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Making Worth, Making Sense of the Sacrifice: Examining the Career Education

Trajectories of Economically Marginalized, First-Generation Latina Graduates

by

Alexia Fernanda Pineda Soto

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the School of Education,

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Making Worth, Making Sense of the Sacrifice: Examining the Career Education

Trajectories of Economically Marginalized, First-Generation Latina Graduates

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Date

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One of the last phone calls I had with my grandmother, Delia, before her passing in August of 2020 was of me notifying her of my acceptance to this doctoral program. The puffy regalia and graduation cap—that I recently found out is called a graduation tam—was my grandmother's dream, and as the first grandchild to be born in the United States, it was in me she placed those hopes and her visions for more. I don't precisely remember the entirety of my conversation with her during that last phone call, but, 3 years later—on the day of my dissertation defense—I scrolled through my voicemails to replay a message she left me just a few weeks before her passing due to COVID-19. I'd be lying if I said I only listened to her voicemail a couple of times. In fact, it was the first time in almost 3 years since her passing that I dared to scroll to the bottom of that voicemail list to hear her voice. As I did so, I leaned back on my office chair and looked at the rainbow patches bouncing from the wa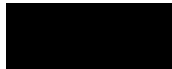lls from a little sun catcher in the shape of a dragonfly I have hung from a corner of my office. I didn't know what exactly to do with that moment, but I think my grandmother wanted me to sit in that stillness. Maybe that stillness was her.

Admittedly, this—what you're reading—is also the first time I have shared this with anyone else. I wish I could tell you—whoever is reading this section—that I have processed my grandmother's passing. But I haven't. And that emotion, that odd mixture of grief and love, is what I hope you can pick up as you skim—maybe even read—these pages. As you do so, I hope you are emboldened to think of how you tear the barriers between the academy and possibility, of what feeling(s) drives you, and come to honor the ancestors who held on long enough so that you, so that we, could become. I became Dr. Alexia Fernanda Pineda Soto because Delia Jovita Gonzalez Segura, my grandmother, my matriarch, my North Star, my love's origin story, held on

long enough to know that I would be the first of generations to receive a higher education. There would be no me without her, and I wouldn't know love had she not taught me its promise of healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, redemption, connection, and creation.

I doubt I can ever come to hope in change, in the imminence and inevitability of justice, as radiantly as my grandmother did, but she knew more lived within me—and us as a collective and familia—than I ever could. As I continue to replay her laughter in my mind, I can come closer to believing we can make worth, make sense, of every single one of our communities' sacrifices. I come closer to believing that I am capable of finding her in the rainbow patches on the walls, on the pages of this work, and through my love-driven identity of being first-gen now and forever.

Grandma, I have never written to you or about you directly—and one day, I will—but this gathering of thoughts I was told to call a dissertation, I owe to you. This dissertation, which is my love letter to what could be, I owe to you. Everything I have become, I owe to you. Te amo. Te extraño. Gracias.

DEDICATION

For Delia, Sandra, and Ronald.
Your love became my ministry.

For my mother, father, and sister, who are the source of every good thing in me.

For my niece, Camila, and nephew, Sebastian, who have taught me who I really can be through joy, laughter, and childhood wonder.

For my ancestral roots, for seeing the warrior in me.

And for my students, because of you everything falls into place. Everything makes sense.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess the ways current higher education approaches to career education, counseling, and preparation models served, or disserved, economically marginalized first-generation Latinas (EMFGL) and their career identities. In centering EMFGL-identifying college graduates, this study used interviews to glean an understanding of what the EMFGL career education experience was like and how forms of career preparation in college equipped, or unequipped, students' career pathways. Driven to assess how higher education institutions can come to eradicate the generalization of their career counseling and education practices and ideologies, this work further uncovers how EMFGL graduates use their career counseling and education realities as a faculty—a sensibility—to (a) critique and question the dominant forms and depictions of career success operating under Western and capitalistic paradigms and (b) to (re)define the spaces that constrain, define, and drive EMFGL steps beyond the collegiate space.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Esos movimientos de rebeldia que tenemos en la sangre [nosotras las mujeres nos] surgen como rios desbocanados en [las] venas.
— Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987, p. 15)

Operating and surviving under the dominance of the United States requires a close examination of the "the larger sociopolitical processes and ideologies that facilitate and impede access to rights for historically marginalized groups" (Perez Huber, 2016, p. 215). The United States is the epicenter and owner of a "long history of anti-Latina and Latino . . . politics that have pervaded public discourse . . . and has [systematically] justified the exclusion, exploitation, and subordination of . . . Latina and Latino [communities] in [our nation]" (Perez Huber, 2016, p. 225). Within the current social, cultural, political, and economic environment, previous and present-day systemic legacies have categorized specific Latine[1] communities "as criminals, drug dealers, and rapists" (C-SPAN, 2015)—an expression of racial hatred deeply rooted in procedures of dehumanization and supremacy.

Given this past and present trajectory of sidelining and political authoritarianism, "understanding the brown body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in the reclamation of narrative and development of radical projects of transformation and liberation" (Cruz, 2001, p. 657). Considering first-generation Latinas are garnering presence in higher education spheres, I posit their existence in piercing predominately White academies can heighten their "modes of learning[,] and . . . conception of knowledge [to] enhance the

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[1] To rupture gender binaries, I offer "Latine" as a gender-inclusive alternative to the typically used terms to identify Latin American descendants and populations (i.e., Latino/Latin@). Given the masculine and colonizing nature of the Spanish language, "Latine" stands as a transformative, linguistic movement to include gender fluidity and to facilitate grammatical processes when writing. Specifically, the "e" in "Latine" is what replaces gendered denotations. In the context of this research, "Latine" will be used in reference to a collective of people.

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possibility of collectively constituted thought and action [capable of] transforming the relations of power that constrict people's lives" (Cruz, 2001, p. 661).

Echoing the latter and building upon past "radical projects of transformation and liberation" (Cruz, 2001, p. 657), the purpose of this study was to examine and center the career education trajectories of economically marginalized first-generation,[2] college-going Latina (EMFGL) students and graduates. Doing so allows the first-generation Latina to alter silence into language and lead her to transgress against the status quo of career education paradigms. This transgression is essential because it permits first-generation Latinas to (a) construct meaning out of their career-seeking identities, (b) define what career and vocation means in their particularized contexts, and (c) rebel against the limitations attached to generalized and Westernized notions of success.

In pairing this inquiry with a deep criticality that can become a "rhetorical device, a means of persuasion, expressing revolutionary or radical ideas to create an active citizenry who enact praxis" (Espinosa-Aguilar, 2005, p. 228), the first-generation, Latina will be fueled to see career and praxis as companions capable of deconstructing the existent forms of injustice in current social spheres. By dissecting the career education trajectories leading many EMFGL students in their higher education spheres, they will better comprehend their personal reasons for positing "a relational . . . and . . . holistic worldview" (Keating, 2008, p. 54) that subverts traditional, academic empiricism and promotes a form of local, national, and global disruption

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[2] For the purposes of this study, "first-generation college student" is defined as any student whose parent(s), caretaker(s), and/or guardian(s) did not receive a bachelor's degree from a 4-year institution in the United States. Students whose parent(s), caretaker(s), and/or guardian(s) attended a 2-year institution, or community college, are also considered first-generation college students. Additionally, students who have had, currently have, or will have siblings in 4-year colleges and universities are, too, considered first-generation. This expanded definition means to account for type of the myriad of differences in filial structures, types of institution attended, and for how long, and the geographic location of the degree-conferring institution. This broadened definition will permit students with these narrative and identity points to participate and be seen by first-generation college student scholarship (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

"that can plant an emotional irritant and hope" (Keating, 2008, p. 54) for restorative justice and representation for the larger Latine community.

A Recommitment to Social Justice-Driven Career Advocacy

The field of career and vocational development has century-old roots in social justice advocacy (Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). Over time, dedication to career-based advocacy has wavered due to societal influences, but the impetus to provide and devote "renewed attention and focus on historically underserved populations" (Jehangir et al., 2020, p. 59) has regained traction in higher education spaces. As the momentum to provide intentional career education to historically and systemically underserved populations has increased, multiple gaps in knowledge have been exposed. Among these gaps lie questions regarding methodology, ideology, and intentionality—questions that shift and change depending on students' multiple identities, histories, and sensibilities. Influenced by these scholarship gaps, the use of the term "career education" is purposeful, as it will refer to a holistic understanding of the recognized—and unrecognized—processes of career formation. Commonly referred to as career or professional development, career education points to the initiatives, policies, programming, curricula, outreach, and access to networks students have to develop the skills needed to discern, choose, and attain a career or vocation that aligns with their personal values, beliefs, success metrics, and sense of purpose.

To parallel the inquiries with which career development scholars are engaging, I present this research with a commitment to examine the way current research and practice has situated EMFGL in the discourse and formation of social justice-driven career education services. Within the literature featured and serving this research, a recurring and salient call to action emerged— the need for identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining career counseling and education

practices. Guiding this call to action was my understanding and definitional use of the term identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining career counseling. Heavily influenced by the contours and understandings of the term intersectionality—and the history that further expands one's current understanding of Crenshaw's (1991) exploration of intersectionality—the use of the term identity-intersectional was meant to be interpreted as a fluid, yet highly sociopolitical, experience (Harris & Patton, 2019). This experience aimed to question—and learn from— history, present day legacies of oppression, and the way in-flux, identity-based realities define an everyday world for an individual who does not societally align to the paradigms of White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1984/2004).

