice is a form of participatory action research (PAR) that aims to increase the role of participants in the research process through photo-stories (Lykes et al., 2018). Stemming from Freirean and feminist ideology, PAR maintains that participants are central to the process of knowledge production since they are experts in their own lives and often the subject matter of the study. In this visual methodology, researchers become

a vehicle so that participants can critically examine aspects of their lives and use this knowledge to challenge and transform their circumstances. In other words, PAR seeks to center participants' lived experiences in the research process. In turn, the researcher facilitates "the transformation of the knowledge" acquired by participants into concrete ways that this information can contextualize their lived experiences and generate change in their lives (Lykes et al., 2018).

Interviews for Students

The interviews for students consisted of a three-part protocol that addressed their focused life history, details of experience, and meaning making (Seidman, 2013). The focused life history portion of the interview concentrated on illuminating students' backgrounds, in particular how their professional aspirations have evolved throughout their lives as well as the role models who have influenced their academic path and potential career choices. The second part of the interview, details of experience, asked students to explain their process in choosing a major. This portion of the interview asked students to discuss the individuals, in and out of the college, who have had a role in helping them select a major. The final part of the interview, meaning making, focused on students reflecting on what the advantages/disadvantages of the major exploration process have been and what they have learned from it. Before students did the interviews, they took a demographic questionnaire that asked them to identify their age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, enrollment status, if they had any disabilities, citizenship status, employment status, and whether or not they receive different forms of financial aid. In addition to the demographic questionnaire, they completed the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) questionnaire to contextualize how strongly they identify with being an emerging adult.

Interviews for Faculty

Similarly to student interviews, faculty interviews followed Seidman's three-part protocol. The focused life history inquired about faculty's own background; in particular, it asked them to focus on their own process of selecting a college, selecting a major, and deciding on a professional path. In the second part of the interview, faculty expanded on their teaching practice. During this portion, I asked them to describe concrete examples of how faculty try to interweave majors and careers during their everyday classes, if at all. I also paid special attention to examples that they brought up during the interviews to see if I could observe similar instances while I was in two of their classrooms. In the last part of the interview, faculty reflected on their experiences teaching in community colleges, faculty's role in assisting students exploring their academic and professional lives, and finally, the ways the institution can help faculty fulfill their ever-expanding roles.

Classroom Observations

I developed the classroom observation protocol based on the Community College Classroom Observation (CCCO) protocol (Alicea et al., 2011). CCCO is a dynamic assessment tool, developed to systematically measure different dimensions of interactions, student outcomes, and engagement among diverse populations of emerging adults who typically attend community colleges (Alicea et al., 2011). I adapted the protocol by creating a portion that focused on major/career/employment. I removed many of the questions that focused on tallying students' interactions and their level of engagement as well as the specifics of the faculty instruction in order to focus on the conversations surrounding majors/careers. This new part aims to record different ways that instructors talk about academic majors, careers, and future employment. Additionally, it focuses on any advice that faculty give students on how they can approach this area of their lives.

Photovoice Digital Diaries

As mentioned above, photovoice is a visual methodology utilized to elicit participation and action from participants during the research process (Volpe, 2018). In this research project, photographs served as a form of field notes in which participants can record their own data, reflect on it, and tell parts of their story. The goal behind using this methodology was to allow participants to become coresearchers by presenting their own narrative. Given emerging adults' wide use of mobile phones and social media platforms (Volpe, 2018), photos were taken on their cellphones and sent to me in the format of PDF documents. The research question they answered was, How can RCC, in particular faculty, help me in my academic journey and eventually selecting a major? In total, students wrote five posts: (1) Take a picture of an object that represents your professional aspirations; (2) Take a picture of someone (with their permission) on campus who has facilitated the process to select a major/career; (3) Take a picture of someone (with their permission) outside of campus that has facilitated the process to select a major/career; (4) Take a picture that symbolizes some of the struggles that you have had in your academic major; and (5) Take a picture of an object that symbolizes another major you might want to explore while at RCC. All student participants were given general instructions with how to write up captions for each of the five posts. Instructions can be found in Appendix D.

Coding and Data Analysis

Given the large quantities of data that I gathered throughout this study, I spent eight months analyzing it. Below are the different strategies I utilized during the analysis portion of this study. These strategies included progressive focusing and documentation, visual displays for data, coding and using the coherent model for theme development, and finally writing procedural/analytic memos. I selected this combination of analytic approaches because it allowed me to explain,

interpret, and develop an understanding of the data as I collected it, thus ensuring that I could incrementally piece together data fragments into findings that illustrated the reality of students exploring a major (Saldana, 2016).

Progressive Focusing and Documentation

Before I began any type of data collection, I developed a system to organize data gathered according to the type of data that it was and its date and source, and catalogue it accordingly as well as maintain an inventory of my data. This allowed me to access particular pieces of data quickly and helped with the overall process of analysis. Familiarization of qualitative data is an iterative process that needs to take place throughout the data collection process, not only during the analysis stage (Barbour, 2014; Ngubule, 2015). In order to do this, I engaged in progressive focusing, or when the analyst interacts with data gradually and refines their focus (Barbour, 2014). My strategy was that after collecting the data, I reviewed it right away, and began writing notes regarding potential connections or even ideas that stood out from my initial analysis of the data. For any observations, I wrote field notes the same day I collected them in order not miss out on documenting my initial thoughts and feelings after spending time in this setting. Besides progressive focusing, I used documentation. According to Barbour (2014), documentation is the first analytic step where data collected is saved and listed by creating a contact summary form. This contact summary form helped me make quick notes and organize my impressions after any data collection point or interaction with my participants/research site.

Visual Displays of Data

Based on concepts that I found from my initial review of the data, I created different matrices. A matrix is a tool to systematically compare and contrast aspects of qualitative data in order to facilitate the analysis of this data (Barbour, 2014; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Spencer et.al.,

2014, Ritchie et.al., 2003). In the case of my data, I compared how faculty and students define certain concepts as well as the multiple meanings these expressions have among each of these groups. I did other matrices to visually display the process of exploring a major for students based on the data from interviews. As I discuss in my findings chapter, I also engaged in a similar process while trying to organize how to discuss my findings.

Internal Validity and Data Triangulation

I ensured internal validity in my study through triangulation and respondent validation. Triangulation refers to using multiple sets of methods, multiple sources of data, or multiple investigators in order to ensure that data that you are finding reveals the same patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my study, using interviews, observations of classrooms, and digital diaries allowed me to cross-check my findings. Respondent validation is the process of sharing your preliminary findings with participants in order to verify that emerging findings "ring true to them" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I shared my initial findings with my participants and got their feedback to make sure that I understood their words as they meant them. Additionally, I shared parts of the raw classroom data (and my interpretation of it) with faculty and students to ensure that I was understanding the meaning behind the sequence of events and words spoken.

Positionality

My personal background and professional experiences give me a particular insight for completing this research. As a generation 1.5 immigrant of mixed-race ancestry who grew up in a low socioeconomic neighborhood in a family of seven kids, I had multiple and intersecting identities that I had to understand as I was developing my academic and professional identity. I did not attend a community college, but I have had several family members who have attended. Through their experiences I have been able to reflect on the necessity of being part of institutions

that help you discover who you are and how you can become who you need to be for your family and community. At different points throughout my emerging adulthood years, I have had faculty whose example and advice have helped me believe that I can also get "there." This personal lens is a driving force for carrying out this study.

Additionally, prior to coming to UCLA to pursue my doctoral degree, I worked at a community college in Boston, starting in 2013, in various roles; among them, a tenure-track faculty member in the psychology department. In this position, I taught in-person and online classes. As a faculty member, I experienced the many factors that make being a faculty member at these institutions extremely rewarding and equally challenging. I chose to work at a community college because I wanted to work for a multidimensionally diverse student body. Working with these students is/was the best part of my job (I still teach online). I found that, for the most part, CC students are motivated, engaged, and resilient. At the same time, I learned that working as faculty at community colleges meant that I was always fulfilling multiple roles for students, including financial aid officer, career counselor, and even friend. I have personally experienced how much faculty can dramatically influence CC students' experiences. But I am also aware of how consuming it is to be so many different things to so many students. It is my hope that this study will (1) profile the journey that emerging adults in community colleges undergo to explore their majors and careers, (2) highlight the important (and complex) work that faculty do in assisting students as they figure this out, and (3) demonstrate ways that the institution can assist students and faculty in their endeavors.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore community college students' experiences in selecting an academic major and career trajectory. This study uses a contextual approach to ground students' vocational explorations in connection to their relationships and experiences in the classroom, as well as the larger institutional climate. The research questions guiding this study are:

In what ways are emerging adults attending community college making decisions about their academic majors and/or potential careers?

- In what ways are students' intersecting identities relevant to their decisions regarding their academic majors/careers?
- What is the role of family, friends, and institutional agents in this process?

To answer these questions, I utilized a qualitative design with a combination of ethnographic approaches, which included interviews of students, document analysis, and photovoice diaries. I analyzed the data from these studies using an emerging adulthood and contextual framework, in combination with the idea that students' backgrounds, intersectional identities, and relationships influence their academic and career identity development.

In this chapter, I will present findings from student interviews, campus observations, and photovoice journals. At first, I will share general findings from all students to illustrate some of the interrelated themes that came across in all interviews through the process of progressive focusing and initial coding. Afterward, I will present findings from interviews that were analyzed according to race and gender groups in order to showcase the factors that impacted distinct groups of students in their major and career selection process. These four groups are African American emerging adult men, African American emerging adult women, Latina emerging adults, and Latino

emerging adults. The last part of this chapter will showcase student photovoice journals that deal with how they contextualized their vocational identity journal while at RCC.

General Analytic Process

Between the months of May 2019 and October 2019, I interviewed a total of four Asian, four White, 10 Latinx, and 16 African American emerging adults attending RCC. This dissertation will focus on the experiences of the most academically vulnerable ethnic groups at RCC, African American/Black and Latinx students. Future analyses will take a comparative perspective to consider similarities and differences in experiences among all the groups.

Students were recruited primarily through communications classes, through students who had already participated in the study, and while I was around campus. For students who did not have time to be interviewed when I met them, I set up Zoom meetings. In total, 25 of the interviews were conducted in-person while nine were conducted via Zoom.

The average duration of these interviews was 43 minutes, which yielded over 700 pages of transcripts. Besides the data from the interviews, I completed four classroom visits that amounted to over seven hours, and over 30 hours in monthly meetings with key stakeholders over the period of a year. I also collected photovoice diaries for a subset of students. Besides the data that will be presented in the findings, I also collected an additional five interviews with full-time and part-time faculty and three interviews with senior administrators who are working to implement the Guided Pathways model at RCC.

For the analysis process, I began to immerse myself in the data from the interviews as I was collecting it. After the data from student interviews was transcribed, I checked each transcript against the original recording for accuracy and any mistakes that might have occurred in the transcription. I completed a long memo for each of the interviews I conducted as a way to further

familiarize myself with the data. I followed the framework-method analytic strategy (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) of data familiarization and organization, development of thematic index, indexing, charting, interpretation, and confirmation of findings. The framework method allows for a structured approach to analyzing large amounts of data without losing the voice of individual cases (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) Additionally, the framework method lent itself very well to the data I collected since I followed the same structure for each interview, thus allowing me to categorize findings according to the main topics that I covered in the interviews. I chose the framework method because it allowed me to easily compare and contrast themes along different units of analysis (i.e., individual cases, ethnic/gender groups).

Participants: Who Are These Emerging Adults?

The following tables are part of the data organization and visualization process that constituted the data analysis process. The first table is a general description of the sample, which helped me understand the diversity of the participants in the study. I then broke down Table 4.1 into different charts according to gender, race/ethnicity, age, generation to college status, and program of study. It is important to note that Black and Latinx students were not distributed in the same way in terms of generation to college. Of Latinx students, 60% were first generation to college, while 31% of Black students were the first ones in their families to attend college.

RCC Student Participants Included in the Analysis						
Name	**Age**	**Gender**	**Program of Study**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Date of Interview**	**Length of Interview**
Maria Rodriguez	19	F	Communication	Latina (Mexican)	5/14/2019	37 minutes
Adriana Fermin*	18	F	Criminal Justice	Latina (Mexican)	5/16/2019	54 minutes
Iliana Hernandez*	18	F	Speech Communication	Latina (Mexican)	5/16/2019	45 minutes
Ryan Lewis	19	M	English	African American	5/21/2019	50 minutes
Diego Sanchez	20	M	Fire Science	Latino (Mexican)	5/23/2019	58 minutes
Miles Stephens	20	M	Theater	African American	5/23/2019	54 minutes
Shariece Brown*	24	F	Communication	Multiracial (African American & White)	5/23/2019	40 minutes

Jamal Perry*	22	M	Communications	African American	5/27/2019	69 minutes
Nikki Smith*	20	F	Communications	African American	5/28/2019	84 minutes
Alejandro Montes*	22	M	Business	Latino (Mexican)	5/31/2019	60 minutes
Lorenzo Tate	22	M	Electrical Technology	African American	9/16/2019	46 minutes
Nia Brown	19	F	Biology	African American	9/16/2019	46 minutes
Eli Robinson	19	M	Computer Science	African American	9/16/2019	38 minutes
Ramon Quintanilla	23	M	Biology	Chicano	9/16/2019	30 minutes
Guadalupe Gomez	24	F	Spanish	Latina (Mexican)	9/16/2019	27 minutes
Javier Garcia	27	M	No Major	Latino (Mexican)	9/17/2019	39 minutes
Dewayne Freeman	18	M	Theater	African American	9/17/2019	33 minutes
Tanya Clark	17	F	Nursing	Multiracial (African American & Cambodian)	9/17/2019	32 minutes
Margarita Alma	20	F	Studio Art	Latina (Mexican)	9/17/2019	30 minutes
Tamika Miller	19	F	Business	African American	9/17/2019	29 minutes
Veronica Amor	18	F	Education	Latina (Mexican)	9/17/2019	23 minutes
Satisha Erics	20	F	Communication	African American	9/18/2019	45 minutes
Ashante Lee	19	F	Undecided	African American	9/18/2019	44 minutes
Yabani Kelechi		M	Business	African American & Nigerian	9/18/2019	44 minutes
Jessica Robinson	17	F	Communications	African American	9/18/2019	39 minutes
Melissa Phillips*	17	F	Political Science	African American	9/19/2019	28 minutes

Table 3 List of Participants Included in Analysis

*Denotes interviews conducted via Zoom.
All participants have pseudonyms.

Breakdown of Sample According to Gender & Race/Ethnicity

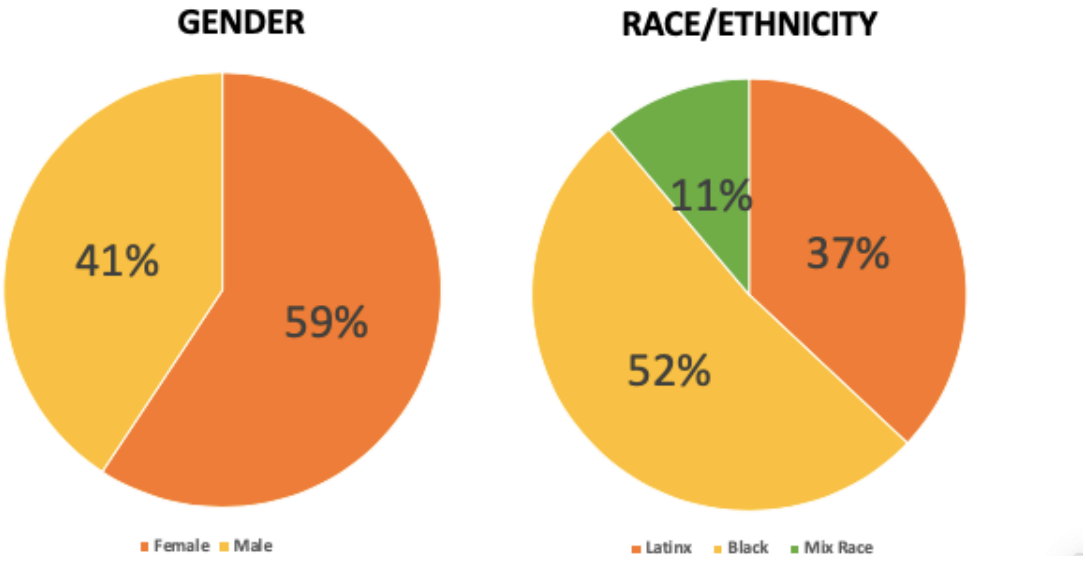

Figure 4.1

Breakdown of Age and College Generation Status of Students Interviewed

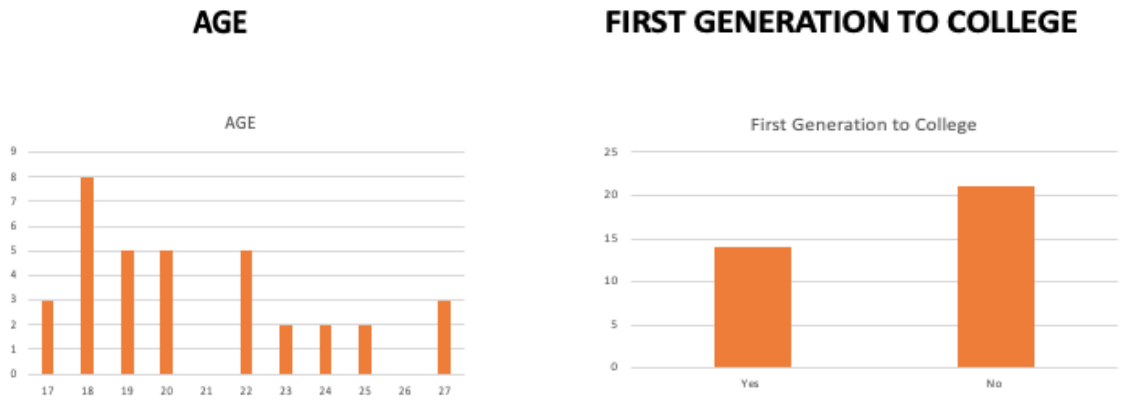

Figure 4.2

Word Cloud Illustrating Program of Study for Students in Sample

Figure 4.3

I developed an index of codes and categories based on my initial read and analysis of the interviews. I coded all of the interviews using the thematic index using MAXQDA. I retrieved all coded segments according to subpopulation to decide on the charting. Additionally, I used different

functions within MAXQDA to quantify the percentage of coded segments according to each document. Based on the highest percentages of coded segments, I developed different matrices for each of the four gender/ethnic groups to further extrapolate themes about how students selected and explored majors as well as the different people who helped them make these decisions. Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 (see Findings, below) show the percentage of coded segments for all interviews for some of these categories.

I retrieved coded segments from MAXQDA and disaggregated them according to the four gender/ethnic groups. Based on my readings from the most frequently used codes and segments, I developed different thematic matrices to allow me to compare and contrast students within each gender/ethnic groups as well as across groups. I read and interpreted matrices with the goal of defining the different factors and relationships that impacted how students selected majors/careers, the visible and invisible ways they explored the majors, and how they contextualized their actions. I looked for patterns in the data but also paid attention to disconfirming cases that contradicted main findings.

This ongoing analysis over the last year was also paired with regular meetings with key stakeholders at RCC. During these meetings, I shared initial findings and received their feedback on my initial interpretation. Besides these larger campus meetings to triangulate the information from the interviews, I also continued to engage with the participants to get their feedback on the interview itself and initial findings. Members' checks were completed throughout the duration of the data analysis. These members' checks also served as a way to follow up on students' decisions on their major after the interview was conducted. From these members' checks, I was able to confirm my interpretation of the interviews and see how the vocational journey played out over the last year.