Closely connected to the parameters defining the term identity intersectional, I have operationalized culturally sustaining career counseling via my understanding of culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy as outlined by movements and scholarship dedicated to Indigenous-led education; Indigenous sovereignty; and the asset-based, gift-giving nature of Indigenous teachings, culture, and resistance (Jacob et al., 2018; McCarty & Lee, 2014). In this context, culturally sustaining career counseling details the way higher education practitioners and career educators can come to imbue and weave culture into the knowledge sharing process that constitutes career counseling and preparation. Beyond this context, culturally sustaining career counseling seeks to complicate the relationship between Western-dominant understandings, the promulgation of individualized success, and the existence of these hegemonic understandings in higher education.

The need for persistent nuancing and criticality is imperative, for it draws people to the ever-evolving root causes that undergird injustice and their perusal of justice. Pointedly, the need to identify the myriad of influences permeating unchallenged forms of career education,

culturally sustaining career education, and what that proactively means and looks like is worthy of examination. Because the principles of culturally sustaining career counseling draw breath from culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2014), the employment of this term sought to honor the history detailing its existence while consistently seeking for its next justice-seeking evolution, a change that must arrive as forms of dominant rhetoric and control also continue to evolve (The Invisible Committee, 2009).

Undoubtedly, the necessity of social justice in educational spheres is a constant and exhaustive battle for collective dignity. Education is steeped in historical processes that detail (a) erasure; (b) manipulation of legal procedures and policies; and (c) the struggle of peoples, communities, and resisters who aim to expose and disintegrate the "mythical Anglo-American culture that required them to experience a process of self-alienation and harsh assimilation" (Williamson et al., 2007, p. 211). Assimilative rhetoric is dictated by an obsession with mobility and meritocracy that then constructs an American nation-state that sells a guise of exceptionalism, purity, and innocence. Given this dominant doctrine, social justice—through identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining practices—is (a) the lifeline, (b) the path to inquiry, (c) the struggle for subversive epistemologies that no longer want to be depicted as subversive, and (d) the unapologetic search for principles of justice that center sensibilities and social histories in the search and application of praxis.

By the means of identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining practices, grappling educators (i.e., educators on the tightropes of justice work) will be tasked to go beyond cultural maintenance and, instead, create cultural shifts where "revolutionary consequences of . . . cultural identifications generates . . . activism, . . . art, . . . sexuality," (Moraga, 2011, p. 13) consciousness, and possibility—all while reinforcing and humanizing people's efforts via

accompaniment, exploration of root causes, and compassion. These elements lead to possibilities and questions that can no longer remain hidden behind dominant agendas and unexplored forms of dominant-approved justice—a form of justice approached by higher education institutions unwilling to do the work truly attributed to antiracist, antioppressive, abolitionist education.

Leaning on the spirit and energy stabilizing this examination, the following question guided this study: What would it look like to create social justice-driven, identity-intersectional, and culturally sustaining career education services for economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas? Although this question gradually entered first-generation student-centric scholarship, the implementation of justice initiatives was contingent on university culture and context. As portrayed through the subsequent pages of this study and labor of love, the prospect of shifting university cultures lies heavily on student realities, student-driven grassroots organizing, and the unapologetic act of intentionally centering identity in practice. In the spirit of honoring the change agency pertinent to the first-generation college student experience, I narrowly focused on what has been done for first-generation Latina students in the realm of identity-specific career education and preparation services. Fueling the latter was an alignment to social justice principles, which have urged higher education practitioners to investigate what must be done to catalyze equity and justice for first-generation change makers wishing to make worth and sense of the collegiate undertaking.

Given the multiplicity of the racially and economically marginalized, first-generation student experience—specifically, first-generation Latinas—this social justice-centric research study called for innovative career education practices that center student lives and an examination of the larger question: "How and why are institutions failing to serve first-generation college students?" (Garriott, 2020, p. 89). Consequently, this question must come to

permeate the objectives and strategic plans that universities lead with as they continue to shift their focus to becoming career-ready institutions. It is imperative to identify the increasing myriad demands placed on those who work in career education centers—demands that principally include heightened expectations to produce generalized career practices that positively respond to students with privileged sources of social capital but can disenfranchise EMFGL students who do not have access to capital-driven networks. In turn, these career practices most often falter because college-wide solutions cannot respond to the particularities, histories, and sensibilities with which first-generation students enter spaces (Fickling et al., 2018). In identifying the way collegiate culture silences and thwarts EMFGL students' sense-making journeys, scholars, practitioners, and students can collectively coalesce to reconstruct career and vocation education methods with context, history, and culture in mind.

Emerging research assessing current gaps in scholarship about career and vocational development practices has shown identity characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and college generational status affects the career efficacy and decision-making growth process for racially and economically marginalized students (Pulliam et al., 2017; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020; Storlie et al., 2016). What is more, those who work with first-generation college students know students enter "a whole new world as they [transition] to college" (Gibbons et al., 2019, p. 501). To ease the magnitude of the transition and ensure student motivation toward degree completion, career and vocational education centers must take on the role of increasing students' awareness around the assets their identities carry (Gibbons et al., 2019). In creating room for identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining practices, career practitioners can assist students in maneuvering the questions and potential external and internal conflicts that some EMFGL students may be experiencing (Ma et al., 2014).

First-Generation College Students in Academia

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Center for First-Generation Student Success reported that nearly "56% [of undergraduate students] had parents who did not have a bachelor's degree" (RTI International, 2019, p. 1). The median annual parental income among first-generation students averaged $41,000 per household in comparison to the $90,000 continuing-generation families report (RTI International, 2019). In turn, these data points deliver context on the extrinsic motivations affecting first-generation college students' decisions to pursue higher education, including access to and potential promise of upward social and economic mobility (Garriott et al., 2013).

Although the first-generation student identity is not monolithic, disparate amounts of first-generation college students are racialized students from economically marginalized communities (Tate et al., 2015). Therefore, for students identifying as "first-generation +"—first-generation students who carry additional identities (e.g., first-generation + economically marginalized)—completing a "college degree is clearly tied to employability and mental wellness" (Tate et al., 2015, p. 294). Failure to succeed in attaining a meaningful—and potentially lucrative—career is equivalent to failing one's loved ones and failing one's communities in need. Complicating this inequity further is the dearth of research, existing career theories, advocacy, and programmatic efforts surrounding identity-intersectional and culturally responsive career development processes (Garriott, 2020).

With this intersection of complexities in mind, racially and economically marginalized first-generation students are currently found at various points of academic and career-based disenfranchisement propagated by academia—the source of upward socioeconomic mobility on which many EMFGL students are told to rely. This disenfranchisement, however, warrants

further exploration as the pursual for meaningful postgraduate careers may collide with Westernized, dominant depictions of success—success that is often linked to economic mobility, a goal that EMFGL students may also carry with them. Fueled by this juxtaposition, the seemingly under-examined connection between meaningful postgraduate careers and economic mobility of racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students and graduates was an undertone leading the efforts of this scholarship.

Undoubtedly, collegiate spaces must advocate for a reconceptualization of the measures that have kept underserved, underresourced, and underrepresented students from attaining an equity-led education (Garriott, 2020;Jehangir et al., 2020; Kantamneni et al., 2018; Kantamneni et al., 2016; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). Included in these efforts, higher education practitioners must re-evaluate the way they embed student leaders and student communities into the career and vocational initiative-building process—an understudied area of research and an underpreformed practice. To understand an institution's respective student populations, institutional leaders must comprehend the sociocultural histories and present-day complexities students carry with them. Intentional disregard of the latter can create a culture of mistrust, disconnection, isolation, uncertainty, and erasure between the institution and the student. This is especially true for specific student populations (Kantamneni et al., 2016).

It is crucial, then, that career and vocational scholars begin to illuminate the marginalities and processes sidelining EMFGL students. In creating room for identity-intersectional and sociocultural practices, career practitioners can assist students to maneuver the questions and potential external and internal conflicts that some EMFGL students may be experiencing (Ma et al., 2014). Critically, emerging researchers assessing current gaps in scholarship about culturally responsive career and vocational development practices have agreed that identity characteristics

such as gender, race/ethnicity, and college generational status impacts and influences the career efficacy and decision-making growth process for EMFGL students (Pulliam et al., 2017; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020; Storlie et al., 2016). What is more, racially and economically marginalized first-generation students with "lower levels of career decision-making self-efficacy often exhibit feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety" (Pulliam et al., 2017, p. 80). This constant evidence confirms EMFGL students are facing a combination of stressors that are compacted by the "unclear goals and plans regarding their careers post-graduation" (Pulliam et al., 2017, p. 80).

Problem Statement

First-generation college students have challenged higher education practitioners, administrators, faculty, and academic communities to push the boundaries of what is known about first-generation students and how the known translates into effective student-centered practices. Though first-generation centric scholarship has gained traction in research fields, first-generation scholars are now going beneath the surface and unveiling the multifaceted layers of the first-generation student experience. In this study, I sought to attend to that call for understanding and to place first-generation specific career education services at the center of examination.

Considering career and vocational support services have century-old roots in social-justice advocacy and global imagination, this advocacy history and purpose has not been intentionally embedded in the career education units and initiatives collegiate students encounter today. The existence of a commitment to justice, however, leaves room to believe that a recommitment and realignment to that mission is possible. Thus, I have introduced and paved the way for the latter by considering two main problems of practice: (a) the lack of identity-

intersectional and culturally sustaining career education, counseling, and preparation services present at colleges and universities; and (b) the dearth of specific career services for first-generation students, as a whole, at institutions of higher education. By way of examining how career education experiences assisted, or hindered, EMFGL students and graduates, I constructed a foundation for replicating this study for multiple first-generation+ populations also beckoning justice-driven scholarship on and about their nuanced first-generation histories.

As seen in gradually evolving literature, a handful of scholars and practitioners have undergirded the need to re-evaluate Western-influenced ideologies driving career preparation services (Jehangir et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2014; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). As they exist, career and vocational development offerings do not speak to the societal contexts with which EMFGL students enter universities (Conkel-Ziebell et al., 2018), and a response to this gap requires a full-throttle re-envisioning of equity enhanced by research, supported by evidence, maintained by invested stakeholders, and driven by student experience and voice. Such a re-envisioning entails recognizing that career counselors, scholars, and practitioners have had minimal training and autonomy to conduct identity-intersectional and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Fickling, 2016; Fickling et al., 2018; Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Consequently, because of this dearth of experiential justice-built knowledge, EMFGL students have been left to trail-blaze their paths with little-to-no personalized guidance. For many EMFGL students, notions of family, honor, alliance, community care, prosocial restorative justice, and immense responsibility embrace their college journeys—realities not often spoken about as asset-based skills that can lead to meaningful postgraduate lives. These collectivist notions, in turn, clash with the individualistic culture of collegiate and career development spaces, and this riff creates an alienation between student services and the students needing those services (Jehangir et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2014;

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Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020)—a clash that must take space in research about first-generation career education and preparation encounters.

To openly disregard the immense meaning of college pursual for EMFGL students and to meet it with ill-prepared, generalized practices means perpetuating a cyclical routine of educational inequity. Notwithstanding, justice and equity-centric practitioners are on the precipice of shattering boundaries surrounding their student populaces. Effectively and justly responding to these movements is a highly political, individual, and collective endeavor that requires spirit, authenticity, and ingenuity, but, above all elements, it requires the heart. This work is closely interwoven with the activist legacies left behind by students and stakeholders who palpably felt the rush of *magis* [of more]; stepping up to that inheritance equates to the restorative and radical love capable of taking up space in higher education. To enact less than what the latter beckons is to leave EMFGL student populations in the dark, an action that—with or without practitioners—will ultimately see the light because first-generation trailblazers carry torches with them.

Purpose of Study

Within the current social, cultural, political, and economic environment, higher education leaders have been governed by political, educational, and multisystemic authorities that categorize specific communities as backward, deficit, and incapable—an expression of racial hatred profoundly rooted in procedures of White supremacy.

Considering EMFGL students have garnered presence in higher education spheres, I posit their existence in predominantly White academies and career spheres can transform student services and modes of leadership. In service of that transformative agenda, the purpose of this study was to (a) examine career education, counseling, and preparation services (terms used

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interchangeably); (b) explore how these services specifically support or further subjugate EMFGL students; and (c) make center EMFGL student and graduate trajectories. The purpose was to gain an enhanced understanding of how EMFGL students and graduates view the career education and preparation services they are, or were, exposed to during their collegiate tenures and how they perceive those services to benefit or hinder their career identities and journeys. Furthermore, I sought to discover what EMFGL students and recent graduates expected to have learned from their institutions' career education services and what they would want, or have wanted, specifically to have learned as an EMFGL student who does not leave their identities at the door when entering the workforce. Using Garriott's (2020) critical cultural wealth model (CCWM) of academic and career development, my objective was to further analyze current career education, counseling, and preparation services while concurrently positioning participant narrative as robust examples of what career education services could be for students who live at different identity standpoints and borderlands.

A secondary purpose of this research was to further present the literature, analysis, and recommendations needed for first-generation practitioners and career educators to spur specific dialogues and initiatives in their own educational contexts. In providing an additional voice to the many calls to action, practitioners and EMFGL students alike can continue to alter silence into language and demand accountable, transparent, and specific career preparation services that will speak to the personal and professional realities EMFGL students and graduates face. This academic resistance is essential, for it fuels the subversion needed to reconceptualize traditional academic empiricisms and services that sideline student populations yearning to reap the benefit of a higher education, yearning to make sense and make worth of the many personal and filial sacrifices made to cross the graduation stage.

Research Questions

The following guiding question helped contextualize the objectives of this qualitative study: What are the experiences of economically marginalized first-generation Latinas (EMFGL) as they pursue their career aspirations during their college tenures? To augment and nuance this search, I present the additional research questions:

1. What are the understandings of EMFGL graduates on the effects of career education services on their career development?

2. How can economically marginalized, first-generation Latina epistemology inform practices for career development services?

The nature of this work asked much of the questions I posed and offered. Despite this, it was my conviction and prerogative to counter the boundaries of present research to create language for the realities EMFGL students and graduates lead. Using this motivation, these questions—with the aid of Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development— helped me recognize the missing links in the current comprehension of career counseling and preparation services to encourage a transformative movement toward culturally sustaining, experience-situated academic and career-ready cultures. In doing so, these *movimientos de rebeldia* [insurgent movements] can negate silence and claim the resistance needed to redefine the spheres that systematically and hegemonically have rejected EMFGL student histories and future identities.

Significance of Study

Contribution to Scholarship

As emerging trends have continued to demonstrate, "first-generation college students tend to be members of economically and racially marginalized groups and comprise increasingly

large numbers of the college-going population" (Ward et al., 2012, p. 14 as cited in Garriott, 2020, p. 80). Although this highly intersectional student population has continued to merit access to higher education spaces despite the lack of network and economic privileges wielded by many of their continuing generation counterparts, much of the literature, theoretical understandings, and programmatic approaches have been deeply reliant on "existing academic and career theory, which was not developed to specifically address the needs of [EMFGL] students" (Garriott, 2020, p. 80). In observing this lack of programmatic adaptation and theory refinement, my aim was to contribute to the field of first-generation college student career education scholarship, as this research in this area of first-generation studies has currently gained traction. In adding to this growing call for justice-rooted career education, I will be able to contribute to the nuanced efforts being led by the growing number of first-generation and career education scholar-practitioners seeking to shift practices from generic stances to transformative possibilities.

Contribution to Praxis

The intersection of social justice; career decision making; vocational identity; class-related career issues; and career aspirations, goals, and choices present a call for "career development educators to assume the mantle of advocating for equity and social justice causes" (Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020, p. 3). This call is complex, but it attempts to showcase the asset-based contributions first-generation college students gift to the academy and its multifold community stakeholders. Yet, the contributions EMFGL students continually offer university settings—by way of multidimensional leadership and service—has been met by a dearth of specific career education resources and opportunities. As such, this project offers an exploration powered by analytical critique but also provides robust recommendations for improved forms of career education practices as reported by participant voice. In turn, the insights drawn from

participant voice can inform interested first-generation and career counseling practitioners about the numerous ways career praxis can come to value and effectively integrate "social justice and advocacy in university career centers" (Fickling et al., 2018, p. 64).

Contribution to Social Justice

Undeniably, "career services staff [and counseling] can play a key role in retention efforts and model leadership in multicultural and social justice best practices" (Fickling et al., 2018, p. 64). Reflecting on this possibility, understanding the role of career educators and the education they extend to the career journeys of EMFGL students is imperative. As emerging data continue to prove, racially and economically first-generation students have continued to exit university-level studies with significant student loan debt and lessened career decision efficacy. Consequently, many EMFGL students—because of the struggle associated with financing their education—have placed many college-related needs, rites of passage, and crucial professional development experiences to the side due to financial inaccessibility and the lack of specific knowledge capable of fueling future economic mobility. Given this reality, many students have maneuvered a double-edge sword—not having sufficient funds to afford the educational, professional, and experiential realities associated with college and postgraduate success and taking on the massive responsibility of paying back the loans used to pay for their inequitable "basic package" education.

Considering these confluences and identified concerns, my aim was to assess how higher education institutions can eradicate the generalization of their career counseling and education resources and bridge this preparation to their most influential, yet financially and racially vulnerable, populations. This study's importance was not in its hot-topic status but in its prevalence in the many stories first-generation advocates often witness in their respective

students. In comprehending how nuanced and specific career education can assist students in refocusing their capacity on their career futures, it may be possible to see a national shift toward access, justice, and meaningful postgraduate lives beyond mere survival.