Findings: Making Career Decisions Across Groups

The following graphs show an analysis of different key factors of students' vocational identity development across groups. The graphs show influences on career aspirations, ways students made decisions about current college major, ways students explored majors/careers in college, reasons students chose majors, and the percent of participants for whom these were influences.

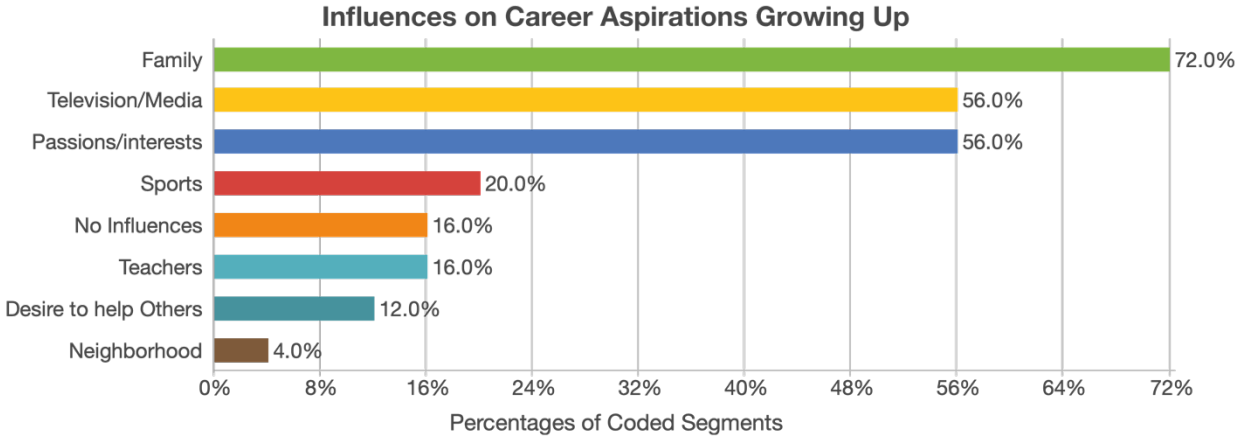

Figure 4.4

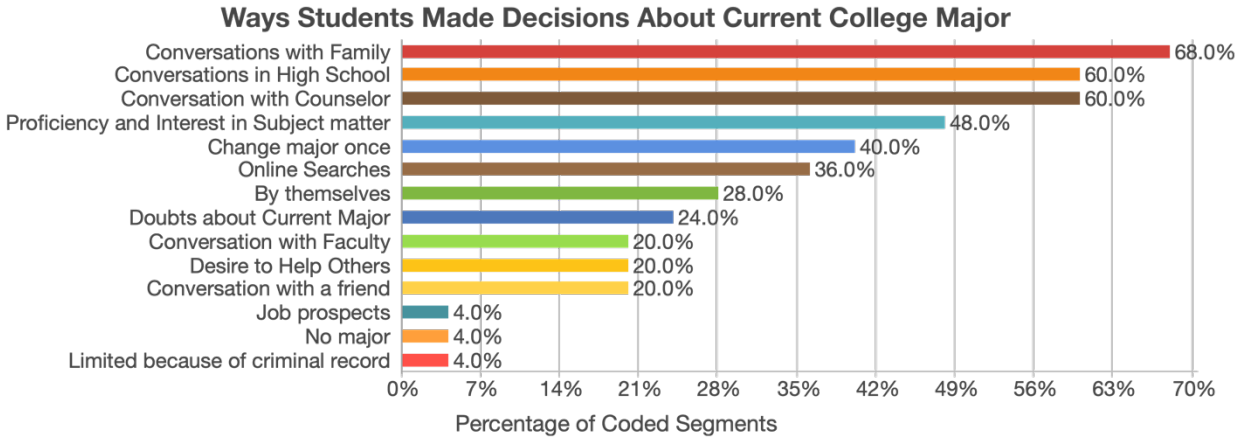

Figure 4.5

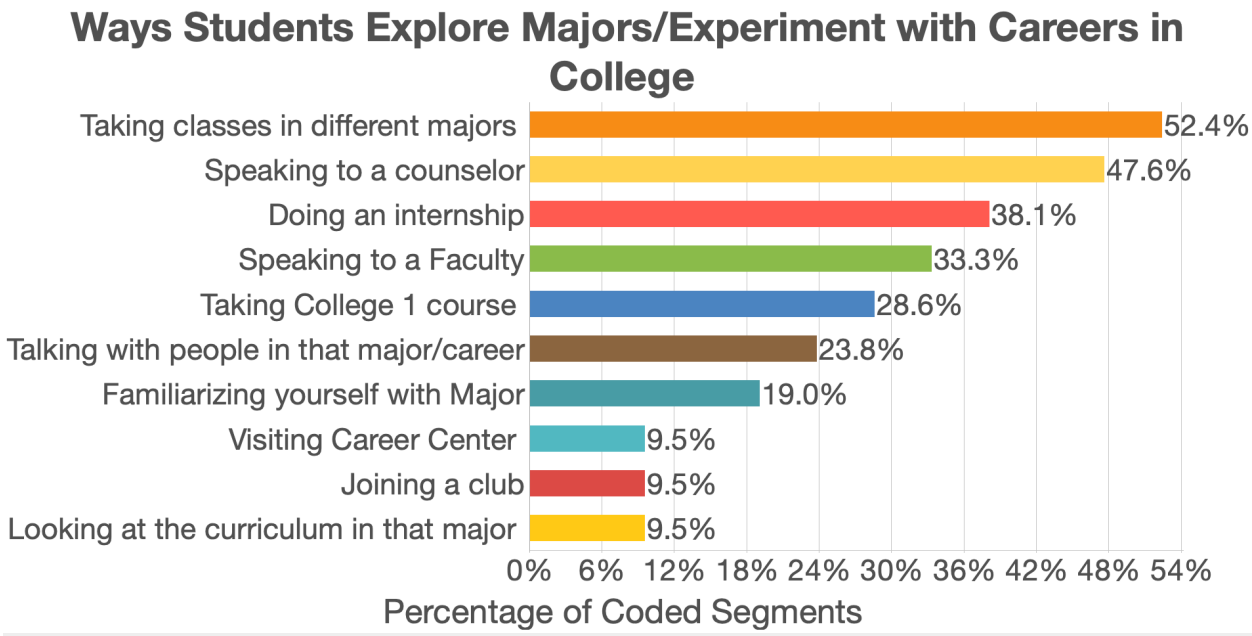

Figure 4.6

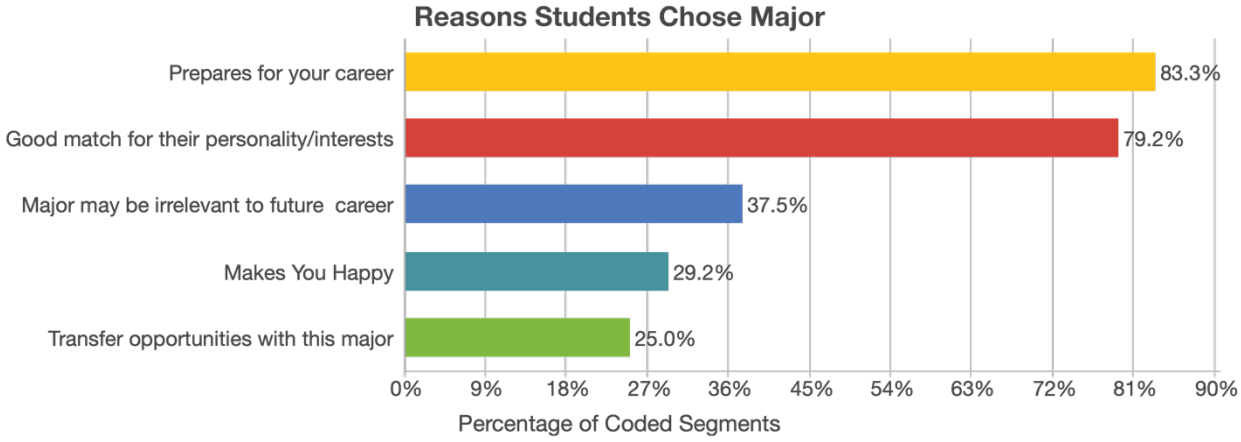

Figure 4.7

In the following section, I present themes disaggregated into four groups: African American emerging adult men, African American emerging adult women, Latina emerging adults, and Latino emerging adults. It is important to note that some of the themes are interrelated and repeat themselves across different groups.

African American Emerging Adult Men at RCC

In total, I interviewed seven participants who identified as African/African American/Black and male. The average age of these participants was 19 years old, ranging from 18 to 22 years old at the time of their interview. Six of the interviews were conducted in person while one interview was via Zoom. The students all lived in Pasadena or the nearby towns of Duarte and Glendale. In terms of majors, two of the students were theater majors, and the rest majored in English, communications, computer science, business, and electrical technology.

For the most part, all of the students had a parent who attended a postsecondary institution for some time, although wasn't clear from our interviews how many of these parents actually graduated. Even so, four out of the seven students said their fathers worked in construction work or as a security guard, jobs that typically do not require a college education. Most of the Black emerging adults could name specifically their mom's job or educational level.

All of the students expressed having one or multiple cognitive, developmental, or behavioral disorders. These ailments included attention deficit disorder, speech disorder, autism, and/or issues with anxiety and depression as well as substance abuse issues. Two of the students received individualized education programs (IEPs) throughout K-12 but did not seek out these resources in college. Additionally, one student mentioned currently being on probation and having a felony.

Overall, the data from these interviews yielded three big themes that helped contextualize how these students made decisions about their major and/or occupational trajectory. These themes center around (1) their experiences prior to entering college, with a focus on their school histories and the influence of sports identity, (2) their views on majors/careers being connected to their hobbies/passions/interests, and (3) the impact of racial bias in how students navigate current and

future professional opportunities. Each of these themes helps shed light on how young Black men at RCC experience making decisions about their majors or programs of study.

Experiences Before Entering College Matter in Decisions for Major: School Histories and The Influence of Sports

Students' educational and life experiences before entering college predicated much of the outlook young Black men had about school itself, their abilities, and their professional outlook. Most of these students had a history of attending multiple educational institutions and struggling academically. For instance, six of the seven students had changed high schools at least once and the same number of students discussed almost not graduating from high school or facing academic difficulties during high school. One of the students had to complete high school at a continuation school, while four of the seven talked about their math ability as a deterrent to the career they wanted to pursue or the major they are currently taking. The reasons why students changed schools often had a lot to do with their family's financial situation and the school's ability to meet their academic and personal needs.

However, in spite of the instability in their school situation, most students had a constant aspiration to pursue professional sports as a career. Five of the seven students dreamt of playing sports growing up. Four of the seven students even envisioned college as a conduit for a professional sports career. The following two students highlight how experiences before entering college impact how these students view attending college and planning for their major and the influence of sports in their career outlook.

Eli Robinson is a second-generation college student who graduated from a local Pasadena high school after attending multiple schools during K-12 in different parts of Ohio and California.

Eli moved around, given his family's financial situation, and admits to never having stayed in one house for a long time. When it came to high school, Eli admits to struggling academically, something that has continued while at RCC, where he is currently on academic probation. Eli explains:

> I just want to make sure that I have my grades for high school, just trying to get out of high school. I wasn't really worried about where I was going [while at RCC]. … Yeah. I wasn't really paying attention. Yeah, just doing my own thing. … I got an F and then I got into a dispute with a professor and straight up dropped it. … Yeah, I try to repeat the classes, retook Math 8 and English1.
>
> [Eli Robinson, African American, Computer Science Major, 19]

In the excerpt above, Eli discusses how his outlook to just survive high school and finish it influenced his college choice. He also explains how that perspective has stayed with him during his time at RCC, even leading to continued academic challenges. One can infer that academics has not been an area of strength for Eli. However, two constant activities in Eli's life have been his involvement with sports and his involvement with video games. The quote below explains how Eli saw his involvement in sports and video games and what he hoped for in his professional life:

> If I could, I would have continued playing sports. … No, I didn't really know too much growing up. I mostly played sports, so it was always with my dad either playing football, baseball, basketball, or other sorts of ... like professional baseball or basketball. And growing up, I always wanted to be a professional video game player and I'm just now starting to get into that, finding out what's the age range or some requirements that I might need to do. And I guess doing one of those two would be a dream job to me.

[Eli Robinson, African American, Computer Science Major, 19]

These quotes together highlight how Eli's experiences before college have impacted his current enrollment at RCC and how he decided on a major. For Eli, much of high school was a process of adjusting to his new school and city while also trying to survive the academics. College planning, including how to choose a major, was not the priority; instead, he wanted to be able to "just graduate." Eli had one planning meeting with a counselor during high school that led him to select RCC and his major. The conversation with the counselor entailed Eli discussing what he liked to do. The only constant activities that Eli had were playing a variety of sports and video games, aside from one short time being part of the robotics team. In the quote above, Eli admits that he would like to play sports professionally but, as he disclosed during the interview, he had to stop because of multiple injuries. For Eli, playing sports was not only something that he felt good at but also a chance to connect with his dad. Given that for Eli the dream of playing sports is not likely to happen, he decided that in college he could pursue the next thing he was good at, video games. Eli decided on a computer science major with the hope that one day he will be able to create his own console or video game.

Similarly to Eli, Lorenzo Tate also came to RCC after being at risk of not graduating from high school. Lorenzo, a 22-year-old second generation to college student has had many of the same experiences as Eli. Lorenzo also graduated from a local Pasadena high school after attending another high school and doing the majority of his schooling in the Inglewood area. Lorenzo also explains that the main reason why he moved a lot was because his mom had financial troubles; specifically, the rising rent prices in the area of Inglewood made it very hard for his mom, who works as a certified nursing assistant, to afford housing. She eventually made the decision that it

was best for the entire family to move in with Lorenzo's grandmother, aunt, and cousin. Lorenzo also discusses struggling in high school in the following way: "I was getting a lot of Ds, started getting a little bit of Fs. But I mean, I bounced back, I still, you know, graduated. But I just had a lot going on, fighting with different people and stuff."

Lorenzo's academic difficulties, his interpersonal conflicts, and the financial hardships that his family endured made high school a very tumultuous experience for him. During our interview, Lorenzo talked openly about constantly worrying about a variety of factors, from his ability to finish all the requirements to graduate from high school to his mom's ability to drive his sister and him to school after working all night. All of these stressors were more pertinent for Lorenzo than having a plan for college. As Lorenzo explains in the quote below, he was not "passionate" about anything in high school except for basketball; however, in his last year, he realized that he was not good enough to attend college on a sports scholarship.

> Me being young, from the hood, I wanted to be always a sports player, NFL, NBA. I wanted to be in NBA. I played basketball in high school. But I came to my senses in 12th grade and I realized, it's ugly for me, so I mean really, besides that, I had no passion. … Basketball, that was all we really had. A lot of people that made it out of our section either play sports or rap or something. For me it was some type of talent, it wasn't too much brain work, you know.
>
> [Lorenzo Tate, African American, Electrical Technology, 22]

Lorenzo's aspirations to be in the NBA and NFL are the only things he recalls being passionate about in high school, and for that matter, throughout his entire life. Additionally, the quote above illustrates two big ideas that impacted his professional outlook. First, Lorenzo understood college to primarily be a vehicle to become a professional sports player. This explains

why Lorenzo did not enroll in a college after realizing he had very little opportunity of becoming a professional athlete. Second, for Lorenzo, anyone in his neighborhood who has had a level of success gained it through becoming an athlete or a rapper. Overall for Lorenzo, neither of these paths involve much "brain work," the implication being that Lorenzo does not feel like he could be successful in anything that involves a lot of the traditional thinking associated with school; thus athletics and entertainment represent the only opportunity for Lorenzo to gain success.

Both Eli and Lorenzo have been at RCC for over a year with a declared program, yet their experiences prior to RCC continue to have an impact in their new environment. They both continued to struggle academically and are on academic probation. Although by RCC standards, both are instilled in a career community and have completed an educational plan, neither are fully committed to their respective paths. Perhaps part of the reason they are not fully committed has to do with the very little information they had before deciding on a program. For instance, Eli envisions that being a computer science major might lead him to be in the game designer industry, while Lorenzo chose electrical technology because he heard from his mom that he could make a lot of money. While they pursue these majors, both continue to actively pursue their alternative plans of becoming a professional gamer and a rapper, signaling again that they are not fully committed to the college-going process. It seems like after both of these students realized that they were not going to be professional athletes, they each proceeded to select the next area in which they felt they had skills and a promising future, and that they could enjoy. These two examples serve as evidence that experiences prior to college, in terms of the level of success that students have in high school as well as the curricular and extracurricular activities that they are exposed to, make a difference in how students approach the major-decision process once they arrive at college.

"My Major Needs to Be Something I Love": The Connection Between Majors/Careers and Students' Passions and Hobbies

The majority of African American male students that I interviewed made their program choice based on a perception of how closely their major matched interests, passions, and personality. The main differences between students who have gained a stronger identification with their program of study and students who have made a commitment that is less secure are the experiences that led them to make those choices and the guidance they received while making those decisions. The following quotes and excerpts are from four different students who have all declared a program of study. However, two of these students have come to these decisions with minimal guidance and interactive experiences, while the other two have had active support from faculty and have explored these majors in academic and functional ways. The comparison among these students highlights the importance of faculty intervention and active exploration for all students who have selected a major.

Dewayne Freeman is an 18-year-old newly enrolled student at RCC. Similarly to Eli and Lorenzo, Dewayne also did not prepare much for his transition to college since most of his energies were concentrated on being able to successfully complete requirements to graduate from high school. After a lot of hard work, Dewayne was able to graduate from a local high school and decided to continue on to RCC. Dewayne heard of the major-selection process for the first-time during orientation at RCC. In the following quote, Dewayne explains how he made the decision to pursue theater arts as a major.

> The process was, first, I was undecided when I first came here. Then I couldn't get my financial aid until I picked a major. I went to the building over here. I think it's the IT building and she [the counselor] was giving me lists and stuff.

> She was asking my personality. Like how I say I'm funny. She said what I'm interested in. I said music and an actor. I want to be an actor. She said, "Oh yeah, we got music classes and theater arts." I was like, "Theater arts?" Then she told me information about it. I forgot, but she was saying improv class and stuff. I can do an improv class. Then I was like, all right, I'm just going to pick theater arts as a major and see how that goes.[Dewayne Freeman, African American, Theater Arts, 18]

As Dewayne explains, the process of learning about majors and making the decision to select theater arts was the result of a one-point, brief conversation with a counselor. Although he was undecided, he soon learned that in order to receive financial aid, he would need to have a major and an educational plan. Based on a 30-minute conversation with a counselor, Dewayne learned that selecting a major is based on personality and hobbies. Besides having aspirations to be a professional athlete and play in the NBA, Dewayne never really explored other potential career paths. His main extracurricular activity throughout his life was playing basketball, but during high school he realized that he would not be able to go pro. Aside from basketball, Dewayne also took part in an after-school program during middle school that involved doing skits. Dewayne really enjoyed this activity but only did it for a brief period of a few months. When the counselor asked him what he enjoyed doing, he immediately thought about this experience doing skits, the fact that he considers himself to be funny, and his admiration for the comedian Kevin Hart. Dewayne has committed to theater arts based on very little knowledge, guidance, or exploration into this major. He has associated this decision with singular and superficial aspects of his personality, a brief "acting" experience, and the information he received from a counselor about how to make this decision.

Jamal Perry is a 22-year old student who has been in and out of enrollment at RCC. Jamal also struggled in high school and had aspirations of playing Division 1 football in college. During his senior year, Jamal decided to stop playing, given his fears around CTE and his realization that he was not going to be able to compete at the college level. Jamal determined that RCC would be a good option for him but admittedly never felt too confident about his academic abilities and capacity to learn. Even though his mom had attended a postsecondary program to become a certified nursing assistant, Jamal has not discussed much about college or his major with his parents. Jamal says his parents are just proud of him for being in college and doing something positive. Instead, Jamal relied on a conversation with a friend to decide on his major. The quote below illustrates how Jamal made his decision about his major based on a conversation with a friend.