This examination was also dedicated to a collective search that has unfound roots, unstable pasts, undefined presents, and futures on balance beams. This study was a call for the first-generation student and for the creative-chaotic sway of being at all places and no place at once. Through my research, I sought to carefully collect thoughts that had been sidelined but are beginning to emerge, for many EMFGL culture shifters comprehend that movement progresses to the sound of "for us, by us." This movement is sacred and connected to the reasons why educators turn to resistance; turn to *conocimiento* [consciousness]; and turn to the wild tongues disobeying the constructs of language, knowledge, and power. This work was an ode to social justice principles, the foundations, the spirits and the bodies that sacrificed, the in-between moments of loss and gain, and the instances where the struggle finally sees rest. This work was meant to reveal how EMFGL students and graduates can come to use their career counseling and education realities as a faculty and a sensibility to (re)define the spaces that constrain, define, and drive their steps beyond the collegiate space. In illuminating these trajectories and carefully piecing together the experiences that inform a renewed formation and constitution of career education, the EMFGL student will be enabled to take this agency to accompany, fight, and ultimately push the boundaries of what higher education deems as effective—an act and praxis of radical love that can come to revolutionize the educational corners we inhabit.

Theoretical Influences

For my leading theoretical influence and unit of analysis, I used critical race theory (CRT) as a structural guide to assess and reaffirm the existence of racially marginalized students

as "holders and creators of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 105). As it stands, CRT draws relation to the foundations of critical theory, a theory attempting to conceptualize and dismantle systemic forms of societal injustice to spur collective and individual resistance and liberation (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Building on the history and justice-based power of this theoretical infrastructure, CRT centers the processes of race and racism in the macro relations of domination. With this orientation in mind, the merging of CRT with borderland theory is a call to the multidimensional nature of critical theory when it intersects with educational discourses, and their theoretical coalescing creates a counter story and counter-hegemonic practice against suppressive academic cultures and practices. In upholding and having provided these claims, CRT aided my presentation of an epistemology connected to experiential knowledge, embodied action, and educative justice. Related to these epistemological pillars is a close-knit commitment to social justice that grounds this experience beyond the individualized reality. These complex goals are meant to prepare EMFGL students for:

> the need to thoroughly understand who we are . . . and to believe in our gifts, talents, our worthiness and beauty, while having to survive within the constructs of a world antithetical to our intuition and knowledge. . . . [In this midst of dualism, who,] in this world of the glorification of material wealth, Whiteness, and phallic worship would consider us holders of knowledge that could transform this world into a place where the quality of life for living things on this planet is the utmost priority? (Castillo, 1995, p. 149)

Castillo's (1995) question expanded rhetorical positioning, for it handled the daily social histories of emerging racially and economically marginalized scholars who maneuver the expectations assumed by their multispace, multiworld lives. In exploring assumptions and

balancing space, CRT frameworks provide a direct connection between EMFGL student experiences and the academy that challenges their validity. This theoretical baseline gives EMFGL students the avenue to "uncover and explore the various ways in which [dominant ideologies operate]" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 108).

In close connection to the latter, this framework was malleable enough to include critical sources of knowledge that construct analyses and worldview epistemologies for many EMFGL students. This framework was imperative to my study because this epistemological orientation is dedicated to the antisubordination projects that connect praxis to the academy and the academy to the larger community. With this intention in mind, CRT's foundations affirmed and acknowledged my purpose for writing—"that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109)—a juxtaposition that mirrors the existing forces surrounding the EMFGL student.

Adding to the impetus CRT beckons to which educators to respond, I included borderland theory to guide my intersectional focus of three salient forms of historical, yet proactive, oppression—racial, economic, and college-generational marginalization. To comprehend the influence of borderland theory requires an understanding that an individual's life cannot be subjected to a single understanding of reality. It not only concerns itself with reframing research inquiries, but it also constructs a space for paradigms that can propel productions of knowledge that are "critical of conventional wisdom and consciously aware of social location" (Lorber, 2011, p. 173).

When evaluating the significance of borderland theory in interdisciplinary fields and conversations, it is apparent that the question of identity intersection is left to be addressed as an

intersecting whole that operates within different worlds and defies borders. Yet, borderland theory creates a stable and inclusive third-space platform that, particularly, contributes to the furthering of multiple, differing realities while centering the remarkability of humankind— intersectionality. This guiding framework actively places multiple racial-ethnic and economic viewpoints, social histories, and realities on the forefront, and, when considering both my study's objectives and methodological tactics, these theoretical considerations were significant because they create a home for new research and cultural productions. Most importantly, as a theoretical informant, borderland theory creates a safe harbor and battlefield for those who want to initiate and form resistant educational cultures.

Interconnectedly, borderland theorists have taken great strides in building current understandings of consciousness. As a theory that situates many conversations in interdisciplinary spheres, its relevance and complicity has spurred two imperative objectives: (a) a grounding of framework of guidance; and (b) the courage to create boldly, loudly, and purposefully. Intentionally, borderland theory is rooted in hybridity. It is grounded in an interpretation that is constantly comprehending its social location while learning to straddle the dominant culture to ensure protection and livelihood (Vera & de los Santos, 2005). Indeed, the functioning force of borderland theory is its presence, for it makes itself known "whenever two or more cultures edge each other, as a border culture, or la frontera" (Vera & de los Santos, 2005, p. 105). Yet, just as this site of collision persists, its prevailing result assists in the "formation of an alternative identity that learns to develop a tolerance for the inconsistencies, ambiguity, and contradictions that [are] . . . encounter[ed] in daily life" (Vera & de los Santos, 2005, p. 106). Consequently, this hybrid mixture of the here-nor-there sets a platform for the act of naming our ever-straddling, ever-creating identities. Its sensibility allows EMFGL students to operate under

pluralisms, under lime lights that turn "ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101).

Recognizing this creation, however, signifies crafting acknowledgment for the separatist, torn, nature that also occupies an EMFGL student's flux in thought and experience. In forcibly shaking hands with the idea that an EMFGL student is expected to comply with both creation and assimilation, one stands witness to the work that is presented by the raging presence of dichotomy and shift. Borderland theory allows for a reparation of schisms and dichotomies while asking for an examination of those schisms, but each new encounter comes with a discourse that asks for a merging of worlds and a temporary respite from having to use the master's tools to survive (Lorde, 1984/2007). Ultimately, in employing this guiding structure, this theoretical framework allows students, scholars, and dissenters alike to seek representation, reconstruction, and empowerment; by attaining a powerhouse of the three, the marginalized EMFGL narrative will cease to be hegemonically and forcibly silenced.

Conceptual Framework

First-generation college students entering collegiate spaces bring with them nuanced histories, sociopolitical realities, and culturally based faculties that university settings are ill-equipped to properly serve. As centers such as the NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success have continued to materialize, efforts to respond "to ongoing and emerging policy issues that intersect with first-generation identities" have, too (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA] & The Sunder Foundation, 2021). Correspondingly, these growing efforts attempt to match the ever-growing population of first-generation college students on college campuses. As evidenced in the "academic year 2015–2016, 56% of undergraduates nationally were first-generation college students (neither parent had a bachelor's degree), and

59% of these students were also the first sibling in their family to go to college" (RTI International, 2019, p. 1). However, of the undergraduate students who graduated in the "academic year of 2015–2016, 42% were first-generation college graduates, and 58% were continuing-generation college graduates" (RTI International, 2021, p. 1). Markedly, the statistical margins are illustrative of the evidence-based practices and critical, empirical research needed to capture the profundity of this significant and understudied population. With this intention, it is imperative to present and critically employ conceptual frameworks that are responsive to the diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging principles that define what higher education can be and mean to the EMFGL student.

According to NASPA and the Sunder Foundation (2021), "First-generation success in higher education equates to generational change in families and economic change within communities and [is, ultimately,] an important consideration when acknowledging how issues affect first-generation students" (para. 1). To best serve this success, I presented Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development as the conceptual framework that guided this study. Garriott's CCWM features four intersectional dimensions: (a) structural and institutional conditions, (b) social-emotional experiences, (c) career self-authorship, and (d) cultural wealth.

I chose this conceptual framework because it stands deviant and subversive to traditional career frameworks—such as social cognitive career theory—that "are not comprehensive in their inclusion of sociopolitical factors that have been identified as important to [racially and economically marginalized] students or how these factors may interact to reproduce or disrupt marginalization" (Garriott, 2020, p. 81). The CCWM outrightly identifies as a critical theory dedicated to delineating the histories, sensibilities, responsibilities, and faculties that shape and

influence EMFGL stories and futures. Explicitly, the CCWM of academic and career development is, in its essence, interdisciplinary and dependent on first-generation college student narratives, an approach that mirrors the nature of a small number of emerging first-generation college student scholarship efforts. As Garriott (2020) described:

> Too often, foundational literature on FGEM [first-generation and economically marginalized] students have located their challenges at the individual level. The CCWM challenges researchers to move beyond individualistic, monolithic conceptualizations of FGEM students' academic adjustment and career development. For example, instead of asking "Why do first-generation students fail?" (e.g., Mehta et al., 2011), the CCWM compels researchers to ask "Why do institutions fail first-generation students?" This critical perspective is a necessary shift for placing FGEM students' challenges in context and scrutinizing institutional factors that limit their success. (p. 89)

Critical scrutiny, in the name of paradigmatic shifts in how racially and economically marginalized first-generation students are researched, is at the epicenter of this conceptual framework. As mentioned, four dimensions guide this critical scrutiny, and together, they create alternative viewpoints that hold the hegemonic practices of higher education accountable for their academic erasure and practice of framing racially and economically marginalized first-generation students as the cause of their marginalization. The four dimensions are as follows: (a) structural and institutional conditions, (b) social-emotional experiences, (c) career self-authorship, and (d) cultural wealth.