> So, he was majoring in communications. And at the time, I just never felt good at a subject at school. And I would just ask him about it, and he was like, "Oh, it's just kind of like talking." That was kind of it. He was like, "You talk and then you kind of learn how to read people's body language, how to do speeches, how to do one-on-one talks and stuff." And I just was like, "Oh my God, that could probably help me finesse my way through stuff." So I literally chose that for my major.
>
> [Jamal Perry, African American, Communications, 22]

Jamal explains that to "finesse" is to give himself an advantage through the use of words. For Jamal, being able to outtalk or outsmart someone has been a critical skill to have to get himself out of conflicts and to get people to respect him. Growing up, Jamal saw his dad, sisters, and brothers "hustle and finesse" to get what they needed. For Jamal, learning this skill is essential to

navigating the world around him and securing the resources he needs. Based on a brief conversation with his friend, Jamal decided to pursue communications, as he associated this major with learning how to talk. However, after declaring a communications major, Jamal never explored potential academic or career paths in this discipline. Jamal felt like this major was broad enough that eventually something will come out of it. Yet, as time went on, Jamal discovered that he loved his African American history classes.

During our conversation, Jamal said that knowing what he knows now, he probably would have chosen history or African American studies as a major because he realizes that he is passionate about learning about "knowledge of the self" and his family. In particular, his interactions with two African American professors who teach classes in Black history have pushed Jamal to work hard and have higher expectations of himself in an academic setting. By the time he figured this out, he felt like it would reflect poorly on him to switch majors. Specifically, Jamal believes that changing programs would make people think of him as someone who doesn't know what he wants in life and he would probably get the "side-eye" from faculty and his family. For Jamal, this unnecessary pressure has kept him from pursuing a discipline in which he envisions a career/future. Although Jamal wants to be a college history professor one day, he is now waiting until he transfers to fully explore this goal. Jamal's case highlights the need to frame initial program choices as flexible and mutable for all students, especially those students who make decisions about their majors with minimal guidance, knowledge, and experiences, in order to facilitate their vocational identity discovery process. In Jamal's example, commitment to a major may still pose an obstacle to the identity journey of a student if they are not engaging in exploring what that major entails.

Similarly to Jamal, Yabani Kelechi also began at RCC with a major that he did not fully understand or explore, but, unlike Jamal, Yabani found structured support that encouraged him to explore other academic paths and eventually switch to a program that better suited his interests. Yabani is a 19-year-old student of Nigerian and African American descent. Like many of the other African American young men in this study, Yabani also struggled in high school to the point that he transferred to night school in order to finish. Much of what afflicted Yabani during high school was undergoing a period of "overthinking" that stemmed from the pressure that he felt from his dad to succeed academically. When he arrived at RCC, Yabani was committed to putting his "fear of failure" behind him and trying his best academically without putting so much stress on himself. At first Yabani was pursuing computer science because of the suggestions that he received from his family and his own dream of working alongside his dad, who owns a data analytics company. However, as time went on, Yabani began to explore why computer science might not be the best fit for his interests and skill set. Yabani explains:

> Well, for computer science, after a while I started noticing that ... usually, for me, the satisfaction that comes from coding and programming is when I finally see all my goals running together and working. But after a while, it just started ... I just saw it as more of a chore than something I saw as fun to do after a certain amount of time doing it.
>
> [Yabani Kelechi, Nigerian/African American, Business Administration, 19]

As Yabani explains, as he took classes in computer science, he realized that he did not enjoy coding and programming as much as he thought. Additionally, Yabani learned more about the computer science curriculum and felt discouraged by the number of math

classes he would have to complete in this major. Yabani cites math as one of the major factors that "pushed him out" of computer science. He recalls:

> I remember when I first found out calculus ... I had to go through, I think, six or so math classes to get into computer science. I don't like math, so that was a really big impact on me. That was also after I had already been getting bored of computer science, so that on top of it was just ... it's what pushed me to start searching for other majors.
>
> [Yabani Kelechi, Nigerian/African American, Business Administration, 19]

As Yabani took some of the initial math classes in the computer science major, he began to realize that maybe this was not the best program of study for him. Yabani does not like math, and he figured out that computer science would require that he take a lot of math classes. This, coupled with the fact that he was starting to get bored in his introduction to computer science class, led Yabani to start to explore other majors. As Yabani began to explore other options, he decided to take some business classes. Yabani grew increasingly more interested in business after one of his professors, his accounting professor, made the class fun and exposed him to a wide range of career options that exist in business. Yabani credits this faculty member with helping him believe that this discipline could be a good match for him. Even though Yabani needs to take various math courses in his business program, he is not weary about completing his math requirements and feels capable in undertaking this task.

For Miles Stephens, his connection to a faculty member at RCC has helped him deepen his commitment to pursuing theater arts. Miles is committed to pursuing a career in the performing arts to become an actor for a TV show. Miles sees his time at RCC as the perfect opportunity to hone his craft and to become more independent from his family. While at RCC, he has immersed

himself in all aspects of the theater community, taking classes and participating in numerous plays/shows. Miles has also spent time researching the acting profession in Los Angeles as much as possible. Although his passion for theater arts began in high school, his experiences with a certain faculty member have helped him explore and understand his future professional craft. Miles explains:

> And one professor who I have a lot to thank for … he's my Acting 2 professor, was also the director for cabaret direct-slot shows here too. He helped me a lot [in] understanding the finer inner workings of acting, like what to expect in the fields and also just community theater, theater in college. So really the whole package. I learned so much in those 16 weeks and I still [am].
>
> [Miles Stephens, African American, Theater Arts, 19]

As Miles describes, his theater professor has helped him get more experience in plays and understand some of the more intricate aspects of acting. These experiences have helped Miles strengthen his commitment to acting and really forecast what it would be like to be part of a theater troupe. Miles feels like he is still learning from this faculty member even though the class has ended.

"Sometimes I Wonder … Is It Because I Am Black?" The Impact of Stereotype Threat in How Students Navigate Major Decisions"

For some of the Black emerging adult men in the study, their Black identities feel like a burden that is constantly present as they try to navigate college and their future career aspirations. Throughout different points of the interviews, Black male students brought up, in different ways, how they were processing their racial identity while in college. The following excerpts elucidate the ways that Black emerging adults contextualized their race, in particular the suspicion and

uneasiness that their Black identity brings future prospects. From these excerpts we learn how self-perception about their race is a very present factor in their experiences in college.

Besides trying to figure out if acting is really a good career for him, Dewayne Freeman is continuously deciphering how other people perceive him based on his race. Dewayne is both very proud to be Black, aspiring to be like African American comedian Kevin Hart, but also weary of the potential threat of his Blackness. For the most part, Dewayne is happy to have graduated from high school and made it to RCC. However, Dewayne often feels uncomfortable being the only Black student in his class. When describing how his race is a big part of his identity Dewayne says, "I guess being Black is hard. I struggle." Dewayne further explains:

> Like, like even now, I'm trying to find a job. I've been doing interviews and stuff, but I haven't gotten a call back. My resume is up to date. … I'm doing good in my interviews, but I don't know if it just me or it's because I'm African-American. Then in classes, my math classroom … I'm the only Black student in there. Yeah, I guess I'm really separated from the other group. [Interviewer asks: How do you feel separated?] Because I'm the only Black student, only Black male actually. … So yeah, I feel like I don't got nobody. I don't got no other Black people.
>
> [Dewayne Freeman, African American, Theater Arts, 18]

In this quote, Dewayne describes different instances where his race has been a matter of concern for him. As he is trying to get more independence from his parents, Dewayne has been looking for jobs. Dewayne has worked to fix up his resume but has not had much luck. Since he has not been getting any callbacks, Dewayne has begun to wonder if it is because he is Black. Besides not getting any leads for a job, Dewayne has also become increasingly more aware of his

Blackness in his classes, especially his math class. Dewayne is the only Black student in his classroom, and being the only Black man in this space makes Dewayne feel he is on his own. Both of these instances illustrate that for Dewayne, his Blackness is something that might potentially impact his job opportunities and his learning.

For Jamal, his Black identity is a reminder of how hard he has to work to reach the level of success he desires. Jamal is positioned between his desire to be successful in conventional terms and the images and examples that he had while growing up, where people that he loves were successful in different terms. These two scenarios create two disparate realities of what constitutes being a productive Black man in our society. Jamal explains this contradiction while he describes his aspirations growing up in contrast to what he envisions for his future now. Jamal says:

> As a kid I used to think I just wanted to be a drug dealer, but I found out later I just liked selling stuff. So, I'd say a businessman or a philanthropist or something like that. Those are always things I've had, just always wanting to sell stuff. I saw it all the time, so it just made me want to be that. … I admired my dad a lot, like hella lot, because he never worked for anybody. My whole life I've never seen my dad work for another man. I watched him hustle like eight different ways, and he always found a way to keep me fed or buy me cleats for football and stuff like that. So he was the first person I remember I idolized as a kid. … Now I actually want to be a history professor. Yeah, so I want to do that and radio and stuff, radio podcasting.
>
> [Jamal Perry, African American, Communications, 22]

Jamal describes a desire to emulate his dad while growing up. Jamal admired his dad for his ability to sustain his family and because he made sure that he never lacked anything while growing up. But Jamal's plans for his life have evolved from wanting to "hustle" to make a living. During the time he has been in college, Jamal has started to envision becoming an African American history professor or having his own podcast. As he is trying to plan for his future, Jamal knows that he is going to have to work more than anyone else to be successful because he is Black. Jamal explains the burden of being Black in the following way:

> And the perverseness is because, with me being Black, I'm never going to get the chance to be on top, so I have to understand how to lose and then keep going, and then work my way up there. I have to grind, it's not going to be handed to me. … I really want to be a good man, and a really good Black man. And I know I have to work 80 times as hard to be where I see myself, versus somebody else of a different background, I feel like.
>
> [Jamal Perry, African American, Communications, 22]

Jamal knows there is a "Black tax" that is attached to his future. In this snippet, he explains what being Black means to him. For Jamal, achieving a level of success will not be something that is given to him; instead, he will have to work harder than people from other racial backgrounds. He wants to be successful, what society may consider a "good Black man," but that goal will not come without tremendous effort and perseverance.

Dewayne and Jamal both try to grapple with how they are perceived by others given their race. But another Black student, Ryan Lewis, has internalized some of the negative stereotypes about being Black and plainly rejects this part of himself. Ryan is a 19-year-old first-year student

at RCC pursuing an English major because there is no creative writing program at the college. When I met Ryan, he was sitting in the quad rapping out loud and warned me that if I sat by him, I would have to listen to his raps. When I initially asked him to describe himself, he exclaimed, "I am the anime rap god." He then began to express his love for all things animation and nerd rap. Ryan admittedly seeks alternative realities because, in his own words: "I don't think I've ever been content with the world." Throughout our time talking, Ryan often discussed his detachment from society, his family, even his own racial identity. For instance, as he explained the majors he considered when he first enrolled at RCC, Ryan explained why he could never study history:

> History I knew wasn't the fucking path. I've never liked the history of actual things. Didn't want to learn about George Washington or any of the presidents. Like, you would talk to me and I would just feel my energy drain in my body. … I was never into Black culture. I know about it now because I had to growing up, learning about it, and you know, it's the right thing to do. But no. I hated hearing about slavery. I mean, I think everybody does.
>
> [Ryan Lewis, African American, English, 19]

Beyond his issues with the history of slavery, it seems like Ryan also struggles with the idea of Blackness. Ryan is vocal about his lack of connection to Black people even though he identifies as Black and Cherokee and he describes both of his adoptive parents as Black. Ryan explains:

> Culture background has never interested me. …Like, I don't like the main Black stereotypes. I've mostly never been attracted to Black females, Black women. Even, like, really brilliant ones because I just don't like the stereotype

> of how we act. Like, how we're raised up to be is very aggressive most of the time. I don't know, like, I say "nigga" all the time and we toss around hate at each other, that's how we play with each other. I've never been into it.
>
> [Ryan Lewis, African American, English, 19]

As Ryan illustrates, he is not interested in understanding more about his cultural background and race. He rejects anything to do with Blackness because of the negative stereotypes about Black people that he believes to be true. He thinks Black people as a whole are aggressive. Ryan also joins in what he believes is aggressive behavior by using the N-word, something he doesn't like but often did during our interview. His rejection of Black identity has played a role in what Ryan has studied while at RCC and his overall decision to be a creative director, a position in which he hopes he will be able to explore alternate realities.

African American Emerging Adult Women at RCC

I interviewed a total of nine participants who identified as African American/Black/multiracial and female. The average age of these participants was 19 years old, ranging from 17 to 25 years old at the time of the interview. Most of the students lived in Pasadena, while one lived in Downtown Los Angeles and another in Glendale. In terms of majors, three were in communications, two in political science, and the rest were in pre-nursing, business, and biology; one student was undecided.

Students' parents had a range of careers and experiences in colleges. All of the Black female students said their parents had attended a 2-year or 4-year institution. Two of the students talked about their parents attending college while the students were in high school. Students talked about their parents being in a range of professions: sales managers, working in construction, finance professionals, sanitation engineers, and even owning their own business. However, it was

hard to decipher the financial situation that these students are in from their descriptions of their parents' jobs. For instance, two of the students (Nikki and Shariece) described that one of their parents had what seemed like a white-collar, high-paying jobs, but they did not live with them and thus gave clues that their financial situation was not stable. Nikki mentioned that her parent was a chief financial officer at a local bank but she was also part of the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, which typically is for low-income students. Shariece mentioned that her dad was a high-ranking administrator at a for-profit school but mentioned that her mom did "odd jobs" like driver for Uber Eats.

All of these young women utilized a range of resources on campus. In contrast to Black emerging adult men, Tanya, Satisha, Nikki, Ashante, Melissa, and Jessica discussed being actively involved in the Black student association on campus. Additionally, Ashante and Nikki talked about using the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services office. Jessica and Tamika have been part of the Pathways program and Shariece has been in contact with the office of disability services.

Data from these interviews yielded four different themes that illustrate factors that influence the major/career decision-making process for these young women. These themes are related to family responsibilities, range of experiences with faculty in classrooms, narrow and brief interactions with counselors, and negative perceptions about how society sees Black women.

Family Demands and Responsibilities Came to College With Them

For the African American women in the study, their family was a source of support and motivation, as well as pressure. While at RCC, all but one of the students in this subsample lived at home with one or two of their parents, grandparents, siblings, or even kids of their own. Throughout our interviews, many of them talked at length about how grateful they were to their families for being there for them. However, interwoven in these moments of gratitude, they also

discussed the pressures and responsibilities they had toward their households. Although they talked about their family supporting them, and many of their parents had attended college, there were not many instances of them describing prescriptive advice regarding the college process. Many of them prided themselves in the fact that they were doing college on their own without much input from their family.

Ashante Lee is a 19-year-old undecided student, of African American descent, currently in her first term at RCC. Ashante is also a single parent and has an infant daughter. She cites her daughter as the primary source of motivation for her enrolling at RCC. Ashante says, "Well, I came to RCC because of my daughter. I need a better future for her, and so she can go to college as well. Because my dad didn't go to college, so I was like, why do I need to go? I'd rather make money but ... so, try it out. And I tried it out and it was like, oh, man." Ashante is at college with the hopes that she can stop living paycheck to paycheck and earn a degree that pays her between $40,000 and $50,000 a year. Ashante considers herself to be from the "bad part" of Pasadena. Although she is proud of the hood she comes from, she wants to be able to provide a better life for her child.

Although Ashante has a powerful motivation to be in school, her journey thus far has been tough. Between a very demanding schedule and the difficulty of her classes, Ashante feels very overwhelmed. Since she is a mom, Ashante's days are full; her school schedule alone (she works on campus) goes from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. When she gets home, after she finishes with her mommy and household duties, she is finally able to do homework. Anything that is not urgent falls off the priority list for Ashante. For instance, when discussing why she has not made it to the career center yet to discuss her major, she says:

> I literally have to write what I have to do now, because it's easier for me that way, and I'm changing my ways of doing that, or I'll just procrastinate. So it's like I have to write, like, "Okay, I got to do this today, I got to do this today, I got to do this today." …And I have to learn like, for example, I waited last minute to wash, so I was washing for three hours, chasing my daughter around the thing, so it's like, "Oh my god, next time I can't let this pile up, because then that sets me back, from studying, from doing all this." So I have to have my agenda, and plan out everything.
>
> [Ashante Lee, African American, Undecided, 19]

In the quote above Ashante is explaining all that she has to juggle as a student and a parent. Even though she knows it is imperative to figure out her major, she admits that right now she cannot fit major exploration as one of her priorities. For Ashante, mommy duties, her school job, and everyday school assignments are all she can prioritize at the moment. Ashante lives with her mother and often relies on her to watch her daughter so she can get her schoolwork done. She is grateful for her mother and overall considers her family and their close-knit relationship as one of her biggest blessings. But when it comes to school, in particular, the process of choosing a major, Ashante admittedly has not sought out guidance from her family. Even though her mother is currently finishing a master's at the University of Phoenix and her brother attended RCC, Ashante does not talk to them about her challenges at RCC. Ashante explains:

> My mom, I don't really ... I don't really, I don't know, when it comes to school, I think because she was so much on me in high school about grades, I just don't talk about it. … Because I think a lot of parents mentally put their kids down, and they not knowing, and they think it's like, "Oh, I don't need the push, I

> don't need the encouragement." Yeah, it's nice to say things, but ... my mom would sometimes say things that put me down, so I shut it down, and once you say something to me, the conversation's done, like "I don't want to talk anymore, just forget it, have a nice day." … She yelled at me because I didn't understand something. And I was scared to get a whoopping, just because, well, I don't know, my mind is thinking more so of getting a whooping than focusing on the work. Or my mom, I had my mom tell me I might as well go to the military if I'm not going to succeed in school or whatever. Or talk to me like I'm slow, or I'm special.
>
> [Ashante Lee, African American, Undecided, 19]

Given her past experiences with her mom, Ashante has decided that she would rather figure things out on her own. Perhaps she feels like telling her mom about the struggles she has been facing at school would prove her correct in that Ashante should think about going into the military instead of trying to pursue a college education. From our conversation, it is evident that Ashante needs guidance and support in choosing a major and career path. It is also evident that her obligations to her daughter and the lack of navigational capital that she could get from her mom make her vocational identity journey much more challenging.

Similarly, Satisha Erics spent a large portion of her interview speaking about the importance of the support she received from her family. Satisha is a reserved and deeply religious 20-year-old African American student, majoring in communications, in her fifth semester at RCC. Satisha has had a lifelong passion for singing and dreams of becoming a singer or voice-over actor. Given her passion, Satisha first came into RCC with the desire to major in music but changed her major after a rocky first semester where she "panicked." Satisha would still like to explore a music

career but knows she must do this within the bounds that her family has set for her. Satisha explained that her parents only want her to sing Christian music. Even though Satisha switching her major has a lot to do with her enrolling in too many courses her first semester and fearing that she would fail her music theory class, her family's restrictions could have also played a role in her giving up on music as a major when she faced her first obstacle.

Satisha switched to a communications major after the challenges she faced during her first semester at RCC. She has not actively explored academic or career paths with a communications major; instead, she continues to hope that she will be able to pursue voice acting or music in other avenues besides her church choir. Satisha has also thought about becoming a writer. Nonetheless, she has not made plans to actively explore any of these potential career paths and thus has kept all options open but uninvestigated. Satisha is unsure what an associate of arts degree in communications will mean when she graduates. Satisha says, "Probably I'd just find some kind of job that they will hire you to do with an AA in communications, I guess." Her mom has suggested that Satisha get a job at Costco to help build her resume and be less shy around other people.

Tamika Miller is a 19-year-old African American RCC student currently in her second year. A local to the Pasadena area, Tamika is currently pursuing a business administration major with a "writing minor." Tamika is an avid reader and would like to one day own a publishing house, work as book editor, and also write her own novels. Tamika has never talked to someone who is a professional writer or who is a book editor, but her mom has started a "book business" for her. Even though Tamika is unsure as to what the "book business" her mom started for her entails, she plans to get into the details of it before the end of the year and start generating revenue.

But not all African American emerging adult women in the study had family responsibilities to worry about while in college. Jessica is a 17-year-old African American student

majoring in communications in her first semester at RCC. Jessica dreams of becoming a talk show host like Oprah or Ellen and sees her time at RCC as the training she will need to accomplish this goal. Jessica moved to Southern California from Queens, New York, to attend RCC. Jessica explains that part of the reason why she wanted to attend RCC was to experience "the college life." In her words, she says:

> Crazy story of me going through my crisis and watching a movie about teenagers, and partying and ... the movie itself is just about a big party movie, but it just shows you could feel good and then make up for your consequences in the end. I just looked up the surroundings of where they were, decided to search up schools in Pasadena, and I found this one, and everywhere I go, people are telling me, "Oh, this is one of the best junior colleges."
>
> [Jessica Robinson, African American, Communications, 17]

Jessica moved to California with her savings from when she was a child model. With this money, Jessica has been able to pay the rent for her shared townhome for a year. Nonetheless, she knows she will still need to get a job to afford her life in Pasadena. Besides worrying about her needs and her ability to do well in school, Jessica does not have any responsibilities to actively contribute to her family.

Experiences in and out of the Classroom: The Good and the Ugly

I found that young people can have starkly different experiences in the classroom with faculty and that these experiences can impact their vocational journey. For the two emerging adult Black women in this section, Jessica and Ashante, their experiences have either helped them connect to their career aspirations or made them feel less confident about their abilities to be successful in college.

Jessica dreams of becoming a talk show host and believes her studies at RCC will help her achieve this goal. Although it was clear from our conversation that she does not have a clear plan for how she will structure her studies or garner the experience and connections she needs to get to her desired profession, Jessica is happy that she has been able to make connections across her classes and believes it will be very helpful for her future. Jessica is especially happy about the connections she has been making in one of her classes where she has been able to think more about the real world and her identity. Jessica says about her professor:

> I take a mass communications class right now and I'm in love with it. … He teaches me real-life things. ... Just because we're on our phones, he's teaching me what's inside of our phones, how it's making people react, how it makes people think, how what's on TV makes toddlers act if they watch it or adults even. He's showing me the real things that I didn't know of. … I wouldn't mind if he was any other race, but he connects because it's not a diverse class. It's just two African Americans and then the rest are other races. So it's good … because he would be, "I'm an African American man, I can't do this and I can't do that, or, I wouldn't do this, but I can't do that." And the class may act like they understand, but they're not going to see what he's going through. But I see it, I know what he's talking about.
>
> [Jessica Robinson, African American, Communications, 17]

Jessica loves that she is learning "real-life things" that she feels will help her have a better understanding of the world for her future career. She is also glad that her professor is African American and speaks to her about a variety of topics using an African American perspective. Jessica really enjoys this class and learning from her professor.

Ashante would also love to get guidance from her professors, but given her experiences with her math professor, she thinks this would be very unlikely. During our interview, Ashante discussed at length some of the negative experiences she has had with a math professor. Ashante says:

> She taught a lesson in 5 minutes, and it's like, "Okay." And if I asked her to explain it, she'd be like, "Well, come to the front." Like I'm halfway to the front already, but that doesn't help me if I'm asking you. She just ... she'll be like, "My other class understands it." But it's me, and I'm asking you for help, and yeah. So some teachers don't understand that, if the whole class is asking you for help or do more examples, but you're like, "Figure it out on your own," that's not helping us. And by saying, "Oh, you should've known this in high school or elementary," well, a lot of these schools didn't teach us that. A lot of stuff that we need now, they didn't teach us. In high school, I didn't have to do essays.
>
> [Ashante Lee, African American, Undecided, 19]

One comment, in particular, has affected Ashante. According to her, her math teacher "microaggressed" the entire class by remarking that when she teaches at another university, "that's her real college class." Ashante feels very discouraged by her interactions in this class. She already finds math very difficult, and knowing that the faculty member does not want to spend the time going over concepts that she doesn't understand makes her doubt her decision to attend college. Nonetheless, Ashante hopes the administration at the college is actively working to have faculty at the college that can

better guide students. Ashante feels solace in her participation in Ujima, the learning pathway office for African American students, because she feels like she has people in this space who can relate to her needs. She says:

> I think they can have people that can relate more, that have been through it. Because sometimes they hire people that haven't been through it, and they're like, "Well, I don't know this," and it's like, "Well, how can you help me, how are you supposed to mentor me?" That's why I think Ujima's good, because they can relate to us, colored people.
>
> [Ashante Lee, African American, Undecided, 19]

Conversations About Majors with Counselors Are Brief and Narrow in Scope

For the most part, African American young women sought out help from counselors for how to navigate school. Tanya Clark is a 17-year old multiracial student in her first semester at RCC. Tanya is pursuing a degree in nursing. She decided to attend a community college and not a 4-year college because people told her it would be "very stressful" and a "waste of money." She lives very close to RCC, but her mom is working for them to move so she can be even closer. During our interview, Tanya described her time at RCC thus far as an opportunity to further understand her racial identity as well as the options available to her in nursing.

Besides learning about nursing from her research on the internet, Tanya has spoken to some of her Ujima counselors about pursuing a nursing degree. Tanya says:

> I've talked to the same people in Ujima. It's always them I've talked to. I've talked to them about it, and they say that a lot of females in the program actually wants *[sic]* to do nursing too. ... They said it's something good, but as

> they told those females, they said I might want to switch my major. But I don't think that's going to happen.
>
> [Tanya Clark, African American, Pre-Nursing, 18]

Although Tanya has heard from several people at the college that people change majors often, she doesn't understand why they do or what that means for her. In fact, it seems that Tanya is confused as to where to get answers in regard to her major and eventual career path. Tanya further explains what she would like to discuss with a counselor or faculty member:

> I've always wanted to talk to a he or she—I actually don't know who they are—I want to do a one-on-one where she explains, "Oh, there's this you can do, there's that you can do," like, give me opportunities and just learn more and probably study. Maybe tutor. Get a tutor on the human mind, human body. I think that's something they could do here at any college. … I would want to ask, but I have to speak maybe with somebody who knows where the nursing and the staff, all of them, where they are. So I would like to ask whoever's in charge, whoever knows.
>
> [Tanya Clark, African American, Pre-Nursing, 18]

She also wishes that faculty in her classes would discuss more about their own career paths:

> I think faculty members, they can help a lot by sitting down with students and going through the whole process with the students. Like me, they could help me with, "Okay, your classes, then maybe if you wanted to volunteer at this hospital," they can help you with that. And then just learning more about what you really want to do and if that's really your career.

[Tanya Clark, African American, Pre-Nursing, 18]

Similarly, Nikki Smith also would like more from her interactions with counselors. Nikki is an African American young woman and third-generation college student attending RCC. Nikki, who self-describes as "very goal oriented," specifically chose to attend RCC because she hopes to transfer to UCLA to continue to pursue her dream of becoming a civil rights attorney. Although she is very settled in her goal of transferring to UCLA, Nikki knows she has an uphill battle ahead of her. Nikki had a very rough couple of semesters when she first started at RCC. Her current GPA is not at the level that she needs to gain admission into UCLA. However, Nikki is not giving up on her ambitions just yet. Thanks to the advice from a transfer representative from UCLA, Nikki has decided to apply as an African American studies major instead of a political science major to be more competitive. Although Nikki is optimistic, she does wish that she would have been given better guidance at RCC.

Nikki really likes the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOP&S) office and has made a connection with the staff there, but really does not discuss anything in depth with people at this office either. Nikki says:

> It's like counselors or EOP&S? I never get the same one. So, because there's multiple times they've been in there, and when I go for my meetings it's never really the same one. So, I don't really go into depth because I know that the likelihood of me getting them again is slim to none. So I just give them the gist of what I'm doing just so that they can help me with my ed plan. Basically, when I go to my counselors, I don't go there with nothing to talk about. I make sure that I know what I want from them so that they can tell me what classes and stuff I need. I don't really go to them for advice.

[Nikki Smith, African American, Political Science, 22]

In terms of her connections to faculty, Nikki reported that she has not really connected with any faculty until this semester. She hopes to talk with them more but still thinks that no one can really help her make decisions about majors and transferring.

Battling Against the Perception That the World Has of Black Young Women While Navigating College

Similar to the ideas that Black young men in the study have about their racial identity, Black young women reported also battling against the stereotypes and negative ideas that the world may have of Black people and women in particular. Their words illustrate how they experience being Black. For these students, their Blackness is coupled with their gender, creating a double-edged sword that makes them anticipate other people looking down on their image, behavior, and potential for success in school.

When I asked Tanya about her Black identity, she brought up how she feels people maligned Black women's hairstyles and the overall difficulty of being a Black woman in 2019. Tanya says:

> I know there's nothing wrong with weaves, there's nothing wrong with doing braids or little hoops. And being in America, and then Donald Trump, our president, it's hard trying to be an African American girl, just independent without somebody looking at you or wondering why are you wearing this as that. The hoops makes you a ho, your hair makes you look like, you know, you're bald. So I have to deal with that.
>
> [Tanya Clark, African American, Pre-Nursing, 18]

Tanya has learned to love different hairstyles Black women wear but she instinctively feels that she is constantly being judged for her appearance. Even though she was wearing big hoops during our interview and has a weave, she projects that people may have certain impressions of her based on her appearance. Melissa Phillips feels much like Tanya in that she knows that most people have a negative impression about Black people, in particular pertaining to their behavior. Melissa is in her first year at RCC and is pursuing a political science major. She aspires to attend law school one day or "do something in the political field." When asked about her racial identity, Melissa says:

> I just think it's important, because, like, my race is always being talked about. They always think something negative about us. So I just believe that my race is really important, like important that I know what my race is and stuff. … You know, there we're ghetto, we're ratchet, loud, you know, all those microaggressive things. But I don't let other people's opinion affect me. So like I don't really care what other people have to say about my race. I mean other Blacks maybe, but not me, at least I don't think so.
>
> [Melissa Phillips, African American, Political Science, 17]

In the quote above, Melissa says that her race is always being mentioned in negative contexts. She uses words like "ghetto," "ratchet," and "loud." Melissa first says that she doesn't let negative ideas about Black people get to her, but admits toward the end of the excerpt, in a more doubting tone, that she doesn't think it affects her, leaving the possibility open that these words may have some impact on her.

For Jessica, the stereotypes that exist about Black people and Black women in particular mean that when people speak to her, they will most likely be taken aback. When I ask Jessica to describe herself, she says:

> I would describe myself as "unexpected" because I don't make sudden changes. But I would surprise people with what I could say, in a positive way. I'm just tired of the African American stereotypes of big lashes, long nails and long ... long hair, long nails, that they're stripping or they're doing something with their lives. You talk to me, you have a conversation with me, you're going to go, "Wow, she's really intelligent." So I think I get "unexpected" a lot.
>
> [Jessica Robinson, African American, Communications, 17]

Jessica is annoyed with the stereotypes of Black women being strippers and women who only care about their appearance. Although Jessica was wearing a weave and very long nails, she knows that when people speak to her, they will be shocked to hear how she articulates herself.

Finally, for Ashante, being Black is working against the ideas that White people in particular have about her race. When I ask Ashante to explain how she views her racial identity, she says:

> The White people don't expect us Black folks to succeed in life? ... They look at us as [if] we're dumb, we don't know how to read, that we're just loud, and we just care [about] our hair more than our books. … I haven't came [*sic*] across that really, so it doesn't really bother me what people think about me. But I hate that they think that, that they think us Black women are just going to have babies or live off of county [receive help from local government

services], or how all Black men are just going to be gang members and go to jail.

[Ashante Lee, African American, Undecided, 19]

Similarly to Melissa, Ashante does not let other people's perception of her Blackness get to her. However, she also expressed how much she detests the idea that Black women and men will not amount to anything. She hates the idea that some people stereotype Black women caring more about their hair than their education. Although she has a baby, Ashante does not plan to "have babies and live off county." Instead she hopes to earn an education to make a better living for her daughter.

Latina Emerging Adults at RCC

I interviewed a total of six women who identified as Mexican, Mexican American, or Latina. The average age of these students was 19 years old, ranging from 18 to 24 years old, when they were interviewed. Four of the six Latinas in the sample lived in Glendale for the majority of their lives, while one lived in El Monte and the other one in Pasadena. The Latina who lives in Pasadena is the only one from the sample of Latinas who does not live with her parents, having moved to the area from a small town in Northern California with the aim of attending college in a cosmopolitan area.

In terms of immigration generational status, four of the participants are second-generation immigrants, meaning that one or two of their parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Additionally, one of the participants is a third-generation Mexican American, and one is generation 1.75, meaning that she immigrated to the US when she was under 5 years old. This student also happens to be undocumented. All but one of these Latinas spoke Spanish as their first language.

Four of them consider themselves first generation to college. For two of them, their parents did not complete high school.

For the most part, each student knew their parents' occupations. All of the dads were self-employed in construction or as mechanics. Their mothers worked in various roles: managing a fast-food restaurant, administrative assistant, principal aide, and housewife. Nonetheless, their parents were all a motivating factor for attending college. Two of them even got accepted to 4-year institutions after high school but decided to attend RCC to save money.

Pertaining to their studies at RCC, all of these students came into RCC having selected a major during high school. However, it is also important to note that many of them changed their major at least once. Their majors ranged from speech pathologist assistant, education, Spanish, communications, and criminal justice to studio art. Additionally, five of the six participants were part of the Pathways program, which means that they had a counselor/coach that they met with regularly. The participant that was not part of Pathways was part of the EOP&S program, which also has counselors/coaches available.

Data from these interviews yielded two interrelated themes relating to the students' connections to their families, their identity, and the manner in which they all navigate their academic and professional exploration while in college. These themes illustrate the different factors at play in how Latina emerging adult students at RCC are making decisions about their vocational identity development.

Motivated by Gratitude: I Want to Help My Family and for My Career to Benefit Society

All of the Latinas in the study mentioned their desire to give back to their families and/or their desire to help out society as one of the main motivators for choosing their major/career. For these young women, the desire to give back to their families for all that they had done for them or

see themselves in professions that gave back to others was a reoccurring theme. Below I provide examples of how three Latinas discussed their desire to take care of their family and give back to their communities. These findings illustrate how the desire to help others is an important motivating factor that fuels the vocational identity development process for this subgroup.

Margarita Alma is a 20-year old DACA recipient, first generation to college, queer Latina in her seventh semester at RCC. Margarita is currently pursuing a studio art major with the hopes of transferring to Cal State LA to become a high school art teacher. Margarita considers nurturing students in their development and providing them with emotional support as her life's mission. In her current role as a teacher aide, a position she sought out to see if she would like this profession, Margarita has been able to experience firsthand how vital her interactions with students are. Margarita explains:

> And I love it. I love my job. Kids drive me crazy, but I love my job. … It's amazing and it's so sad to see that students struggle very much. And a lot of my students are in second and third grade and I have to test them—some of them are reading at a kindergarten level. And to me it's like, why, is it the teachers? But you meet the parents and then you know. Or the kids come and tell me, like, "Oh, my parent's hitting me." Or, "Oh, my uncle calls me stupid, and they bully me." And it just breaks my heart. And I always tell my students, "Look, you guys can always tell me anything if you need to tell me something." Because I want to be there for students that don't have anybody else there for them.
>
> [Margarita Alma, Latina, Studio Art, 20]

Although Margarita knows she would like to be a high school teacher, she still appreciates her time working with elementary school children. In this quote she describes how much she enjoys her role supporting young children in their learning and understanding why they struggle. Margarita connects their challenges in learning fundamental skills like reading to the emotional trauma some of them endure. Margarita looks forward to supporting them emotionally because she also battled with mental health issues while growing up. Margarita had severe depressive episodes in high school that almost made her quit school altogether. Margarita believes that part of what was driving her depression was the pressure that she felt from her parents to do very well in school, get accepted to a school like the University of Southern California, and be an example to her younger siblings. Both of her parents had less than a high school education and made a lot of sacrifices to provide for Margarita and her siblings. Thus, even though Margarita understands that this pressure was too much of an emotional weight for her, she believes that her parents were doing their best. Margarita sees her opportunity to attend college as something her parents never had. She further explains:

> An opportunity that my parents didn't have. And an opportunity that was given to me because thankfully, my parents always raised me to be grateful for what I have because I know a lot of people do not have the opportunity to even go to kindergarten. They don't have those kinds of opportunities. And I was always grateful to go to school. In high school, I was tired of it, but I always reminded myself, you can go to school, and if you have the option you should go, because some people don't even have the option.
>
> [Margarita Alma, Latina, Studio Art, 20]

Margarita is grateful to her parents and is making the best of her parents' sacrifice to come to the United States. Margarita believes that her career as a high school art teacher will provide an outlet for students who have no one to rely on. Margarita believes that children and adolescents who are going through situations similar to what she experienced need a creative outlet, and she aspires to be able to provide that for them in her career. So far, Margarita has taken many steps toward her goal of becoming a teacher, from mapping out her path after RCC to actually working in a school to see the day-to-day of this profession. Margarita is well on her way to accomplishing her goals but fears that being undocumented and losing DACA status may become an obstacle to her goals.

Veronica Amor is a Mexican American first-generation college student in her first semester at RCC. Veronica is enrolled as an education major and dreams of becoming a teacher after college. She loves the idea of becoming a teacher because she is passionate about helping children. Veronica has had a chance to help her little brother with school and this is what first got her thinking about becoming a teacher. Additionally, Veronica feels inspired to play a role similar to that her teachers had for her in high school. Veronica explains:

> My career is education. My major is education. I want to be a teacher. I think what kind of leaned me to that, pushed me to that position, is because I have a younger brother and younger sister and I always used to help them, and I see how they struggle. My brother has recently—he's in third grade—and he's been having struggles and just wants a vacation and stuff. So, he doesn't really know multiplication, then I help. I would help him and then he would tell me, "Oh, you know, I think you're a good teacher." And he couldn't know that. He's like, "Oh, you're a very good teacher now." And I was like, "Oh, okay,

> thank you." But in high school as well, that impacted. And then in high school as well, my teacher, she impacted my life. I wouldn't go to high school at all. I would just go some days and I would ditch most of the days. She was really, really caring and she was ... she even texted me, she emailed me or anything. She's like, "Oh, like you have to come to class, blah blah blah." She told me a whole little paragraph of why I should go. And because of her, I graduated. So I want to be like that for little kids, or for someone, I want to impact their lives … you know?
>
> [Veronica Amor, Latina, Education, 18]

Veronica's experiences with relieving the challenges her sister and brother face at school have helped her see herself as a teacher. Moreover, her own experience of being disengaged from school giving her some personal difficulties but having teachers who cared for her made her want to do the same for other people. During our interview, Veronica also discussed the example of her godmother, who is an early childhood teacher. Veronica admires the work her godmother does with children. Veronica dreams of having her own classroom one day. For Veronica, being able to help her people is the main driver for coming to college and enrolling as an education major. However, when I asked Veronica if she has been exploring the differences of teaching at different levels, Veronica shrugged and shook her head to say no. Even when I asked if she had had a chance to visit her godmother's school to understand more about her day-to-day activities as an early childhood teacher, Veronica said, "Not yet." Although Veronica's motivation to become a teacher is strong and admirable, she has not taken many steps to explore what it would take to become a teacher. Veronica figures that speaking to her past high school teachers could be a good start to

exploring becoming a teacher but has yet to take any concrete steps to begin the exploration process.