Structural and Institutional Conditions

For the purposes of this study, I viewed Garriott's (2020) first dimension—structural and institutional conditions—as the primary and leading dimension of the CCWM due to its pointed

mission of getting to the root cause of why harmful, power-laden ideologies and practices are perpetuated. According to Garriott (2020), this dimension has a particular "interest of challenging deficit-based narratives that have traditionally been used to describe FGEM students' experiences, [and by way of the CCWM, to conceive] of their challenges as symptoms of an oppressive system" (p. 84). Central to this dimension is an exploration of five forms of oppression: (a) exploitation, (b) marginalization, (c) powerlessness, (d) cultural imperialism, and (e) violence (Young, 2013). Because the interplay of these dimensions magnifies as EMFGL students journey through their day-to-day realities, it is vital to comprehend how these dimensions bar opportunities for EMFGL students and negate EMFGL presence inside and outside of collegiate walls. To further contextualize these five forms of oppression, Garriott (2020) operationalized each form.

Exploitation

Garriott (2020) defined exploitation as "the degree to which FGEM students' time and efforts are taken advantage of for the benefit of others" (p. 84). As examples of this form of oppression, Garriott mentioned two specific cases of exploitation: (a) FGEM students working long hours at off-campus worksites or multiple on-campus work-study positions to fund their educational costs and basic necessities, a method of economic marginalization normalized by higher education cultures that, ultimately, benefit the fiscal bottom lines of employers; and (b) the overrepresentation of FGEM students in ever-growing for-profit and online programs, another method of exploitative action that requires EMFGL students to accrue considerable debt in exchange for a degree that may not be of economic worth or value (Garriott, 2020).

Marginalization

Marginalization, under Garriott's (2020) CCWM, "captures exclusion from campus activities and resources as well as discrimination based on one's identity" (p. 84). Garriott viewed marginalization as the way an institution's practices, policies, curriculum, and programmatic offerings affect students who cannot access the funding, time, or resources to actively participate in the cost and time-consuming nature of academic and career building experiences.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness "refers to one's perceived authority, status, and sense of self. It is reflective of one's ability to make influential decisions and their sense of respect from others" (Young, 2013, p. 56, as cited in Garriott, 2020, p. 84). Garriott (2020) offered powerlessness as a form of oppression because of the liminal social statuses EMFGL students maneuver in collegiate spaces, a social status that is further prone to erasure due to the institutional classism demonstrated by rising tuition costs. Tuition increases promote an unspoken, yet relentlessly present, reminder that a higher education for the EMFGL student is out of reach and, if attained, an egregious battle to keep.

Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism details "the imposition of dominant higher education norms (e.g., individualism and capitalism) on FGEM students" (Garriott, 2020, p. 84). As an element not thoroughly investigated and critiqued in the field of career education, cultural imperialism via Garriott's (2020) interpretation places emphasis on the detrimental, Western-driven ideologies defining postgraduate career and vocational success. Garriott outlined the myriad ways individualistic norms negatively impact the academic progress of first-generation college

students and how students who are encouraged and nourished to hone in on their cultural heritage and accompanying assets surpass the successes of their privileged counterparts.

Violence

According to Garriott (2020), violence refers to "the actual experience and fear of violence based on one's identity. This may include physical violence as well as 'harassment, intimidation, or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members' (Young, 2013, p. 46)" (p. 85). As part of identity-intersectional populations, EMFGL students are often subjected to violent forms of harassment, assault, and discrimination in on- and off-campus spaces. These forms of violence increased steadily after the 2016 elections, and, as aggrieved victims of these identity-motivated crimes, EMFGL students must constantly maneuver realities that threaten survival and existence.

Carefully observing and critically acting to challenge the described five forms of oppression is essential, as doing so can contextualize and make visible how knowledge, language, power, and privilege continue to deleteriously regulate and control how the EMFGL student accesses, survives, understands, and is minimally supported in higher education. With this frame in mind, higher education practitioners must come to face and contend with how their upholding of this educative harm consistently enacts forms of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual violence on EMFGL students. The structural and institutional dimension, as the leading dimension of the CCWM, beckons practitioners and the systems they operate in to acknowledge how their misinformed, miseducated malpractices have become the regularized norm that shuns and silences what EMFGL students are attempting to define for themselves, their communities, and the generation they are attempting to build.

Social-Emotional Experiences

Garriott's (2020) social-emotional experiences dimension begins with its foundations in the borderlands. The socioemotional borderlands—or worlds—that EMFGL students are called to respond to are worlds that encompass their filial, academic, community, and emerging career identities. These socioemotional crossroads are understood in research and practice as the psychological experiences of first-generation college students—an area of scholarship that does not have a present conceptual framework that can fully explain the tensions that are a part of this magnitude. Yet, Garriott attempts to present three tensions that are present in the literature: (a) campus cultural fit, (b) normative capital, and (c) school–family integration.

Campus Cultural Fit

The first identified tension of campus cultural fit describes "the extent to which an FGEM student feels they are engaged, welcomed, and belongs at their university" (Garriott, 2020, p. 85). This sense of engagement, welcome, and belonging is in reference to the manner in which collegiate campuses have created social milieus, hidden curricula, and cultural traditions that are responsive to White, middle- to upper-class students. This form of cultural alienation asserts the perpetuation of the dominant "who"—who gets to define whose values and whose existence is seen as worthy and significant. Relevant trends in higher education scholarship agree that a heightened sense of belonging and value congruence is correlated to academic success, persistence, and eventual graduation; yet, that sense of belonging and congruence runs parallel to the dominant student. EMFGL students who exist outside this paradigm and its enactment are often charged to puzzle out the ways, methods, and connections that make their college journeys fit the collegiate culture. In turn, this "fend for yourself" status quo is seen as a rite of passage and as occurrences that are a part of the college experience. However, as this tension reveals, this

systematically accepted theme of individualism has deeply affected EMFGL social-emotional experiences.

Normative Capital

The second identified tension of the social-emotional crossroads dimension, normative capital, describes an "FGEM student's subjective assessment of the degree to which their access to resources and knowledge align with normative forms of capital privileged by their institution" (Garriott, 2020, p. 86). Often referred to as the hidden curriculum, normative capital underscores the amount of campus know-how to which an EMFGL student has access. This campus know-how may include, but is not limited to, (a) a student's knowledge about where to go for academic support, (b) what to expect out of classroom participation, and (c) how to access office hours and go about them (Garriott, 2020). These normative forms of capital produce a gap of knowledge that posits EMFGL students as "deficit" for not holding the prior knowledge of how to conduct these procedures. Consequently, upon encountering these normative capital processes, EMFGL students are then placed in unique socioemotional positions where tools like class and cultural code-switching are used to "fit" into a dominant discourse, situation, and/or action (Garriott, 2020).

School–Family Integration

The last identified tension of the social-emotional crossroads dimension is school–family integration. This last tension speaks "to an FGEM student's feelings of connectedness and support from their family in relation to their college attendance" (Garriott, 2020, p. 86). This dimension involves a multitude of close-knit psycho-social-emotional experiences that accompany EMFGL students far past their collegiate tenures. Concepts such as "family achievement guilt" and its close partner, "survivor's guilt," follow this social-emotional

crossroad, as family and community narratives follow the memory work, present day experiences, and future motivations of EMFGL students. Relatedly, these narratives create a juxtaposing dichotomy that fuels an EMFGL student's need to pursue consistent success in the name of family, but that also creates an emotional rip and riff, producing a sense of complex guilt that often requires an EMFGL student to examine how their college-going status can affect them, their prior identity in a family structure, and what the latter entails moving forward.

Significantly, Garriott (2020) pointed out that "one's intersectional experience of structural and institutional challenges may shape social-emotional experiences" (p. 86). This interwoven relationship between dimensions reveals and reinforces that there is no singular approach to how higher education practitioners design or craft their solutions to their most pressing educational injustices. There exists no exact way to enumerate the multitudinous ways forms of oppression multiply and intersect. The social-emotional experiences dimension exacerbates the acknowledgement that EMFGL students are existing in and balancing worlds that researchers, practitioners, and educators have yet to bridge.

Career Self-Authorship

Career self-authorship is comprised of various sensibilities including the "capacity to 'analyze data, critique multiple perspectives, understand contexts, and negotiate competing interests to make wise decisions'" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269, as cited in Garriott, 2020, p. 87). Under Garriott's interpretation, an EMFGL student's sense of self-authorship entails that a student has a grasp and understanding of three main skills: "(a) the ability to critically analyze structural forces and how they shape one's experience, (b) a sense of control and agency, and (c) confidence in one's internal capacities to solve problems and make important life choices" (Carpenter & Peña, 2017 and Jehangir et al., 2012, as cited in Garriott, 2020, p. 87).