Iliana Hernandez is a second-generation Mexican American student in her second semester at RCC. Iliana is currently pursuing a degree to become an assistant speech-language pathologist with the aim of transferring and eventually completing a graduate degree. Iliana owes much of the success she has had at RCC to the guidance and support of her family. Her brother, mom, and dad have been very instrumental in her navigating college, in particular what classes she should take and how to receive priority registration. Iliana continues to explore/consider potential career options besides becoming a speech-language pathologist. She envisions potentially pursuing law or even politics after RCC.

When I asked Iliana to talk about someone whose career she admired, Iliana explained how witnessing her mother help people her whole life inspired her:

> My mother. I admired her patience and her drive for helping others. … So growing up, at the elementary school that she worked at, she would help do Dr. Seuss Day, in which the kids would make slime and they would read books on Dr. Seuss. They would bring in the guest reader and have them read aloud to children, and I saw her putting in the effort for these kids. ... I was younger; I was like, "Oh, she's my mother but she's helping all these other kids. Yeah."
>
> [Iliana Hernandez, Latina, Speech-Language Pathology, 18]

Iliana deeply admires the work her mom has done with children. In particular, Iliana admires her mother's temperament and motivation to lend a helping hand to children in her elementary school. Iliana's mother's consistent example of service toward others has been present throughout her life. Although when she was young Iliana thought about becoming a teacher like

her mother, with her counsel, Iliana has decided to pursue becoming a speech-language pathologist. In this role, she would still work with children and help them succeed in school.

For all three of these students, Margarita, Veronica, and Iliana, their careers are directly linked to their desire to give back to their families and also give back to the communities they come from. All three of them aspire to be like one of their family members, and even though they are not looking to do the exact same work as them, they are motivated to give back in a similar manner.

College Is a Time to Figure Out What It Means to Be a Latina

Latinas in this study are on a parallel journey of not only forming their vocational identity but also of self-reflection on their ethnic identity. From dealing with stereotypes about what it means to be Latina to unpacking how their American and Latina identities can coexist, to defining what it means to be Latina for them, each of the students in this subgroup are grappling with this aspect of their identity. In the excerpts below, I present some of the thoughts these Latina participants shared around their ethnicity and how it sometimes intersects with their vocational identity development.

For Guadalupe Gomez, a first-generation immigrant whose parents came from Mexico, her Mexican and American identities are two evenly divided aspects of herself. When explaining how she sees her identity, Guadalupe explained that she sees herself as equally American and Mexican:

> Well, I feel ... my friends, they say, "Oh, I don't feel like I belong here. But then I don't feel that I belong in Mexico neither." But I don't feel that way. I feel I belong in both. Because part of me ... because I was born here, and I do have some culture stuff from here, Halloween and stuff like that. And how Americans buy stuff you don't need. I feel I have that. I do see myself as

> American. But then, I do see myself as Mexican, because I know some of the history. I would go over there every summer, since I was little. I like that part of me.
>
> [Guadalupe Gomez, Latina, Spanish, 24]

In the quote above, Guadalupe describes how, unlike her friends, she doesn't feel conflict over her split identity. Moreover, Guadalupe explains how she can identify different aspects of herself that can be described as very "American," such as the stereotype that Americans buy a lot of things. At the same time, Guadalupe has been able to cultivate her Mexican background by visiting Mexico during the summer and remaining connected to her family there. According to Guadalupe, her affinity for her Mexican heritage was one of the reasons she decided to pursue Spanish as a major. In describing her choice, Guadalupe says:

> I was just in high school and I'm just like, "I'm just going to major in Spanish." I just signed up for the classes for Spanish. … I really never had a thorough talk with the counselor. … Well, the Spanish one firstly, because how I told you, how I feel that I'm Mexican, and like how I like the language, and I just wanted to practice it and teach it, you know? ... It's a nice language.
>
> [Guadalupe Gomez, Latina, Spanish, 24]

As Guadalupe explains in the excerpt above, she made the decision to enroll as a Spanish major in college while in high school due to the affinity she felt with being Mexican. Additionally, Guadalupe wanted to spend her time in college deepening her ability to speak Spanish and eventually teach it. However, Guadalupe is now questioning this choice. Beyond her initial interest in teaching Spanish because the language itself appealed to her, she has not had any practice or work experience in a college teaching setting. Guadalupe is now questioning her choice and

wondering if she should attempt being a preschool teacher. Nonetheless, Guadalupe is glad to have the opportunity to study Spanish in depth and learn more about herself.

Unlike Guadalupe, Adriana Fermin has felt tension from being both American and a woman of Mexican descent. Adriana is an 18-year-old Latina in her second semester at RCC, majoring in criminal justice. Adriana is originally from Northern California, from a small town between Lake Tahoe and Sacramento. Adriana would like to become an FBI agent or work as a police officer, both career options she has researched thoroughly. Besides pursuing her goal of being in law enforcement, Adriana decided to leave her hometown and move to LA in order to be around more Latinx people. Adriana explained her conflict about being the one of the only Latinas in her hometown when I asked her about her ethnic identity. Adriana says:

> That's actually something that I've always honestly had a struggle with. Because I am Mexican, Latina—both my parents are Mexican—but since my town was so White, growing up and going to school, I was like one of three Latinas, not even students but, like, just girls. I don't even remember having classmates that were boys that were Hispanic. So growing up in my family, to have never really implemented a lot of traditions, so I always felt really conflicted because in school whenever we'd learn something about Latin culture and stuff, they'd always be like, "Oh, what do you know?" And I didn't know anything, so I always felt like I was in between these two American and Hispanic worlds. … I could never really, like I had one foot in American and I had like a quarter in the other one. Because it was physically who I was but all I really know is American culture. … Moving down here has been so interesting and different and nice because Latinas down here do know more

> about their culture and embrace it more. And I never felt like I could do that—one, because I didn't know much about it, and two, because being one of a very select few in a place where you're surrounded by nobody who looks like you, where nobody would know anything about your culture—it just didn't feel like I even wanted to learn more about my culture and my parents' culture. So, I think that just recently, literally since I moved here and started school here, I've been able to feel like I am Latina, like I am Hispanic.
>
> [Adriana Fermin, Latina, Criminal Justice, 18]

In the quote above, Adriana explains that growing up in a mostly White town, many of her family's Mexican traditions got lost, and she was not able to feel like she is truly "Hispanic." At school, Adriana always felt like she was asked to represent all Latinx people. However, deep inside she felt like an impostor who did not know much about her parents' heritage. This has significantly changed ever since she moved to LA to attend college. Given her new surroundings—in particular, the fact that she is no longer the only Latina—Adriana feels like she is now more capable of embracing her Mexican identity. Attending college for Adriana is not only an opportunity to explore her vocational identity development but also a chance to define what it means to be a Latina.

For other Latinas in the study, being in college over the last year has meant an opportunity to think and confront different stereotypes of what it means to be in this ethnic group. In spite of the fact that Veronica is proud of her background, she discussed how she feels being Mexican given the resurgence of anti-Mexican sentiment in the US over the last few years. Veronica explains:

> I don't know. I think it's like when they ask me, "Oh, what are you? Like, what's your ethnicity?" And I go, "Oh, I'm Mexican." I'm proud of it, you know? It's like, "Yeah, Mexican!" Because a lot of people are … they're racist so they talk about that. They're like, "Oh, Mexicans do this, Armenians do that," or whatever other races. I'm proud of being a Mexican. … Because right now it's like, "Oh, you guys are immigrants, just go back to your country, blah blah blah." … It's dumb. I think because, I mean, my parents have their—they're residents now—but a year ago they didn't and that would've affected them. It gets me frustrated, but I can't do anything about it right now.
>
> [Veronica Amor, Latina, Education, 18]

Even though Veronica is proud of her heritage, she also knows that people have many different stereotypes of how Mexicans behave. In the quote above, Veronica repeats several times that she is proud of where her parents are from, and that she considers herself a Mexican woman. She also notes that racism is very much a reality for her that could have affected her parents greatly when they were undocumented. Veronica admits that she is often irritated by how people describe Mexicans but feels powerless about the situation.

When I asked Maria Rodriguez how she made sense of her identity, she also brought up some of the hurtful stereotypes that people have about Latinx people. Maria describes herself as "Americanized" but with Latinx roots. Her family comes from Mexico, but her parents were born in the US just like she was. The main person in her life reinforcing her Latinx roots is her grandmother, who speaks Spanish to her. Thus, Maria is a bit conflicted as to what being Latina means for her. In her words, she says:

> Aspects of my identity? I don't know. I mean, I don't know, I've never really been asked something like that. I mean, I don't know, I guess being Hispanic I guess. That's something, because a lot of people think Hispanic people don't want to go to school or they drop out and stuff, and it's like, no, it's just sometimes they either can't do it, sometimes they can, but it takes a lot more work. But it's different. But I mean, I like it because I get to prove to them that that's not true. It's not a stereotype. …But my parents are from Cali and so am I, so it's, I grew up very Americanized. ... But school and society has put me in the box of Hispanic-ness.... They say all these things. I'm like, "I don't know what you're talking about." Because I wasn't raised like that. I was raised totally American. So I'm not used to Hispanic culture too much. So it's just, it's weird to me.
>
> [Maria Rodriguez, Latina, Communications, 19]

At first, Maria explains that she has not really been asked to speak on her identity. She also discusses the negative view that people have about Latinx people not liking school and the importance of her demonstrating in her life that this is not the case for all Latinx people. At the same time, Maria also explains that she grew up mostly with American customs, even though the world has always tried to label her as "Hispanic." It is clear that Maria is grappling with what it means to be a Latina, a label she understands to have bad connotations and one that she has been given throughout her life but has yet to fully define on her own terms. As she also discussed in the interview, Maria explains that being a communications major has allowed for her to further explore her ethnicity. Maria has

leveraged some of her communications courses, particularly those that deal with intercultural communication, to explore different cultures, including her own.

Iliana describes being a Mexican woman as a very big aspect of her identity but also acknowledges that her ethnic and gender identity might negatively impact her career one day. In the following section of our interview, Iliana explains:

> I think me being a Mexican and me being a woman are very important to me only because they are considered the majority-minority, so at times it does feel like, I want to say an uphill battle, but also I have grown up around a lot of Mexicans, so it wasn't like I was a different person. It's just that in the grand scheme of things, it will affect my professional career, I think maybe, possibly.
>
> [Iliana Hernandez, Latina, Speech-Language Pathology Assistant, 18]

Iliana is proud of her Mexican heritage but still feels that it might present some challenges for her in the future. Even though Mexicans are a majority-minority in the United States, Iliana believes the obstacles are stacked against people like her. In particular, Iliana feels that while this has not affected her now in her community where she lives around mostly Mexicans, later on in her life she expects the demographics to change, and being Mexican might bring additional difficulties in her profession. When I ask Iliana to further explain what types of challenges she encounters, she elaborates that beyond discrimination because of her ethnicity, she may also endure differential treatment because of her gender:

> Only because of the institutionalized system, where it's sometimes people of, like [White race], race are promoted rather than minorities. … I think it was my English teacher last semester. She had us do a lot of research into institutionalized racism as well as in the '50s and '60s when they were having

> strikes for the farm workers' union. So, stuff like that. Seeing how for example, just, like, Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, how he's well known, and we have a day for him even though Dolores Huerta was also involved in the movement. And she was a woman, and she did arguably just as much but we don't really celebrate her achievements or actions.
>
> [Iliana Hernandez, Latina, Speech-Language Pathology Assistant, 18]

Over the last year, as Iliana has taken different courses at RCC, she has been learning more about the historical difficulties that exist for Latinas. Iliana now has an understanding that racism and discrimination is not only person to person, but can also be part of policies and institutions within our society. But beyond institutionalized forms of oppression, Iliana also expects that within her own ethnicity, there will be difficulties she would endure because she is a woman. The example of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez is evidence for Iliana about the lack of acknowledgement that Latinas receive. Even though Iliana has not personally endured any of this yet, she is bracing herself for what may happen in her professional life.

Latino Emerging Adults at RCC

I interviewed four emerging adults who identified as Mexican American/Chicano/Latino. This smaller group of students was, by far, older than other groups of students in the sample. Two of the students were native to the Los Angeles area, another one had lived in many different cities throughout Southern California, and one had recently moved from Colorado via Texas.

Three of the students in this subgroup had similar immigration histories and parental educational backgrounds while one had been in foster care and had different experiences altogether. Three of the students were third-generation immigrants whose parents had attended a form of college and graduated. For the most part, their parents were white collar professionals,

including a lawyer, a financial advisor, a local government administrator, and a teacher. The one student who grew up as part of the foster care system is a first-generation immigrant and first generation to college.

Additionally, unlike the other student subgroups in which most of the students started at RCC right after high school, three of the students in this group did not. Two of the Latinos in this group transferred from other community colleges and another one enrolled after completing a music production program at a nearby conservatory. Coincidentally, one thread that all the Latino students had in common was their jobs/hobbies in different areas within art. One of the Latinos worked as a photographer and musician, another one was a DJ, another one a graphic design artist, and the last one a graffiti artist. As I will describe later in this section, although they all had very strong interests and experiences in the world of art, all but one of the students did not see their hobbies as a viable career path and instead wanted to focus their studies on more conventional careers.

Data from these interviews yielded two main themes for three of the participants. These themes are connected to students' reliance on their family to explore/navigate their major selection and, as previously mentioned, their definition of what constitutes a "real" career and the desire to pursue a major that fit this description.

In addition to describing these two themes, I will also spend some time discussing the particular experiences of one of the students who is not pursuing a program of study and does not plan to get a degree. The differences in his experiences can be helpful in understanding the reasons why a student might not be engaging with one of the fundamental aspects of the college-going process but nonetheless find themselves attending a community college.

Selecting a Major With Input From Their Family

Three of the Latino participants mentioned at length different ways their families were involved in their decision to enroll in a particular program of study. These different conversations highlight the varying degrees of social, navigational, and familial capital available to these students as well as certain dynamics at play for these three Latino students.

Ramon Quintanilla is a Chicano student in his sixth semester in college, who one day hopes to transfer to UCLA. For the first 2.5 years after high school, Ramon enrolled part-time at another nearby college, only taking three credits per term. At his prior institution, Ramon was pursing music production. He also had a part-time job as a photographer. However, when Ramon transferred to RCC, he decided to prioritize school and enroll full-time. Ramon also switched majors following his uncle's advice. Ramon explains his major-selection process in the following way:

> What did I do? First, I went, I asked my uncle first. I said, "Oh, what should I do?" He said, "Some kind of science. Like do some kind of science, and then talk to the counselor, and they'll help you [figure] out what sciences they are." So that's when I went to a counselor, and then when my counselor told me, was just, "Well, a lot of people that want to be a medical doctor, they just do biology here. That's what we lean towards." …[My uncle] told me, "Whenever you're deciding med school, just come to me and I know good med schools that you could go to, and I'll send you there. I'll send you there and I'll recommend you so they'll accept you." He said that; I said, "All right, thank you."
>
> [Ramon Quintanilla, Latino, Biology, 23]

In the excerpt above, Ramon recounts how his uncle who helped raise him told him to select a major in the sciences. Ramon's uncle is director of nursing for an LA-area hospital. Throughout the interview, Ramon reminisced about how growing up he remembers seeing his uncle "grinding" and studying to become a nurse. After receiving advice from his uncle, Ramon then went to speak to a counselor to inquire about the different science majors available. After a brief conversation with the counselor, Ramon decided that biology would be the best major to pursue for his newly discovered goal of becoming a medical doctor. Although he is not sure about the path to becoming a medical doctor, he knows that his uncle will be there to help him select the best medical school and write recommendations on his behalf. Ramon trusts that his uncle will know the steps he needs to take. Thus, besides this brief conversation with a counselor, he has not sought out advice from counselors. When I asked Ramon how he knows that his uncle would know how to help him with medical school, given that he is a nurse and not a doctor, Ramon said that his uncle would know the process because he works around doctors every day.

To a lesser extent, Ramon's mother has also been involved in his college journey. Ramon's mother attended trade school and now works as a supervisor in a local government office. In the quote below, Ramon explains the type of support and advice his mother has given him regarding attending college and possibly graduate school, given her own experiences. Even though he explains that his mother has never put pressure on him regarding what he studies in school or his career prospects, she has always pushed him to get a degree. Ramon says:

> She said she just wants me to finish school. She wants me to go to college and finish college. She doesn't want me to just drop out and go work or something. She says she believes that I'll have a better life with a major, because in her

> job right now, since she didn't really major [in] anything, it's only so far she could go up in the ... ladder in her job, because at [a] certain point, if she wants to, let's say the floor she works at ... if she wants to run the floor she works at, she's going to have to have a master's in something. So what she told me, was, like, major, get your master's, do something, because later on in the future it'll help you out.
>
> [Ramon Quintanilla, Latino, Biology, 23]

Similarly to Ramon, Alejandro Montes started at RCC few years after high school ended for him and after pursuing a career in music production. Alejandro is a 22-year-old fourth-generation Mexican American majoring in business finance. Alejandro is in his second year at RCC. He originally moved to LA from Denver, Colorado, to attend a music production program. After finishing this program, his dad gave him an ultimatum to enroll in college or be cut off from his financial support.

Like other students in the study, Alejandro describes his upbringing as one where he was "bred to attend college." However, unlike many of the students in the study, his parents never let him think that "making it" to college was all he needed to do. Alejandro's family has been emphasizing the importance of college and majors since he was in high school. The youngest of three kids, Alejandro grew up accustomed to the idea of different professional careers, given the many people in his family who attended college and even graduate school. Alejandro's mom and dad both attended the University of Texas at Austin. His dad ended up becoming a lawyer specializing in family law, while his mom is a financial advisor for LA County. Both of his siblings attended 4-year institutions and his aunt works for Google. Alejandro has relied on all of their advice as he has navigated selecting programs and changing his major. When discussing whether

or not majors matter for his future career, he explains what he has learned from his aunt and sister about majors:

> My aunt who lives in San Jose, she's really successful. She works at Google and she told me that that's how she ended up where she was. She majored in psychology or something and then just ended up getting an MBA and that her idea was, it didn't really matter what you majored in in college. So yeah. … I think my mom and dad, I call them and asked them. Let's see, what else? My brother, my sister, probably other family members as well. … My sister told me that she went to Trinity and she said it doesn't really matter what you major in, as long as you went to a good university, wherever you want to work, they're going to see, oh, they went to a good university. Sure, they majored in psychology, but that could be applied here, I guess, in a small way. So it doesn't really matter. It just depends on the college, the university and your connections. But at the same time that's not that true and it's really complicated. I didn't really know how important a major is in the job you get. It is important, but what about graduate school?
>
> [Alejandro Montes, Latino, Business Finance, 22]

In the quote above, Alejandro is discussing how he has learned to contextualize majors with his future career goals based on his aunt's professional career and his sister's advice. Alejandro explains how his aunt who works at Google, whom he considers to be very accomplished, majored in psychology before she went to get her MBA, leading Alejandro to believe that your precise major does not influence your career trajectory if you decide to get a

graduate degree afterward. Additionally, even without having done an undergraduate major in business, his aunt is able to work for one of the most sought-after employers in the world of business and technology, Google. Moreover, Alejandro also discusses how his sister, who attends a small private liberal arts college in Connecticut, also told him that his major does not really matter in terms of his future career. Instead, he should think about the reputation of the school he attends and the connections that he will make during college. Alejandro says at the end that he is still somewhat confused about the importance of a major to his future career, but that has not stopped him from making a choice.

Moreover, throughout the interview, it is evident that Alejandro is using the information that his family has shared with him to decide how to navigate the college environment. When I asked Alejandro why he chose RCC, one of the first things he talked about was the reputation that RCC has as one of the best community colleges in Southern California for transferring to schools like UCLA and USC. After RCC, Alejandro want to make sure that he goes to the best college possible in order to increase his network and opportunities after college. In terms of his major, he is not as concerned about what he would pursue precisely, instead hoping that his major will just prepare him for a career in entrepreneurship. His view on his major is impacted by the advice that he receives from his family.

Unlike Alejandro, Diego Sanchez's experience is one where he feels like the advice he received from his parents was not as helpful in his major-selection process. Diego is a 20-year old Latino man in his fourth term at RCC. Diego is currently enrolled in the fire science program and hopes to become a firefighter in the future. However, Diego's time at RCC has been very challenging. Ever since high school, Diego knew he was interested in pursuing a career that would allow him to actively help other people. However, when he enrolled at RCC, he felt pressured to

select a major, even if he did not know which major would help him reach his aspirations. Feeling pressured by the institution to make a choice as soon as he enrolled, having extreme fears about his math abilities, and feeling discouraged by his family to pursue fire science, Diego chose graphic design instead. Diego explains his regrets in not choosing fire science soon after he started at RCC:

> I should have just stuck to what I wanted to do, but I was influenced by my parents. They're like, "Okay, if you want to be a firefighter, is that something you could work towards right now? Or don't you have to join the academy and blah, blah, blah? That kind of seems like all that stuff will come later." I was like, "Oh, okay." I should have just stuck to what I wanted to do, because my mom said, "Don't rush into anything." That's why I chose my major in the first place, that I didn't really want to do. … I just told my mom, like, "Okay, I'm not 100% certain I want to do this." She just told me, "Okay, don't commit to anything then." So I just chose arts, because I figured ... the trajectory I took in the arts doesn't demand that much, just math or science. I was like, "Okay, if I choose a safe major like an arts, I'll just take courses to get me credits." I don't know. Now thinking back about it, I'm pissed. I should have started as a firefighter, or with that as my major, but I don't know. I guess I was content with just getting my GEs done, and I guess using that first year to think, "Okay, is firefighter something I really want to do?"
>
> [Diego Sanchez, Latino, Fire Science, 20]

As Diego explains, his parents did not really understand the process to become a firefighter and advised him to select a different career path that could give him some career options right away. Also, Diego's parents did not want him to rush and commit to any major and instead spend

some time exploring different options. Therefore, Diego made the decision to select a career community in the arts because, in his opinion, the requirements for the major would not be too strenuous. Diego went into graphic design courses for his first year. As we will see in the next section, Diego somewhat enjoyed this academic program but found himself still wanting to pursue fire science. Diego would have liked for his parents to encourage him to pursue the major that he was interested in, or for the different counselors at RCC to not pressure him to make a choice he was not ready to make. He wishes he could have had his first year to explore. Nonetheless, Diego began to do his own research and figured out the steps he needed to take to become a firefighter. Diego has recently become EMT-certified. Besides this step, he has met regularly with his local fire station and has plans to become a volunteer cadet. Although he feels like he has lost a year taking classes that do not count toward his new program, he has been able to pursue a major whose requirements and career outlook he more clearly understands. Diego explains:

> Because the first year of college, I didn't have a vision, and I didn't have goals. So without goals or a vision, every day, coming to school just felt like a job or not pleasant. Because I was just coming to school with no goal. Working hard, but not really working towards anything. So now that I have a major that I do like, or I could even change ... no, I'm not going to change it. But just having a major that I know now, that's my goal. That's what I want to do. That inspires me, like, okay, I'm actually working towards something. All the hard work I'm doing, it's going to pay off. It's not for nothing.
>
> [Diego Sanchez, Latino, Fire Science, 20]

Ramon, Alejandro, and Diego all received different input from their families regarding their program of study. However, the types of advice all resulted in different approaches to

selecting majors. For Ramon, his uncle told him that he needs to focus on pursuing a science major and that he would help him get into medical school. Ramon feels like pursuing something in science will be best for his future based on his uncle's advice coupled with the advice from his mom to get a degree so he can have a better life. Alejandro's family have shared with him how to navigate major selection and academic planning. For Diego, his family told him to not rush into a decision on a major without knowing that the college would require him to make this choice right away.

Artistic Inclinations and Experiences but a Desire to Look for a "Real" Career

For three of the Latinos in the sample, pursuing a career in the arts is akin to not having a stable and fulfilling career in the future. Therefore they all decided to redirect their energies to more conventional professional paths. Both Ramon and Alejandro had aspirations of pursuing a music production career, but for one of them this career path was not likely to sustain him monetarily, while for the other one this path would not fulfill his aspirations to help others. For Diego, although graphic design was an "okay" career path and he had "fun," he feared it would not be stable enough for him in the future. All three of these students highlight how future stability and fulfillment are important aspects of how some students make decisions about their majors.

Ramon has been extensively involved in different aspects of the musical and visual arts both in school and out of school. Ramon spent the majority of his time in high school learning to play different instruments and was involved in music activities. As mentioned earlier, he pursued a music major at his prior institution for two years. Besides being involved in music, Ramon has also worked as a photographer at a studio for the last 4 years. Ramon explains his interest in music in the following way:

> I was leaning towards music during middle school and high school. I really wanted to do something in music. … Probably music production. I was really into playing instruments. I was learning how to play instruments. Then when I joined the band, I learned how to play. ... My friends were teaching me how to play the instruments they knew. So, it's like, "Oh, I'm really interested in this." But then as I came to college and, like, think about my career, like, "Yeah, I could do this, but it's more beneficial if I do something that will help me in my career." So I wanted to become a medical doctor. Yeah. So then my uncle, he said, "You want to do music, but is that going to help you later on? You think that is a good backup?"
>
> [Ramon Quintanilla, Latino, Biology, 23]

Ramon describes how his interest in music goes all the way back to when he was in middle school and joined band. Although Ramon is passionate about music and envisioned a career in music production, he decided to switch gears when he tried college for a second time because he did not think a major in music would benefit his career. His doubts about his future in music, paired with his uncle's advice, led Ramon to want to pursue medicine. Ramon believes that he could still pursue music while he is in medical school. But he believes that medicine is a good, safe choice that will guarantee job security in the future.

Alejandro decided to pursue music production in school as a "protest to [the] educational system" and the pressure that he felt from his dad. Alejandro describes attending a college preparatory high school where everyone was obsessed with the university or college they would attend. Alejandro decided then that he wanted to pursue his dream of being an electronic music producer and DJ. Alejandro explains:

> In high school I really liked music and I liked these electronic DJs that were just getting big at the time, similar to Skrillex, but I wasn't that into him. Calvin Harris, these guys, that was the dream. To travel around the world and DJ. Oh my god … yeah. And see that. That was the dream. And that's kind of how I got into music a bit. Even though later I realized you shouldn't really change music for getting women to chase after you or deejaying and traveling the world, you should do it because you like it in itself, not because you wanted this money and whatever fame. … Because I want to learn about business nonetheless, because I want to create a company at some time in my life. … Sure, I care about a lot of issues and working for a think tank where you would figure out why subsidized medicine isn't working with Affordable Care Act, and we would figure out these really interesting issues, but how hard would it be to get into it? And would I be as interested in it as I would be working for a company or making my own company?
>
> [Alejandro Montes, Latino, Business Finance, 22]

In this excerpt, Alejandro describes his aspirations to be a world-famous DJ and enjoy the fame and glamour that this experience would bring him. He attended a music conservatory and graduated as a music producer. Alejandro explains that he still does music but also realized that he needed more than music to be fulfilled. His curiosity and desire to have his own company one day encouraged him to go back to school. For Alejandro, exploring music and testing out his aspirations of being a DJ were a good experience that led him to understand that he needed more to be fulfilled.

Diego describes his experiences as a graphic design major as interesting and fun, but ultimately he felt that it would be difficult to translate this major into a stable career. Although Diego chose this major because he did not know what else to do given that his parents deterred him from pursuing fire science and the fact that he was asked to select an area of study during orientation, Diego did imagine what it would be like to be in this career. Diego recounts his feelings about being a graphic designer:

> It was good. The class was really fun, and I did start to kind of think, "Oh, this would be a cool job." … And I made some cool stuff in that class, like some nice art. And the teacher's cool, because she lets you sell what you make. You'll make a nice poster, and she'll sell it at some art show. If people buy your work, she'll give you the money. I was like, "Wow. This is a class that I'm actually making money off of." Just that already, I was like, "Wow. This is something that I could make money off of." I started to like it, but I don't know. … Again, listening to my mom was like, "Diego, are you sure you want to become a graphic designer? I just don't know how you're going to get a job after getting that degree," or whatever. I was just like, yeah, thinking about it, I'd probably either work privately for companies or people who wanted me to design them stuff. But I was just like, that doesn't seem like a consistent, sturdy line of work. I liked it, but I thought of it more as a hobby the whole time when I was in the class. I was just like, this is a fun little de-stressor for the day, before I go to math class or English class.
>
> [Diego Sanchez, Latino, Fire Science, 20]

As Diego explains, being a graphic design student was fun and even had interesting perks like being able to sell his own art pieces. However, Diego also describes being doubtful about what where he could work and how steady his job would be. Additionally, his mom was concerned about his career prospects as a graphic design major. Diego saw his time doing graphic design projects as a way to pass the time and not as a reliable source of income in the future.

Overall, Ramon, Alejandro, and Diego were very conscientious about how their majors would translate into jobs. Although they all had hobbies they were enthusiastic about, they did not see these hobbies as viable career paths that would provide them with a steady source of income and/or the fulfillment they desire from their professional lives. However, as I will present next, Javier, the other Latino in the study, has a different way of looking his artistry and future career.

The Special Case of Javier: Undeclared and Forging His Own Path

Unlike the other three Latinos in the study, Javier Garcia is not following a conventional academic trajectory while at RCC—he has not enrolled in a program and does not plan to do so. Javier's story presents the conundrum of a student who is in college to learn and improve his skill sets while also being distrustful of the formal structures/processes that constitute attending college. His story presents an assortment of factors that are important to consider when trying to engage students in the vocational identity development process.

Javier is a highly motivated, formerly incarcerated, 27-year-old part-time student of Latinx descent. Javier first learned about RCC from his sisters after he was released from prison. Javier is the oldest of four siblings, all currently enrolled at this college. While in prison on charges related to vandalism/property damage, Javier earned his GED. Javier was incarcerated for graffitiing in different parts of downtown LA. After prison, Javier first attended East LA College, but decided to switch to RCC because they often have free food on campus and other programs

that have helped him. He enrolled in school online and has never talked to a counselor or administrator. Javier thinks he doesn't need to meet with anyone, either. Essentially, Javier believes in being independent and not relying on anyone. According to Javier, he is at RCC to gain skills that will enhance his artistry but is not pursuing "paper" or a degree/certificate. Javier believes that a degree is not a guarantee of anything, and he does not need it. He explains:

> Because I don't think I need a paper that says that I can do this, I can do that. ... I don't want to work for nobody, basically. I've done that before, and I'm like, there's no purpose to that. Because, like, I can make more money on my own. I've been part of artist shows and photo shoots and I made my own money. I sold photos for like $500, and I'm like, "Oh damn. I made that with one photo, and this person worked all week for $500." If you're good at something, like, you could figure a way to do it.
>
> [Javier Garcia, Latino, Undeclared 27]

Javier believes that a degree is just a formality that certifies that you have a certain skill set. In Javier's experience, he has already proven that he has the skills to be part of artist shows, receive compensation for his work, and receive recognition from other artists. Therefore, Javier thinks that enrolling in a degree program at RCC is pointless for his own goals of being an independent artist. Currently, Javier is taking a silk-screening class. He uses the skills he is learning in that class to make T-shirts, which he sells to make money to pay his rent. Javier hopes to transfer to the ArtCenter in Pasadena to continue to enhance his artistic skills but is not sure he will ever try to graduate from any school. Although Javier might not be formally engaging with one of the key aspects of the college-going process, declaring a program, it does not mean that he is not

engaged in some of the key purposes of higher education—skill enhancement and self-improvement.

The fact that Javier is enrolled at RCC is a tremendous feat unto itself. Javier always told himself that he would attend college one day, yet his very difficult childhood, adolescence, and experiences in school almost made this goal impossible. At the age of 5, Javier and his siblings were taken from his parents (his dad used to physically abuse his mom) and put into foster care. Javier says that he constantly moved all around Southern California. At the age of 10, he moved back in with his mom, but only for a handful of years. By the time Javier was 14 years old, he was living on his own. Given all the instability that Javier had in his life, he never consistently attended school, and when he did attend, he did not form relationships with his teachers and classmates. Javier explains:

> When I was younger, I wouldn't really go to school, until when I turned 18, that's when I was like, "Oh, I want to go to college." Because before I was 18, I was like, "There's no point in high school." They're not teaching you anything that you want to learn. The teachers don't really help you. Half the time the teachers were like, "Oh, you're late, you're not going to be nothing, like, you're going to work at McDonald's" or stuff like that. … That's why we didn't go to school. I was like, "I'll just stay at the park. And I'll just see people." ... There was a bunch of kids that stayed in the park too, though. And I would just watch all of them. They were all doing drugs, and I would just be like, "Screw them." And now I see them still, and they're all like ... they're just burnt. They're not who they were before. They are just in the street lots.
>
> [Javier Garcia, Latino, Undeclared, 27]

In the quote above, Javier explains how he experienced the majority of high school and why he really did not see its purpose. Javier often had teachers who did not teach him anything that he felt mattered. Additionally, his teachers often put him down and told him he would never achieve anything beyond being a fast food restaurant employee. He and his peers skipped school and hung out at different parks. However, in comparison with his classmates who were skipping school and doing drugs, Javier is now attending college and learning the necessary skills to improve his artist's craft. For Javier, doing art has been a way to escape all his challenges, express himself, and foster resilience.

For Javier, being creative is a big part of his identity, and it is what has helped him to get through the difficult moments in life. "I just stay, like, making things, and not just give up. I'll make shirts, or drawings, or tattoos, or like, random stuff." From going to prison, Javier has learned to be more organized and judicious in how he "tags" or does his graffiti around Los Angeles. Javier hopes to continue to improve his craft while at RCC. In the meantime, he wants to continue to "make stuff" and use his artistry to sustain himself and be a source of inspiration for other people. Javier says:

> Oh, to go do graffiti, and also because … networking, like, people see your name, they're like, "Oh damn, this guy was here, I want to work with this guy." [And] well, make shirts and just create stuff. And I give stuff back to people that don't have stuff. Because I'm like, "Oh, I know what that's like." So, I'm like, "Oh, I've got to do that."
>
> [Javier Garcia, Latino, Undeclared 27]

In other words, Javier sees graffiti as a form of self-expression and as a means of achieving notoriety as an artist. He also continues to create different artifacts in order to sustain himself and

nourish his spirit. For Javier, his art is a way to give back to people who, like him, don't have a lot. Even though he is at RCC to improve and gain new mastery in different art forms, he has yet to be convinced that attaining a degree/credential will improve his professional life.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to understand the vocational identity development of Black and Latinx emerging adults attending community college. In particular, this study used a contextual approach to ground students' vocational explorations in connection to their relationships and experiences in the classroom as well as the larger institutional climate. This study aimed to unpack and illustrate the factors influencing major/career decisions given the lived experiences of Black and Latinx students during a pivotal time in their lives, emerging adulthood.

There are four major findings from this study that point to the complexities that surround Black and Latinx students as they navigate community college. First, past educational histories matter in how students choose a major and think about their careers. Second, the majority of students in this study made decisions about their major in casual, brief conversations during their senior year in high school or during their college orientation. These brief encounters do not properly prepare students to understand the purpose of their major during college and beyond. Third, relationships with institutional agents, counselors, and faculty make a difference in students' decisions to explore a major and commit to it. Last, negative ideas about their race/ethnicity, gender, and other aspects of their identity influence how students view themselves, their capabilities, and their vocational journey.

In this chapter, I will expand on the major findings in this study by interweaving past research and theories that help contextualize them. Specifically, I will highlight how past research on concerted cultivation and natural growth can be leveraged to understand how students come to college with varying levels of preparation. I will also incorporate status theory to situate participants' vocational identity development along a spectrum and delineate how to help students along this identity journey according to their varying levels of commitment and

exploration. I will contextualize how the results from this study compare to past research that has been conducted on identity development of young people, including emerging adult theory, and highlight the importance of including an intersectional lens in how we understand this sector of the population. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and its implications for future research, policy, and practice. Specifically, given differences in students' backgrounds, policies like Guided Pathways should aim to create a culture where all students are consistently provided with the information and guidance to navigate their vocational identity process.

The Importance of Understanding Students' Experiences and Needs and Not Making Assumptions

Emerging adults in this study came to college with different lived experiences. These experiences shaped everything from their aspirations to their decisions to enroll at RCC and their overall approach to college. In particular, their experiences molded how they decided on their major and envisioned their future careers. Participants were neither a tabula rasa nor "unmotivated" as the theoretical foundations of the Guided Pathways model have suggested (Scott-Clayton, 2011; Bailey et al., 2015a). However, they all had disparate experiences with their previous educational institutions, including varying opportunities for enrichment, and family dynamics that impacted their process of choosing a major at RCC. For instance, across different race/ethnic and gender groups, students discussed having disjointed learning experiences in high school. Students talked about attending multiple high schools, getting into academic or disciplinary trouble, or being happy to have "just made it out." These experiences created a particular cognitive pattern for how these students in turn navigated RCC. For instance, for students like Jamal Perry, Dewayne Freeman, Veronica Amor, and Melissa Phillips, who almost did not graduate from high school, being in college was a feat unto itself. For these students, figuring out a major was one of

the tasks that they had to eventually worry about, but just making it to college and adjusting to college was their primary focus. Similarly, students who had attended multiple schools were more reluctant to ask for help from institutional agents. For example, Ryan Lewis, Eli Robinson, and Javier Garcia had fragmented school experiences and saw connecting with institutional agents as unnecessary even though they needed help navigating college. Simply put, their previous schools and family dynamics had taught them that being successful consisted of relying primarily on themselves.

In terms of enrichment opportunities, there was a clear distinction between the students who explored their childhood and adolescent aspirations and those who arrived at college with uninvestigated passions and interests. For example, there were students like Nikki Smith, who had aspired to become a lawyer since middle childhood, with the noble aim of advocating for the rights of Black people and the practical goal of making a lot of money. Even though this has been Nikki's goal for a long time, she has yet to explore this career path or talk to anyone who actually works in the profession.

On the same note, Guadalupe Lopez loved speaking Spanish from a young age because it connected her to her heritage. Guadalupe aspired to one day become a professor and teach Spanish. But five years after she started college, Guadalupe has not had any opportunities to try out what it would be like to teach. She is now at the point where she is considering another program of study because she fears that she would not be able to teach Spanish after all. Guadalupe's experience is very different from Margarita Alma's. Margarita also wants to be teacher but has been able to explore what this role might be like for her while she works as a teacher aide at a local school. When I asked Margarita what made her decide to look for a job teaching, she talked about learning early in life the importance of trying something out to really know if you like it.

Another poignant example of the different outcomes for a student who connects concrete experiences to his aspirations and one who does not is Miles Stephens and Dewayne Freeman. Miles and Dewayne both want to become actors. While Miles has had experience acting in different plays in high school and exploring other career paths, Dewayne decided that he wanted to be an actor following a brief exchange with a counselor at orientation. When the counselor asked him what his interests were, Dewayne talked about being funny and liking movies, which led the counselor to advise him to select a theater major. In contrast, Miles based his decision to become a theater major on his acting experiences and his research about the theater program at RCC, eventually solidifying his commitment after developing a close mentoring relationship with one of his theater faculty at RCC. Miles has other interests that he is passionate about, such as his love for animals and karate, which he has done for the majority of his life. Miles is able to distinguish between choosing a major solely based on interests/passions and choosing a program of study that he could potentially learn from for his career. Given that Dewayne's decision to become a theater major is not grounded in any concrete experiences or exploration, his decision to pursue theater is likely to change as he discovers other interests.