Considering Garriott's (2020) approach to the CCWM, the skills are tools that are pertinent to the EMFGL student experience, as EMFGL student realities have given this student population a unique approach to interpreting, further cultivating, and specifically narrowing in on these skills to potentially build nuanced career development trajectories if given the proper access and training. Further, this dimension alludes to additional abilities that have already been proven and articulated in previous understandings of vocational constructs. These abilities include personal self-reflexivity, an accounting and intake of context, and problem solving—all abilities that are related to research on career adaptability. Via Garriott's (2020) research, the notion of career adaptability "includes *concern* about one's career development, *control* over one's career decisions, *curiosity* about one's fit within the world of work, and *confidence* in one's ability to execute academic and career choices (Savickas, 2005)" (p. 87). Given this definition, when EMFGL students are in environments (a) in which they critically hold knowledge over structural and institutional conditions, (b) that thoroughly acknowledge their social-emotional crossroads, and (c) that help further catalyze their sense of career self-authorship, the potential of what career self-authorship can result in is "academic persistence, career or major choice satisfaction, and well-being" (Garriott, 2020, p. 87).

Cultural Wealth

Cultural wealth is the last dimension detailed in Garriott's (2020) CCWM. Cultural wealth builds and aligns closely to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model and focuses on the assets, strengths, and capital of marginalized students. Under this dimension, Garriott (2020) further critiqued the tendency first-generation scholarship leans toward, a tendency that continues to seek what is wrong *with* first-generation students. Via the cultural wealth dimension, Garriott beckoned readers, scholars, and practitioners to shift the focus to examine

and investigate how and why first-generation college students continue to resiliently persist in higher education when that same space and culture has caused deleterious harm.

It is imperative to reiterate that Garriott's (2020) approach to cultural wealth, and its incorporation to the CCWM, greatly adheres to the foundational, and now seminal, work of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, a model that vehemently rejects deficit-based narratives and theoretical propositions about racially marginalized individuals and students. Further, Yosso's community cultural wealth model, and now Garriott's (2020) critical cultural wealth model of academic and career development, is rooted and

> grounded in critical race theory (Delgado, 1995), [and, through this grounding,] cultural wealth theory posits that communities of color develop forms of capital to cope with systemic oppression, which are not recognized in dominant narratives of social capital. Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth framework explicates aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, and linguistic capital as forms of capital vital to the health and well-being of communities of color. (Garriott, 2020, p. 88)

Of the forms of capital further explicated in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, Garriott (2020) particularly expounded on family and community capital, critical consciousness, and resilience in the CCWM. Although, Garriott did not provide an in-depth explanation of how the CCWM further progresses the larger understanding of the chosen notions of capital, Garriott did provide a brief overview of how family and community capital, critical consciousness, and resilience play essential roles in the cultural wealth dimension of the CCWM. Garriott's (2020) operationalization of family and community capital includes an exploration of how sources of emotional support a student or individual garners while in school or career can

spur a "sense of pride, meaning, and motivation [in] a FGEM student . . . representing their family and community in college" (p. 89).

Relatedly, Garriott's (2020) use of critical consciousness is connected to a student or individual's ability to contextualize their awareness and realities in the spectrum of systemic oppression, a use of critical consciousness that Garriott connected to the type of contextual awareness found in notions of career authorship. Lastly, Garriott briefly underscored the way FGEM students use resiliency to critically adapt, respond, surpass, and succeed in the presence and encounter of persistent obstacles.

Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development was conceptualized to direct academics and emerging scholar–activists toward an ethic of justice that involves, and fiercely centers, the asset-based experiences of FGEM students as a source and informant of academic and career education to come. Undoubtedly, Garriott's CCWM is a reminder that educators must "never forget that justice is what love looks like in public" (West, 2010), and that love in first-generation studies has appeared as challenging researchers "to move beyond individualistic, monolithic conceptualizations of FGEM students' academic adjustment and career development" (Garriott, 2020, p. 89). My goal, via this study's objectives, was to be influenced by this conceptual framework and to be led by Garriott's (2020) ever-present, guiding, critical question: "Why do institutions fail first-generation students?" (p. 89). This question informed and guided my analytical methods, approaches, and scrutiny.

Methodology

Influenced by Harding's (1992) epistemological ideals, my aim was to piece together a robust collection of data that focused on situated knowledges. With that intentionality in mind, this qualitative study featured a collection on in-depth interviews, which I referred to as verbal

testimonios. To attain specificity, I focused on participants' life stages, which allowed me to narrow in on the histories and present-day narratives of nine EMFGL alumni members. I designed this study to include the voices of EMFGL graduates because scholarship on career education trajectories has yet to map the sociocultural experiences of EMFGL students engaging with career narratives before, during, and after college life. Assessing the shifts or experiences during each of these stages was crucial, as differing themes arose and contested current conceptions of the EMFGL experience. To ensure this process of data collection closely mirrored the values and goals of deliberate, collaborative, and community-driven knowledge creation, I produced reflexive memos to fulfill two intentions: (a) to capture my initial interpretations and processing of the conversations held with each interviewee and (b) to enact a sense of academic *solidaridad* [solidarity] while my EMFGL siblings—my participants—constructed and shared their testimonios in the interview space.

In qualitative fashion, I took each interview transcript and testimonio submission and began to interpret and shape each participant's story. To complement the emerging findings, I aligned each participant story to Garriott's (2020) CCWM framework and connected a priori findings to larger emergent themes that arose by analyzing significant passages from each piece. I further analyzed themes through the theoretical lenses of CRT and borderland theory. Through processes of thematic coding, I was able to "present the understanding of the essence of the experience in written form" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). Despite this infrastructure, presenting data qualitatively entailed making decisions that came with several challenges, including those having to do with personal assumptions and positionalities. To cushion these effects, I paired data processes with an intentional organizational structure featuring a mixture of

inductive and deductive coding that was "reflective of an ever-deepening understanding of the phenomenon experienced" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80).

Positionality

I entered this research with closely connected privileges—being an alumna and professional staff member of a university program that serves racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students. Having these members at hand, I hold the privilege of maintaining a close-knit network that can host my presence and inquiries. Instinctually, these memberships doubled as a conglomeration of moments that not only reinforced my need to conduct these examinations but also reprompted me to recall the complexities involved in occupying these identities, too. These complexities are rich, laden with consciousness, and governed by notions of resistance, and, as such, these memberships asked for my full-fledged presence, a wholeness that community-minded/community-hearted spaces require of its individuals. Educated by these ideologies, I entered this space knowing that my research deviated from traditional norms of data collection because of the deep ties I hold to this evolving first-generation identity and the many unknowns attached to it.

The words detailing my positionality statement describe a fine line between complicity and need. Yet, I understand positionality because Lorde (1984/2007), Moraga (2011), Anzaldúa (1987), hooks (2000), and my (re)sisters created a universe where I could not and would not sever pieces of who I was to serve a politic that did not seek to love me but, instead, disassociated me from my holistic worth to use portions of me that felt comfortable to the dominant. The women of the world who raised me knew, before I ever could, that the merger of my identity markers alone could not define my positionality. Instead, via our shared language for experience and oppression, I used my ever-changing interpretations and presence to counter the

"ways that [higher education] depoliticize[s] and whiten the [theories]" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 349) I used to conceptualize new bridges (Moraga & Azaldúa, 1981).

Now, my positionality begged me to look back to home, to roots, to history, to a life beyond survival. My positionality asked that I explore and honor the ancestral energy and spirit that made it possible for me to become. To do this, my positionality aimed to call processes as they stand and as they are, for failure to do so will only further create norms that perpetuate cyclical harm. Social justice is disruptive, and to live in that love-filled chaos, one must be able to name what we live through and what we are responsible for, whether the latter be legacy-based and/or present-day transgressions. To name the transgression is to bring it into a space, to call its existence into a room, and to, collectively, dismantle what the transgression has created in our history and present. As I attempted to construct understanding and knowledge of the social encounters defining the day-to-day, the self—and how the self embodies those ever-evolving social encounters—served as my anchor. To embody positionality in our endless social fabric of loss and imagination, inequity and healing, struggle and redemption requires feeling the way our approaches to justice work moves in our bodies, conscious states, and the way that chain reaction connects us to the communities we aim to serve.

To strengthen that connection, Jean-Marie (2006), in their work *Welcoming the Unwelcomed: A Social Justice Imperative of African-American Female Leaders at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, beckoned us to witness how educators "committed to social justice and racial uplift connect their professional work with social and political activism in the quest for equality and justice for African Americans and all people" (p. 86). Jean-Marie, through their work, centralized what it means to be an evolving practitioner that, above all things, can lead and construct with love-driven intentionality—an intentionality that reminds us that

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positionality is not linear. Commitment to justice work is a commitment to the open wound caused by historical and systemic truths. Justice work is a promise, and this promise vows to ask the difficult questions out of positionalities, motivations, and interpretations. These difficult questions are meant to assess what our role truly is and what it can come to be as transformative leaders wishing to catalyze justice out of shared accompaniment with our communities. To respond to our positionality and its changes means balancing the heartbreak with the responsibility and owning who we are and how we are willing to stand-up, speak-up, and create for a world that is seeking reparation, healing, and possibility.