For the most part, all the families were supportive of students' college journey, but this support was not always fashioned in the same manner. In the study, there were families that were actively involved in all aspects of the students' college experience. The families of Alejandro Montes, Nia Brown, Iliana Hernandez, Jessica Robinson, Ramon Quintanilla, and Yabani Kelechi were intimately involved in how they chose RCC, their major selection, and how they could potentially leverage their major and their future careers. These families actively engaged in conversation about what major to choose as well as other critical aspects of students' navigating their vocational identity development. Parents, sisters, brothers, and aunts not only talked with

these students but also provided them with material experiences that allowed for exploration before and during college. Other students had families who gave them emotional support but not a lot of guidance. For instance, students like Maria Rodriguez, Adriana Fermin, Jamal Perry, Shariece Brown, Tanya Clark, Margarita Alma, and Veronica Amor spoke about how their families were cheering them on in their journey but did not have a lot of involvement in their decisions to pursue a major. There were other students who, together with their families, decided that it was extremely important to be independent in their decisions during college. Nikki Smith, Tamika Miller, Miles Stephens, and Dewayne Freeman all emphasized the importance of learning to make their own decisions while in college without relying upon their parents.

Lareau's (2003 & 2011) concepts of *concerted cultivation* and *natural growth* have helped me interpret the experiences that students have before arriving at college and how it impacts the process of selecting a program of study. In her book *Unequal Childhoods* (2003 & 2011), Lareau investigates the differences in how children from low-income, working class, and upper-/middle-class families are socialized. Concerted cultivation and natural growth are the two child-rearing philosophies that Lareau identifies in upper-/middle-class and working-class/low-income families, respectively. These two different philosophies yield different ways of interacting with society and its main institutions. Lareau's main tenet is that different approaches to child rearing in the United States are a form of transmission of differential advantages. These differential advantages mean that children from different social classes have an inherent advantage or disadvantage when interacting with different institutions because policies and regulations within these institutions privilege upper- and middle-class habits and reject the rest.

Children from upper- and middle-class families are socialized to have a sense of entitlement when dealing with authority figures, an ease in navigating institutions like schools and

hospitals, and dexterity when advocating for themselves. These children also spend the majority of their childhoods preparing for their professional lives through direct exposure from an assortment of extracurricular activities or interactions with their professional working families and the networks they are embedded in. For working-class and poor children who are raised with a natural growth child-rearing philosophy, they grow up to have a sense of constraint. In other words, these children either accept the actions of authority figures or challenge them in less productive ways, have a harder time advocating for themselves, and have a harder time navigating societal institutions. These children spend most of the time playing and learning from their families, and if they have extracurricular activities, they are not consistent or formalized.

The different experiences that students have prior to college highlights the challenges with the current structure that RCC has in place for how students choose their majors, which assumes that students have had a certain level of exposure to college-going processes and careers during high school and with their families. The structure for choosing programs at RCC assumes that students will have the preparation and exposure to make a decision on a major as soon as they arrive on campus during orientation. The majority of the students in this study chose a major based on their interests/likes because that is how they understood this process. But for the majority of students who had limited exposure to careers, this meant that they were basing their decisions on very superficial information. This study extends Lareau's findings to how these inequalities play out during the transition to adulthood, in particular the college setting. Besides extending Lareau's theory to young adults, these findings also corroborate research by Baker (2018) and Baker et al. (2017) indicating that community colleges need to unpack how different students choose and explore majors in the first place before developing "choice architecture" to help them.

Misguided Assumptions of the Guided Pathways Model

The Guided Pathways model, which the school is trying to implement as career communities, assumes that all students at the college arrive understanding the purpose of a major, knowing how to explore it, and knowing how to contextualize what they are learning in their major for their future careers. The Guided Pathways model, thus, is based on an assumption that students will have the navigational capital to ask questions of counselors and faculty when they are confused and advocate for themselves.

Policies like Guided Pathways uphold middle-class habits, further widening the gap that students from working-class and poor families need to fill in their quest to explore their vocational identity. Although these policies aim to eliminate the confusion and stress of making decisions for CC students who are characterized as "unprepared," they fail to structure the exploration that students need to eventually make a decision. Thus, participants in this study who were socialized to seek out help were able to find a path for exploration and navigate the major-selection process with more ease and success than those students who did not have that type of guidance. In the second edition of *Unequal Childhoods* (2003 & 2011), Lareau follows up with interviews of the now young adults whom she first interviewed as children. Lareau notes that time compounds the advantages of those young people from middle-class backgrounds. Family habits, such as parental involvement/intervention with educational institutions on behalf of their children, and economic resources made the transition to college easier for middle-class young adults because postsecondary institutions continue to prioritize and reward their habits and resources.

One of the missing criteria in Lareau's (2003 & 2011) work is the influence of race, immigration status, and other identities in the socialization of young people. Although Lareau acknowledges the situational impact of race for some of her participants, she maintains that class

is a primordial variable in the educational outcomes for the families in her study. On the other hand, this study uses an intersectional lens to distill how race/ethnicity, gender, immigration status, and other aspects of students' identities interact to create multiple contexts for how students make decisions about their majors. For instance, to fully understand the vocational journey of a student like Shariece Brown, it is not enough to know that one of her parents has a white-collar job while another of her parents is part of the gig economy, making her someone who at times struggles financially. To truly understand the complexity of Shariece, one must put all of her different aspects of her identity together. Shariece is a woman in her mid-20s, of mixed racial ancestry, and with a physical disability. For Shariece, integrating all of these different aspects of herself, including the difficulties that come with not being able to walk, have complicated her ability to select a major. The study's initial goal of looking at students' vocational journey through the lens of intersectionality theory was integral in understanding how their different identities play a role in their vocational identity development (Crenshaw et.al.,1995).

On a similar note, understanding Margarita Alma's vocational journey from only a social-class spectrum omits the impact of her immigrational status in her ability to successfully navigate the major-selection process as well as the potential obstacles that could deter her. Margarita is an undocumented 1.75-generation immigrant. Although Margarita's parents only attended school up to middle school, they have always encouraged Margarita to take her education very seriously. They have actively taken her to college fairs and local college tours. Margarita has not benefited from the cultural/social capital of a middle-class family, but as a first-generation immigrant, has had the impact of immigrant optimism as fuel for her college-going process (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Besides immigrant optimism, Margarita has benefited from having to learn to navigate spaces on her own since her parents do not speak English—what is known as language brokering

(Shannon, 1990). Language brokering has equipped Margarita to learn to advocate for herself and others, a skill that she actively employed to switch majors, seek out guidance from counselors and faculty during the process, and advocate for her own students. These findings are consistent with previous work from Guan et al. (2014). Their study on the impact of language brokering for emerging adults of immigrant origin indicates that engaging in these complex tasks may increase these young people's ability to navigate and thrive in complex environmental spaces.

Identity Status Theory: Understanding the Spectrum of Students' Decisions and Commitments

Marcia's (1966) identity status theory is a useful framework to organize and understand the range of exploration and commitment to majors and/or potential careers for each of the participants in the study. In particular, this theoretical lens helps deconstruct the characteristics and relationships that students leverage to reach a self-constructed identity. In the following section, I discuss the main characteristics of participants that were consistent with the four identity statuses outlined by Marcia. In the discussion of each identity status I highlight the influence of relationships, or lack thereof, for each of these students as they made decisions regarding their programs/majors. I also present an additional framework to contextualize the awareness of negative perception regarding conferred identities during vocational identity development, funds of identity. For many of these students, it was not only a matter of figuring out their major and potential careers, but also a process of understanding how the world sees them as members of certain social categories and how that might impact their vocational decisions.

Identity Achievement

Four of the students in the sample could be described as having reached identity achievement status or a self-constructed identity during their time at RCC. Identity achievement

means that students have both a strong commitment toward their chosen academic path and have explored their program of study and future career path. Reaching identity achievement status does not mean that the student will always remain in this major/profession, but that, for the time being, they have achieved a level of self-assuredness regarding their decisions and have started to embody aspects of their vocational goals. For three of these students, they enrolled at the college with totally different majors but managed to switch to programs that better suited them. In these new majors they have actively explored their interests in both cognitive and behavioral terms. As my discussion of two of these students illustrates, each of them has made a plan to learn more about their majors/career paths and has sought out guidance to help them in the process.

Margarita Alma and Diego Sanchez first enrolled in specific majors, but after some exploration, decided to switch to other programs. Margarita switched to a major in studio art after being enrolled as a film major for a year and doing an internship. Although Margarita was convinced that she wanted to be a film director, it was not until she worked on a movie production that she realized that this career path would not be a good match for her. Margarita continues to think of herself as a creative person but believes she could channel her energies into helping young people find their self-expression by becoming a high school art teacher. Margarita has begun to work as a teacher aide at a local school to explore the day-to-day functions of teachers in more depth. Margarita's relationship with an EOP&S counselor at RCC and a faculty member from the art department have guided her in understanding her program requirements and mapping the steps after RCC. Margarita plans to transfer to Cal State LA to continue her studies after RCC. Throughout our interview, Margarita articulated how being a teacher is a big aspect of how she defines herself.

Along the same lines, Diego Sanchez came to RCC and enrolled as a graphic design major based on a brief conversation with a counselor during orientation. Diego enjoyed his graphic design classes, but as he started to explore potential career paths during his first year, he knew that getting a job in the graphic design industry would not provide him with sufficient stability in the future. After a conversation with an administrator on campus, Diego decided to return to his initial aspirations of wanting to study fire science and become a firefighter. Diego began to immerse himself in all aspects of becoming a firefighter. After numerous conversations with his local fire station about what would make him a good candidate to be a volunteer cadet, Diego decided to enroll in an intensive EMT course. Diego passed this course on his second try, relying on many of his fire science mentors to remain committed to this goal. Diego has alternative plans in case he is not able to become a firefighter given some of his health conditions. Nonetheless, he has immersed himself in learning everything about what it takes to be a firefighter and is actively doing what is in his power to reach this goal.

Identity Moratorium

There were five students in the sample who could be labeled in the identity moratorium stage, which means they had an absence of a solid commitment to a major, even if they were enrolled in a specific major, and continue to actively explore alternative paths. For these five students, being in college meant taking advantage of this period of exploration. For the most part, these students sought out different classes and different experiences. In the case of Alejandro Montes and Maria Rodriguez, they explored their majors by taking classes and joining clubs. Additionally, these students sought out guidance from as many people as they could, in particular their family, friends, and faculty. Both of these students were also open/flexible to a new major if the opportunity arose. Although most of these students had solid family support that allowed them

to take full advantage of this time-out to find themselves, they were also eager to be independent from their parents. In the case of Guadalupe Gomez, who has been at RCC for close to 5 years, her desire to explore new alternative paths has only come about over the last semester. She is eager to start materially contributing to her family after making a strong commitment to a program of study she never truly explored to begin with and now is unsure about.

Identity Foreclosure

Nine students in the study can be categorized in identity foreclosure status, or having made a strong commitment to an academic or vocational path with very little exploration before they made this choice. For many of these students, they selected a program of study while they were in high school based on the advice they received from their family. For example, Nikki Smith and Melissa Phillips both decided to pursue political science while at RCC with the goal of becoming lawyers, based on advice from their parents. Both of these students have heard messages like "You should become a lawyer because they make a lot of money and you are good at arguing." Neither of these students have had any actual experiences in law firms or have talked to a lawyer about their day-to-day activities. They are very committed to becoming lawyers and they both told me they were 100% sure of their decision, but really cannot verbalize in-depth why this career path is a good match for their personality and talents. Ramon Quintanilla and Tanya Clark present a very similar scenario. Both of these students are committed to pursuing a career in medicine based on the wishes of their families. These two students have an interest in helping people and an interest in the human body. But beyond these superficial interests, these students have not explored these disciplines or careers in depth. They have also had brief encounters with counselors who have applauded their decision to pursue a STEM major but not given them any prescriptive guidance to ensure that this is a good path for their talents, experiences, and personality.

Besides family, another big source of influence that led these students to make decisions about their major is media. Students like Tamika Miller and Adriana Fermin got the idea of being a book editor and an FBI agent, respectively, from watching television. Although there is nothing wrong being inspired by media, the problem is that these students made these decisions without further exploration into these careers. Both have done online searches, but they need to engage in more in-depth activities to ensure this career is a good option for them. Essentially, as they take classes, they will be exploring business/English and criminal justice, but without more prescriptive guidance, it might take them a little longer to examine if they are approaching their vocational identity journal with a good understanding of their needs.

Identity Diffusion

Students in the identity diffusion status do not have a strong commitment to or much experience with exploring their program of study. For the most part these students have technically declared a major, but they have an unsecured commitment and based their choice on the idea that their major will lead to a career that is profitable, easy, or accessible. It is important to note that of the 26 students included in the analysis, only one considered herself undecided. Therefore, identity diffusion should not only be understood in terms of the students' official standing with the college (whether they have declared a major or not) but how they explain their commitment toward that major and what they have done to explore it.

Students like Lorenzo Tate and Eli Robinson have both found themselves in majors that they are not completely committed to and have made this decision based on the prospects of a lucrative career. Lorenzo wants to be an electrician because he needs money to fund his rap career and has a criminal record that limits his options. However, Lorenzo is constantly vacillating between being an electrician or a plumber. He also has not explored the day-to-day work of an

electrician other than through the classes he has taken. Lorenzo does not have much interest in his major and is likely to switch to another major that he also doesn't really understand. For Eli, he decided that he wanted to be a computer scientist because anything in STEM will make him money. He has not taken any computer classes and is not good at math. Although he has declared a computer science major, he is neither actively completing requirements for this major nor exploring careers.

Finally, students like Satisha Erics and Ryan Lewis have declared majors they are unsure about. Satisha is a communications major who hopes to become a singer and writer of mystery books, while Ryan is an English major hoping to become a creative director of anime. Both of these students have chosen majors with a limited understanding of the programs and their career aspirations. They also have not had conversations with their families or institutional agents to guide them. The majors are incongruent with any preparation they (students) have made to be in this major and any occupational experiences they have had thus far. The fact that they have no active plans to connect their majors to their potential careers or explore those careers make their aspirations more of a fantasy.

Funds of Identity: How Can Negative Perceptions Surrounding Race/Gender Impact the Vocational Identity Development of Students?

One of the aspects of vocational identity development that is not addressed by identity status theory is the impact of other identities on the development of different identity domains. For example, since racial and gender identity development are parallel processes, how do they impact one another? Although identity status theory can be applied to one's vocation, race, and intimate relationships, this theory falls short in identifying how these parallel identity processes can impact one another. Moreover, the findings from this study highlight how students' perceptions of what

other people think of their race/ethnicity and gender become part of a dialogue on who they are and any obstacles that they might encounter in their future professions. Funds of identity theory is a sociocultural theory that posits that people form their self-concept based not just on internal psychological processes, but also on cultural processes and ongoing understanding of how other people see them (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Iliana Hernandez and Jamal Perry are two of the many students in the study whose stories show the influence of racial/ethnic and gender stereotypes in the vocational identity development of students of color. Both Iliana and Jamal feel like their race/gender could be a big obstacle for their future careers. During her interview, Iliana discussed the possibility of facing sexism and institutional racism as a Latina at some point during her career. She discussed that what she has been learning about discrimination and oppression in her classes has impacted how she sees her own career. Similarly, Jamal believes that as a Black man, he will always have to work harder than people from other races to gain any level of success. In other words, as they become aware of the discrimination that people with their same conferred identities face, these stereotype threats impact their self-constructed identities (Steele, 2010). Introducing theories like funds of identity and concepts like stereotype threat to these findings illustrates the importance of considering other identities in how we understand the vocational development of students.

The Complexities of Emerging Adulthood in a Diverse Population of Students Attending Community Colleges

One of the primary aims of this study was to understand the vocational identity process through the developmental lens of emerging adulthood. Although the stage of emerging adulthood has been widely utilized to look at traditionally aged, mostly White students, not much had been done to examine how its five premises manifest in a nontraditional, diverse student population

attending community colleges. The five premises of emerging adulthood stipulate that young people in this stage are in a time of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between being an adolescent and an adult, and great optimism about the future (Arnett, 2000). A sixth premise, caring for others, was added to capture the experiences of immigrant populations (Katsiaficas, 2016). Overall, this study found that each of these premises served as a helpful framework to consider when interpreting how students decided on their major. However, these premises need to be adapted to the context of community colleges and understood through an intersectional lens to address the needs of students like the ones in this study. As the case of Javier Garcia illustrates, the six premises of emerging adulthood are helpful to understand the decisions of students within this developmental stage; however, how each of these premises are manifested in a nontraditional student population is different than for a White, middle-class population.

At 27 years old, Javier Garcia exhibited a strong sense of exploration, optimism for the future, and care for others. Although Javier is not trying to get a degree, he is very interested in exploring different artistic skill sets that could help him improve his craft. Javier is in school because he is optimistic that his future will be better than his past, as he aspires to be a world-renowned graffiti artist. Javier has a strong sense of duty to give back to people in need, given his experiences growing up in the foster care system and being incarcerated. However, when it comes to Javier feeling instability or a pull between being an adolescent and an adult, Javier has had a very different experience than the traditional literature of emerging adulthood assumes. He has always faced a level of instability. For the majority of his life, Javier has been taking care of himself and ensuring that he has the basic resources to cover his primary needs of shelter and food. Javier has also had to face adult responsibilities since he was 14 years old and living on his own. His coming of age has not been a gradual process or one that only took place over the last 8 years of

his life but one that started during middle childhood. Although he is not enrolled in a program at RCC, taking that silk-screening class is an opportunity to learn, sell T-shirts to help pay rent, be around peers who are doing something positive in their lives, and at times get a free meal. Javier's case also further exemplifies Rose's (2016) critique of one of the potential downsides of Guided Pathways, the narrowing of its open-access mission. Community colleges serve as institutions for students to receive credentials, but they also serve as spaces where students like Javier can receive skill training.

Javier's experiences and those of many students in the study mean that emerging adulthood looks different for them. Their desire to explore and their optimism for the future is present, but must be understood in the context of their past educational histories, familial relationships, and experiences growing up with different forms of support systems. Many of these students have been assuming adult responsibilities for a very long time. Going to college and their ability to explore a vocational path is not so much a luxury but a lifeline. In order to ensure that these students are able to explore while in college, more may need to be done to support them not only logistically but also emotionally, since a student like Javier might need to work though his past traumas to develop the trust necessary to explore different career possibilities.

Deluca et al. (2016) argue that one of the biggest obstacles for emerging adults from disadvantaged backgrounds is the fact that, compared with their White, middle-class peers, they are on a fast track to adulthood. While middle-class families continue to provide intervention and hands-on support to students as they transition to adulthood, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds assume adult responsibilities earlier on. This fast track to adult roles is one of the factors that contributes to the stunted growth and limited professional opportunities of emerging adults from disadvantaged backgrounds (Deluca et al., 2016). Similarly, Settersen and Ray (2010a,

2010b) argue that emerging adults who can delay entrance into adult roles and rely on their parents have better educational and life outcomes. But as this study shows, this is a privilege that only some students have available to them. Since many of the traditional-age students coming to community colleges have had to adopt adultlike roles long before they even began college, what can we do to assist them in their vocational identity journey?

Love (2019) discusses the concept of *radical imagination* in light of the need for institutions of education to go beyond reforms to truly address the needs of marginalized students. Radical imagination is a paradigm shift that asks institutions of learning to imagine removing what is considered the normal way of doing things in favor of practices that address social reproduction mechanisms embedded in historical inequities of systems of education in the US. In the case of emerging adults in community colleges, it is futile to view these students through the lens of middle-class habits. Instead, community college policies and processes need to reimagine the role of college for students from all backgrounds. What is necessary to support vocational identity development for a student who has a criminal record and very little family support, like Javier? What if they are not engaging in the college-going process in the same way as other students? Given that this student, like other emerging adults, has motivations, a desire to explore, and optimism about the future, how can a community college provide a space for them to engage in this process?

Implications for Future Research, Policy, and Practice

There are several implications for future research, policy, and practice. Future studies that look at students' vocational identity development would benefit from precisely capturing students' socioeconomic status (including parental education and income) as well as prior educational record at the college. At times students had trouble describing what their parents did for work, their

program of study, and whether or not they were on academic probation. Being able to have this information in detail would allow for more data points to triangulate students' vocational journey.

Policy researchers need to couple findings from large quantitative studies that look at the effectiveness of the Guided Pathways model with smaller qualitative studies that disaggregate students to better understand their lived experiences. Much of the research on the model of Guided Pathways has been conducted through large studies that look at how to restructure colleges according to this model. However, not much research looks at the impact of Guided Pathways policies in how students choose majors. This study serves as a model for how to understand the impact of this policy on Black and Latinx emerging adult students at a college in Southern California. It would be interesting to also understand how this policy affects students in different locations.

Future policies that aim to restructure community colleges with the goal of increasing the retention and persistence of students need to consider the developmental needs of the population they are trying to serve, including the impact of racial identity development. For instance, with respect to emerging adults from a diverse background, policies that aim to look at how students make decisions about their majors/careers need to consider their vocational identity formation as part of the larger identity development process. This means that these policies should try to support students in parallel processes that are taking place, such as racial/ethnic identity formation, that also impact how students are making decisions about their major. Additionally, policies like Guided Pathways should encourage colleges to do an internal audit of how their students experience the different processes and structures at their particular college.

The practical implications for this study center on the implementation of Guided Pathways in colleges. In plain words, the process of choosing a major needs to be a right decision for students

and not a rushed one. For students to make the right decisions when they arrive at community colleges, the institution as a whole needs to help students approach major selection as a holistic process where they evaluate their passions, skills, past experiences, and personality. Institutions need to not assume that students lack aspirations, but instead keep in mind that students may need structured opportunities to cognitively and behaviorally explore these aspirations. Students need to be able to reflect on their past failures, but also what is unique about themselves. Students need to also see this process as one where they connect labor market data, majors, and occupational trajectory or academic paths. Institutions need to advise students to consult with family, friends, or people in their lives that know them. They also need to create structured opportunities where students talk to peers, advisors, and alumni who have also chosen a major similar to the one they are interested in. Students also need to have the opportunity to take vocational tests but contextualize the results with the caveat that they may have hidden talents that need to still be discovered. Students need to be able to have experiences where they get to engage with their interests in concrete ways. These experiences can include internships, informational interviews, and other, more in-depth connections between their lives and what they are studying.

In order for this to be a holistic process, conversations about vocational identity cannot only be limited to interactions with the career center. Instead, different aspects of vocational identity development need to be embedded throughout different interfacing opportunities with the college, in particular within classrooms. Faculty members need to be encouraged to include more conversations that involve major and career selection, particularly in introductory courses and general education courses. In terms of counselors, more needs to be done to distinguish for students the different types of counselors that exist within the college. Besides meeting with students who

actually go to the career center, counselors who primarily deal with career development also need to support faculty and other professionals at the college.

At the California state level, there are two main implications that have to do with a greater level of oversight from the Chancellor's Office for how community colleges adapt Guided Pathways within their institutions. First, the way that Guided Pathways has been implemented allows for colleges to adapt this policy according to the needs of their students. As a means of understanding the needs of their students, the Chancellor's Office should mandate that each college develop a way to study its student population with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodological tools. As part of this assessment of their population, colleges should try to disaggregate their student population. The Chancellor's Office should also develop ways to closely oversee how Guided Pathways is implemented at different colleges. It would be very helpful for institutions to learn from one another; this would also help institutions maintain a level of accountability to the goals of this policy. The Chancellor's Office already has different programs whose mission is to have an integrated, institution-wide, student-centered implementation of the Guided Pathways model (Eikey et al., 2017; "California Guided Pathways Project," 2019). From my research at RCC, is not clear if the Chancellor's Office has a mechanism to ensure that this is taking place. Therefore, my second suggestion is that as funds from these different programs are disbursed to each college, the Chancellor's Office create guidelines that mandate that administrators, students, and representatives from academic areas and student services areas form teams that oversee how Guided Pathways is infused throughout the institution.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the limitations of this study is the use of student data only. When I first proposed this study, it was meant to be a conversation between the needs of students while they made decisions about their majors and how faculty understood students' vocational identity development. My goal was to discuss the Guided Pathways model from the perspective of students and faculty. Although I managed to collect data from faculty, time restrictions and the ongoing global pandemic limited my ability to include that data in the findings and subsequently the discussion. I plan to publish the faculty data in future articles. Additionally, even though this study included findings from students who self-disclosed as cognitively or physically disabled and students who had been previously incarcerated, future research should look to understand more about the context of these special populations. The findings from this study demonstrate that their situation is one that necessitates a more in-depth investigation to further unpack the challenges they face while interfacing with institutions like community colleges.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the four pillars of the Guided Pathways model for California community colleges is helping students choose and enter their academic/career pathway ("California Guided Pathways Project," 2019). The goals of this study were to introduce the frameworks of emerging adulthood, identity status theory, and intersectionality to elucidate Black and Latinx emerging adults' experiences as they navigate college and develop their vocational identity. In doing so, this study sought to move the conversation from macro processes to one that centered the students' experiences. This study found that Black and Latinx emerging adults come to community college with aspirations and a desire to not settle for a career they are not passionate about, something that is very normal for this developmental age group. However, most of these students had not had many opportunities to explore their career aspirations before they arrived at college. Students often made decisions about their majors in a rushed manner and after brief conversations in high school or during orientation. Any support they received from institutional agents focused solely on developing an educational plan. Most of the students in the study had a plan for their time at RCC, yet many of them were confused about the connection between their major and future academic plans/career or how to explore whether the program they had chosen was a good fit for them. The majority of these students discussed exploring their program decisions and aspirations by taking different classes. Thus, students are not unintentionally deviating from their program of study by taking courses outside of their major. In fact, this process is how they explore alternative academic and career paths.

This study contributes to the literature about the vocational identity development of Black and Latinx students in community colleges with respect to the Guided Pathways model and emerging adulthood by centering the unique needs of students in this developmental stage, in

contrast to the current policy. Exploration is indispensable for students in this developmental stage. Community colleges need to recognize this need and not assume that students have had experiences that have prepared them to understand how to navigate this process. Instead, these institutions need to learn more about students' contexts to create support structures that acknowledge how different identity processes, such as racial/ethnic identity development, also have a role in how students interface with the college and how they make decisions about their major.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Students

This is the guiding format for the semi-structured interviews. Interviews will be carried out in a semi-structured format to ensure that the most pertinent questions are covered during each interview. Some questions might be added or removed accordingly.

Part 1: Focused Life History

1. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
2. Tell me about how you describe yourself.
3. What aspects of your identity are most important to you? Why?
4. What career/job did you want when you were growing up? Why?
5. When you were growing up, was there a person whose job or career you admired?
6. Were there jobs/careers that your parents/family/friends/teachers would mention as a good potential option for you in the future?
7. What jobs/careers do your parents have?
8. Tell me about the first time you heard about college. What was the context of this conversation?
9. Are you the first person in your family to attend college?
10. How did you choose RCC?
11. How did you first learn about academic majors?
12. In what ways do you think academic majors are connected to the careers/jobs people eventually have?

Part 2: Details of Experience

1. Tell me about the process of selecting an academic major. What did you first do? Who did you speak to? What are the main reasons you selected this major?
2. Did you select a specific major or an area?
3. Did you read any information/talk to anyone in deciding your academic major?
4. What role did your future careers plans have in your choosing the major that you did?
5. Do you think you would have picked a different major if you attended a different college? Why or why not?
6. Have you discussed your major with your parents or friends? What have you told them about it?
7. Have you discussed your major with any one at the college? Faculty member? Administrator? Counselor?
8. Have you discussed academic majors in your classes? In what ways?

Part 3: Meaning Making

1. What does exploring a major mean to you?
2. What are the advantages in settling on a major as soon as you start college? What are the advantages of exploring a major?
3. What would be some reasons that would push you to switch to a new major?
4. What advice would you give a student who is undecided on a major?
5. Do you think any aspects of your identity have influenced the major you have selected?
6. How do you think faculty can help students in selecting/exploring majors?

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Faculty

This is the guiding format for the semi-structured interviews. Interviews will be carried out in a semi-structured format to ensure that the most pertinent questions are covered during each interview. Some questions might be added or removed accordingly.

Part 1: Focused Life History (Background)

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about where you grew up.
3. Did your parents go to college? Where did they go?
4. What did you want to be when you grew up? Why?
5. Was college something that was discussed in your household growing up? What are your first memories surrounding the process of going to college?
6. Where did you go to school? Why did you choose this college/university?
7. What did you major in? And how did you go about the process of selecting a major?
8. Did you have a class in particular or a faculty member who influenced your selecting the major that you did?
9. Did you have a class in particular or a faculty member who influence you selecting the career path that you did?
10. How did you connect your major and future career while you were in college?
11. How did you view the process of starting your career while you were in college?
12. Tell me about your first job after college. How did you decide on this job?
13. How did you come to teach at a community college?

14. Why a community college and not another type of college?
15. How did you end up at RCC?
16. How many years have you been teaching? What subjects/courses do you teach?
17. How would you describe your experiences teaching in community college thus far?
18. Thinking back over the last year, what would you say are the beliefs or values that drive your teaching, that make you want to do it? Have these always been what drive you, or have they changed over your career/or over your time at RCC?
19. What do you think is the mission of community college?
20. What do you think is the role of community colleges in students' major and career exploration?
21. What do you think of community college students between the ages of 18 and 27?
22. In your experience, do you think community college students are different from students attending other institutions?
23. Do you help students select their majors?
24. What conversations do you have with students regarding their career?

Part 2: Details of Experience: Concrete Experiences of Faculty in the Classroom in Relation to Students' Major and Career Exploration

1. Do you have any thoughts from our last interview?
2. Tell me about a typical day teaching.
3. Walk me through your process of selecting the topics that you will cover during a class session.
4. Do you have class discussions/assignments that explicitly deal with students' major choices? Why or why not?

5. If yes to the question above, can you tell me more about it?
6. Do you have class discussions/assignments that explicitly deal with students' careers choices?
7. If yes to the question above, can you tell me more about it?
8. What are some questions that students have had in your classes regarding their majors?
9. What are some questions that students have had in your classes regarding their careers?
10. Tell me how you discuss aspects of your educational trajectory in your classes.
11. Do you discuss specifics about your college major in your classes? Why or why not?
12. Do you discuss specifics about your career in your classes? Why or why not?
13. Do you think faculty in community colleges should guide students in their major selection? If so, how do you do this?
14. Do you think faculty in community colleges should guide students in their career selection? If so, how do you do this in your classes? In particular, in Speech 101?
15. What is the purpose of your class _____?
16. What do you want students to come away with after taking this class?
17. Do you think Speech 101 influences how students select a major or career? If yes, how? If not, why not?
18. Can you tell me about a time when you helped a student explore their major options?
19. In your experience, where do students go on campus (physical space) to explore their majors/careers?
20. On campus, who do you think helps students explore their majors/careers?
21. How do you think students explore their majors/careers while at RCC?

Part 3: Reflection on Meaning

1. Do you have any thoughts from our last two interviews that you want to share?
2. What are the factors that you think influence how students select their major?
3. What are the factors that you think influence how students select their careers?
4. Do you think race, socioeconomic status, or gender play a role in how students select their major/career? If yes, how? If no, why not?
5. What are your thoughts on recent college initiatives like Major Pathways? Are you familiar with these initiatives? Do you think they help students? If yes, how did you learn about them?
6. Why do you think is hard for some community college students to settle on a major?
7. Do you think community college should help students decide what major to pursue? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. Do you think community college should help students decide what career to pursue? If yes, why? If no, why not?
9. What are some ways the college could help you be more of a resource to students exploring their major?
10. What are some ways the college could help you be more of resource to students exploring their career?

Appendix C

Classroom Observation Protocol

Adapted from CCCO Training Manual *(C. Suárez-Orozco, T. Darbes, S. Alicea, S. Singh, & M. Martin, 2011)*

Date of Observation: _____

Instructor: _____

COURSE NAME:

❍Semester ❍Term: _____ (list weeks in term)

Scheduled length of class session: _____

Actual length class met: _____

# of times/week class meets: ❍1X ❍2X ❍3X ❍4X ❍5X

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS: (estimate/ percentage of)

Gender Identity:
- Male
- Female
- Other:_____

Race/Ethnicity Group
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Black/African American
- Asian
- Filipino
- Latino
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or More Races

Age Group:
- >18
- 18-21
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

TRACK NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO *ARRIVE BEFORE* CLASS BEGINS:
_____
[*provide tally]*

TRACK NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO *ARRIVE AFTER* CLASS BEGINS:_____
[provide tally]

TRACK NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO *LEAVE BEFORE* CLASS IS DISMISSED:
_____
[provide tally]

TRACK NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO *STAY AFTER* CLASS IS DISMISSED:
_____

Start of Class

Is the instructor in the classroom before class starts? Where is the instructor coming from (teaching another class, office hours, another campus, meeting on/off campus)?

Does the instructor greet the students at the beginning of the class?

Does class begin promptly or is there room for conversation before class (between instructor and students and/or students and students)?

How does the instructor begin class (icebreaker/check-in/warm-up/etc.)?

Does the instructor bring anything into the classroom not directly class related (food for students, books to share, artifacts of any sort)?

Does the instructor bring anything into the classroom that is class related to clarify or illustrate a point (music, art, books, photographs, artifacts of any sort)?

How does the instructor introduce the information (or an agenda) that will be covered during class?

Does the instructor review the topics that were covered in the prior session?

Are students expected to have read before class? If so, how does instructor address those that have not read (reviews readings/recaps readings so that all students can participate in discussion, singles students out for not reading, assumes all students have read and proceeds with class as planned)?

Does Faculty Member share knowledge/experience based on:	Does Faculty Member share knowledge/experience based on:	Why and how was knowledge/experience shared?
• Ability/disability status • Age • Citizenship status • Commute/Transportation • Housing (apartment, house, homeless) • Gender/Gender identity • Military/Veteran status • Political beliefs • Race/ethnicity • Religious/spiritual beliefs • Sexual orientation • Socioeconomic status/class • Status as parent/guardian • Employment	• Ability/disability status • Age • Citizenship status • Commute/Transportation • Housing (apartment, house, homeless) • Gender/Gender identity • Military/Veteran status • Political beliefs • Race/ethnicity • Religious/spiritual beliefs • Sexual orientation • Socioeconomic status/class • Status as parent/guardian • Employment	

Major/Career/Employment

Does the faculty member make any mention of their time in college?

Does the faculty member discuss their major in college?

Does the faculty member make a reference to how they decided to start teaching?

Does the faculty member relate any of the class content to students' academic paths?

Does the faculty member relate any of the class content to students' career paths?

How does the faculty member explain the significance of the class content, if at all?

Do students ask questions/make comments regarding majors/careers/jobs?

End of Class

Does discussion carry to the end of class, or is there a "wind-down"?

Does instructor summarize lesson, connect to previous lesson, and look ahead to next lesson?

Does the professor hold class for the entire scheduled time? If no, why not (gives time for students to ask individual questions/impromptu office hours, allows students to leave as they finish assignment)?

Is there an opportunity for students to meet with the instructor after class? If so, where (in classroom, in office, in parking lot, in coffee shop/cafeteria, etc.) and for how long?

Do students leave immediately after class is over or do they linger? Do they talk to each other/instructor?

What is something that you did not see? Are there things you expected to see and did/didn't?

How accessible does the instructor make themselves? What are the diverse forms of communication provided by the instructor? Do they make these known? Do students know how to contact their professor (email, text, office hours, phone, Skype, etc.)?

Appendix D

Photovoice Instructions

Photovoice is a participatory methodology used to construct meaning from the valuable experiences and expertise of the student/participant (Greene et al., 2013). Your main objective is to take a photo that relates to your major-exploration process.

The research question that you will try to address in all of your posts is the following:

How can RCC, in particular, faculty, help me in my academic journey and eventual selection of a major?

In total, students will write five posts:

1. Take a picture of an object that represents your professional aspirations.
2. Take a picture of someone (with their permission) on campus who has facilitated your process of selecting a major/career.
3. Take a picture of someone (with their permission) outside of campus that has facilitated your process of selecting a major/career
4. Take a picture that symbolizes some of the struggles that you have had in your academic major.
5. Take a picture of a place/department/building on campus that has been essential in your academic and professional journey.

For all photos, please ensure that you only take pictures in public spaces (e.g., not in classrooms) and avoid photographing any potentially illegal behaviors. Photographs of other people will be allowed but you must obtain their verbal consent before taking their picture and you must also explain to them that this picture will be part of a larger research project investigating the academic and professional exploration trajectory of RCC students. Also you can share with them my contact information in case they want more information: Natacha M. Cesar-Davis, email: nmcdavis@ucla.edu.

A recurring prompt for each photo will be used to contextualize the meaning of the photograph. Using the checklist below, address each of the following as they relate to your photo:

(P)lace/Setting

- Describe the photo

(H)istory

- What has happened to create the space in this photo?

(O)bjective

- Why was the photo taken?

(T)heorization

- What do you think this photo communicates as it relates to course content?

(O)pportunities

- How can this photo provide opportunities for us to create change in regard to your theorization?

(.)Missing

- What is missing from the photo? Are there any new reactions you feel should be discussed or addressed?
- Counterstory specific: What are assets or strengths in these community photos that are not highlighted in dominant narratives or mainstream media?

Appendix E

IDEA Inventory

IDEA: Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood

Reifman, A., Arnett, J. J., & Colwell, M. J. (2007). Emerging adulthood: Theory, assessment, and application. *Journal of Youth Development*, 2(1).

Views of Life Survey

- First, please think about this time in your life. By "time in your life," we are referring to the present time, plus the last few years that have gone by, and the next few years to come, as you see them. In short, you should think about a roughly five-year period, with the present time right in the middle.
- For each phrase shown below, please place a check mark in one of the columns to indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree that the phrase describes this time in your life. For example, if you "Somewhat Agree" that this is a "time of exploration," then on the same line as the phrase, you would put a check mark in the column headed by "Somewhat Agree" (3).
- Be sure to put only one check mark per line.

Is this period of your life a…	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
1. time of many possibilities?				
2. time of exploration?				
3. time of confusion?				
4. time of experimentation?				
5. time of personal freedom?				
6. time of feeling restricted?				
7. time of responsibility for yourself?				
8. time of feeling stressed out?				
9. time of instability?				
10. time of optimism?				
11. time of high pressure?				
12. time of finding out who you are?				
13. time of settling down?				
14. time of responsibility for others?				
15. time of independence?				
16. time of open choices?				
17. time of unpredictability?				
18. time of commitments to others?				
19. time of self-sufficiency?				
20. time of many worries?				
21. time of trying out new things?				
22. time of focusing on yourself?				
23. time of separating from parents?				
24. time of defining yourself?				
25. time of planning for the future?				
26. time of seeking a sense of meaning?				
27. time of deciding on your own beliefs and values?				
28. time of learning to think for yourself?				
29. time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?				
30. time of gradually becoming an adult?				
31. time of being not sure whether you have reached full adulthood?				

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