For the last 10 years, I have invested my scholarship trajectory in the first-generation college student experience. From the moment I felt my first-generation identity and its bridge-building nature, I understood that proliferating the first-generation student narrative was my call to justice work. As I have continued to dedicate my struggle to this community, I have often had to realign and recall that first-generation initiative building is young but on multiple cusps of pushing academic limitations due to the number of first-generation students entering higher education spaces.

With these precipices, researchers and practitioners have a present choice: (a) to assess and examine how to enact justice—which many call equity, inclusion, and access—to be an asset to the first-generation experience or (b) replicate the faulty practices and default modes of operation that have failed our students. The choice, it seems, is not an obvious one. This is where my positionality must make its commitment and appearance because the temptation to depend on the traditional is far too enticing for educational corporations. Therefore, I am learning to listen to what my positionality calls forth, what it allows me to do and exist in, what it is responsible

for, and how the confluence of factors permits me to enter cosmoses that are sacred to first-generation practitioners and students like me.

As I wrote of this, however, there was an unrecognized pattern occurring that I, in my work and accompanying constructions, vowed to warrior on to acknowledge. This recognition aimed to center the fact that identity-laden practitioners—individuals who were often presumed incompetent, too much, or too unqualified—who embodied justice scholarship were individuals who typically carried the identity markers in question and carry such markers with high love, criticality, and ferocity.

Academic practitioners who push limitations are researchers who, mostly, have lived the transgression at hand. The latter creates a fierce devotion to justice work because that injustice has either been lived or witnessed, and to further fuel the normalization of hegemonic injustice is to make us identity-laden practitioners a replica and decoy of the control. Positionality allows me to view this in body, mind, and spirit, and, as such, I have come to know when enough is enough. Given this, the work I produced aims to take that enough-ness to imbue the historical, the lived, the needed, and the innovative to offer a reconstruction of how to enter justice work, for we cannot forget who we are and how we carry legacies, histories, and impacts in the very act of existing.

Assumptions

Worldview

To align myself with the tenets of resistance, subversion, and critical consciousness, I based this work on constructivist-transformative epistemologies. I compounded these worldviews together because an examination of generic career education and preparation, its reasons for existing, and its purpose required a multiprong approach that involved the

interpretation of meaning and the deconstruction of larger, hegemonic, and repressive higher education cultures sidelining EMFGL student realities. To assure that this work followed and was created within these paradigms, I operationalized Garriott's (2020) CCWM to structure the analytical processes, but this pairing also revealed assumptions regarding this scholarship. These assumptions were influenced by unapologetic pursuits for questioning, narrative centering, and justice practices, yet they can come to silence alternate viewpoints that fall out of the constructivist-transformative worldview. As a commitment to justice work, I neither sought nor looked to and toward neutrality. I sought to create deliberate and nuanced distance from neutrality, as forms of neutrality are the culprits of higher education's multifold inaccessibility to begin with. As this worldview continues to serve as my guide and accomplice, I hope to further catalyze the creation of a foundational, ideological infrastructure that will narrow on the "revolutionary consequence[s] of . . . cultural [shifts] . . . [to] generate activism" (Moraga, 2011, p. 13).

Expectations

The following assumptions, as influenced by my worldview, accompanied my study:

- Current career education and preparation services are culturally unsustaining and do not speak to the specific identity-laden and driven experiences of the students it aims to serve.

- Lack of purposeful career education and preparation services have adversely impacted EMFGL graduates as they enter the workforce.

- EMFGL students are seeking career education and preparation services outside of traditional career education and preparation channels.

- The semistructured interview experience will allow for a sharing of common themes
  and will be a space that can allow students and graduates to create a vision of what
  they would want, or would have wanted, from their career education and preparation
  experiences.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included, but were not limited to (a) a reduced sample size comprised of participants elected by a community nomination process and (b) researcher bias due to relational proximity to the identities examined. The combination of limitations meant no stark generalizations could be made about this scholarship and the subpopulation it represents. These limitations are further explained in Chapter 3.

Delimitations

An immediate delimitation of this study was the selected scope for this research. Due to the purposive sampling and the limited allocated time for data collection, the results cannot speak for the entirety of a community. Yet, this qualitative grounding was aligned to the constructivist-transformational worldviews undergirding this study's objectives, and, as such, this qualitative approach beckoned me to undertake a thorough deep-dive into the lived trajectories of EMFGL alumni. Albeit a delimitation, this approach and intention paved a way for multiple channels of critique and interpretation that can be modeled for future studies.

Definitions of Key Terms

Career education and preparation, commonly referred to as career or professional development, refers to the initiatives, policies, programming, curricula, outreach, and access to networks students have to develop the skills needed to discern, choose, and attain a career or vocation that aligns to their personal values, beliefs, success metrics, and sense of purpose.

Culturally sustaining career education draws from an asset-based pedagogy that beckons sites of education to become places where a student's cultural knowledge, consciousness, and existence is sustained throughout the career-education process and not eradicated due to notions of Westernized versions of success.

Economic marginalization is a form of marginalization that describes the historical and present-day conditions that have impeded full participation in specific cultural norms, traditions, and activities due to systemic disparities and sociopolitical structures that have produced lack financial mobility and resources.

EMFGL is an acronym merging three identity statutes—economic marginalization, first-generation college student status, and the Latina identity.

First-generation college student, for the purposes of this study, is defined as any student whose parent(s), caretaker(s), and/or guardian(s) did not receive a bachelor's degree from a 4-year institution in the United States. Students whose parent(s), caretaker(s), and/or guardian(s) attended a 2-year institution, or community college, are also considered first-generation college students. Additionally, students who have had, currently have, or will have siblings in 4-year colleges and universities are also considered first-generation. This expanded definition means to account for the myriad of differences in filial structures, types of institution attended and for how long, and the geographic location of the degree-conferring institution. This broadened definition will permit students with these narrative and identity points to participate and be seen by first-generation college student scholars (Toutkoushian et al., 2018).

FGEM is an acronym merging two identity statuses—first-generation status and economic marginalization (Garriott, 2020).

Identity-intersectional career education builds on the notions of intersectionality—the act of including the historical and present-day realities and knowledge of identity-laden students into the creation of career education, counseling, and preparation tools.

R&EMFG is an acronym merging three identity statues—racial marginalization, economic marginalization, and first-generation status.

Racial marginalization is a form of marginalization that describes the historical and present-day conditions of systemic exploitation, erasure, and oppression that privileges Whiteness—and its parent, White Supremacy—and impedes the full and safe participation of People of Color in political, social, financial, and emotional dimensions of society.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

First-generation college students have garnered gradual, yet needed, attention in higher education research. Although the term and identity "first-generation college students" has been difficult to define and is in constant flux due to changing societal contexts (NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017; Toutkoushian et al., 2018), for the purposes of this literature review, a first-generation college student was defined as any student whose parent(s) and/or caretaker(s) did not receive a baccalaureate degree in the United States. Given the myriad of operational definitions for this student population, data points regarding the number of first-generation students nation-wide have remained contested, but approximately a third of the college-going population has been identified as first-generation (Whitley et al., 2018).

Increasingly, first-generation college students are entering college campuses with the perception that a college degree will lead toward an upwardly mobile future for their families and communities. As university-level studies continue to be synonymous with financial and social mobility, attaining a college degree has been seen as imperative for students from working-class backgrounds (Azmitia et al., 2018; Barnes & Slate, 2013; Crul et al., 2017; Garriott et al., 2015) who view the college undertaking as a gateway to "occupational and housing opportunities, [improved] access to health care for them and their families, and [a break in] the intergenerational cycle of poverty" (Azmitia et al., 2018, p. 90).

As the focus of this study, economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas are a part of the growing number of Latines comprising the second largest racial/ethnic group in the United States (Rodriguez et al., 2012) and the budding number of students entering college campuses (Carales & López, 2020). Coupled with increases in enrollment, it is imperative for institutional

agents to comprehend the complexities and assets characterizing first-generation, Latine realities (Carales & López, 2020). Similarly, it is crucial for institutional agents, scholars, and practitioners to identify and respond to the historical existence of deficit-laden accounts still being used to characterize this population (Carales & López, 2020).

In alignment with the social justice purpose of this study and literature review, I used Carales and López's (2020) operationalization of Ornelas and Solorzano's (2004) understanding of deficit thinking. According to Carales and López's (2020) interpretation of Ornelas and Solorzano's (2004) work, "deficit-oriented thinking in higher education includes the negative perceptions, assumptions, generalizations, and beliefs held by some faculty, staff, and administrators toward marginalized groups" (p. 104). These viewpoints are rooted in the idea that marginalized groups lack certain qualities necessary to achieve in higher education (Cano et al., 2018).

Identifying deficit-oriented scholarship is necessary to counteract the inaccurate portrayals of Latine experiences because addressing educational injustice requires properly discerning the factors that impede retention, persistence, graduation, and postgraduate success for this population. Notably, it is significant to situate the political background defining the K–16 pipeline from which present-day college students draw ideological influences. Students entering collegiate spaces are hailing from K–12 educational contexts fixated with a one-size-fits-all college readiness approach. According to Barnes and Slate (2013), this approach has been dictated by (a) harmful standardized testing and accountability measures roughly shaped by policies hailing back to the space race of the 1950s, (b) the fear-mongering of a *Nation at Risk* (Gardner & Others, 1983) at the hands of the Reagan administration in the 1980s, and (c) the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002)—all driven by political agendas that

have detrimentally impacted the college and career choices of students on the economic margins who cannot afford both the educational support networks and high-tiered resources available to affluent students. Considering this U.S. context, the pathway to college for students on the margins has been a life-long trajectory of swimming against political, social, and financial currents that have ideologically and structurally pitted higher education as the only option and way toward success (Barnes & Slate, 2013).

Building on the latter, colleges and universities presently stand as the societally accepted vehicles that are charged with transporting an ever-diverse population of students toward the next step forward. In response to this charge, empirical studies over the last decade have investigated and urged career education, counseling, and preparation services within university settings to recall its century-old roots in viewing vocation as justice and in viewing present career education services as a unique location for intentional career advocacy (Fickling, 2016; Fickling et al., 2018; Harrist & Richardson, 2012; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020; Stebleton et al., 2020).

Rechanneling career advocacy, however, faces a myriad of challenges that include, but are not limited to, (a) career counselor neutrality or the perpetuation of harmful status quos in counseling environments (Harrist & Richardson, 2012), (b) a lack of content knowledge or multicultural competencies (Fickling et al., 2018), and (c) stagnant beliefs that social justice values cannot translate into meaningful advocacy interventions in career education work (Fickling, 2016). Correspondingly, career educators dedicated to creating renewed attention to the potentiality and impact of career education are encouraging career practitioners to address these challenges head on (Stebelton & Jehangir, 2020) because society's most pressing issues

call for future professionals who can confront injustice and meet it with collective criticality, imagination, and reinvention.

Review of the Literature

In service of a larger mission to reignite and redefine career education, counseling, and preparation for first-gen+ students,[3] and in particular first-generation college-going Latinas, this literature review synthesized literature about (a) racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students (R&EMFG); (b) the current state of career education for R&EMFG students; and (c) the future of career education, counseling, and preparation services for first-gen+ students as a whole and for EMFGL students in particular. This review begins with a broad overview of racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students in the home, in the academy, and in career education spaces, followed by a nuanced examination of economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas in the aforementioned spaces. I then present an exploration of the state of career education and its connection to specific career education practices for racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students. In drawing from the literature presented in Chapter 1, I concluded by featuring emerging scholarship that aims to redefine the field of career education in its totality and to inform intentional career education, counseling, and preparation services for EMFGL students, specifically.

Racially and Economically Marginalized, First-Generation College Students (R&EMFG)

R&EMFG Students and the Home

Existing empirical studies on filial involvement in the day-to-day lives of first-generation college students generally report that filial relationships are crucial for familial sociocultural

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[3] First-gen+ students refers to students who are first-generation college students and hold additional identity statuses (e.g., racial/ethnic background; gender and/or sexual identity; class-based identities, immigration status, and so forth).

capital development, "and researchers have documented the educational advantages that accrue due to parents' cognitively and emotionally supportive interactions with their . . . children" (Ryan & Ream, 2016, pp. 956–957). Beyond this, current investigations have posited that first-generation students tend to rely on their version of aspirational and filial motivations to attain more and to accomplish more (Tang et al., 2013). Connectedly, these "aspirations [turned] expectations measure how far they believe they will go . . . after taking into account the realities of their life situations and potential barriers that may hinder them from furthering their education" (Spees et al., 2017, p. 458). This education, as it currently stands and is perceived,

> offers the privileged status that many FGCS [first-generation college students] have both
>
> envied and feared their entire lives. It is, after all, the same status that (a) continues to add
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> challenge to the lives of their family and close others and (b) has made them feel
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> different, and possibly inferior, since they were young. (Pratt et al., 2017, p. 11)

These dueling sentiments are further nuanced when students' identity developments are compromised and threatened by their inexistence in multiple social spheres—developments that can come to draw deep divides between the student and their respective familial spaces. To further create a portrait of first-generation college students in the home, the research described in this section further explores (a) family achievement guilt (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Jehangir, 2010), (b) familial issues that can arise during the collegiate undertaking (Cilesiz & Drotos, 2016; Spees et al., 2017; Wheeler, 2016), and (c) family roles and notions of independence (Covarrubias et al., 2019).

Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) used their work to detail family achievement guilt, an emotion and experience that is elicited when first-generation college students note the deep discrepancies and mismatches between their familial backgrounds and new university

environments. Particularly, Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) cited Piorkowski (1983) when they suggested that first-generation, economically marginalized students often feel like survivors because they were able to separate themselves from home environments that were either adverse and/or misaligned to their larger goals. In turn, this separation causes a sense of guilt because students gain entry into university settings that often provide alternate opportunities for wellness, success, and stability in a middle- to upper-class setting, while many of their own family members have remained in the same place that students felt they needed to escape. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015), citing Piorkowski (1983), also posited that, when a student comes to attain more success than their families and communities, they often have to grapple with the now internalized achievement guilt that reminds them that they, the student, had the opportunity to go to college, attain a better opportunity at financial and social-class mobility, and, consequently, have now surpassed their previous home environment status in privileged settings while their families dealt with day-to-day struggles.

Jehangir (2010) underscored the knowledge-based realities first-generation college students are tasked with maneuvering due to their new-found access to academia. The existence of institutionally provided knowledge(s) not only becomes foreign to the student, but it also presents a presumed intellectual threat to parents and home-based communities (Jehangir, 2010). Intellectualism that places the first-generation college student on "the margins of both one's home and school world, [and to] be in a no man's land . . . is to be nowhere. To straddle this borderland between home and school in search of that 'somewhere' . . . is elusive" (Jehangir, 2010, p. 537). The connection and contention between guilt—and the collegiate transition to privilege and knowledge that influences achievement guilt—has remained highly under-investigated. Many studies have yet to examine the degree to which family achievement guilt

operates and is navigated by different racially and ethnically marginalized groups—a focus that would benefit practitioners invested in serving R&EMFG students in their work before, during, and after college.

As first-generation college students internally grapple with the nuances of family achievement guilt and its many unexplored dimensions, they must also respond to familial issues that arise. Often a contradictory experience, these familial issues often double as a reminder and motivation that the collegiate undertaking is dedicated to members who sacrificed what was possible to see a first-generation college student attain new heights (Spees et al., 2017). Yet, the collision between home and the academy produces a fissure within the first-generation student who often lacks the comprehensive support from higher education practitioners that students need to grapple with these internal collisions (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Further detailing these junctures, Cilesiz and Drotos (2016) stated:

> College[, to these] students [means having] to make sacrifices as they leave their family homes, where some of them hold adult responsibilities for house-hold maintenance. Diverting family resources toward aiding themselves through education would entail sacrifice. Perhaps surprising to many from families where going to college has become the routine, family members of first-generation students are not always supportive of educational efforts and may interpret their choices as selfish and irresponsible. (p. 237)

Despite this collision, first-generation college students—especially those from migrant family backgrounds—are, from a young age, continuously reminded that parents sacrificed their lives and own ambitions to migrate to the United States to provide their families with opportunities, with an education never accessible in their respective home countries (Spees et al., 2017). As a direct consequence, filial authorities come to place immense educational and

personal expectations that are deep-seated into the processes with which first-generation college students interact (Spees et al., 2017). Building on, yet being cautious about, the positive attributes these expectations can come to instill, present and future researchers committed to this student demographic have to constantly recall that "parents may hinder their adolescents' academic success by burdening them with family obligations and demands that reduce their capacity to engage in school" (Spees et al., 2017, p. 462).

While balancing the existing emphasis of education "as a means of a better life so that [first-generation students] would not have to work as hard or in the same way as their parents" (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016, p. 101), students must also, as an added expectation, maneuver their divided consciousnesses to achieve an interconnected, holistic, identity-defined sense of self (Jehangir, 2010). Simultaneously attempting to take ownership of these multitudinous pressures and legitimizing knowledge creations in White academies is the crux of the first-generation college student experience; yet, this sociorelated history is incomplete. This history has remained as the dominant discourse that has yet to see the multifold, internal trajectories that have torn apart or propagated these simultaneous balancing acts. To validate presence, however, these concepts—as they have currently existed—must delve into spaces that are not yet named in the everyday realities of first-generation student populations. If these unnamed spaces have no language, no name by which to call themselves, the piercing worlds that have been presented and maintained will never be interlaced, healed, representative, just, and/or home to the sensibilities of this rapidly growing demographic in university environments and the nation.

R&EMFG Students and the Academy

NASPA's Center for First-Generation Student Success reported that nearly "56% [of undergraduate students] had parents who did not have a bachelor's degree" (RTI International,

2019). Of that percentage, the median parental income among first-generation students averaged $41,000 per household in comparison to the $90,000 continuing-generation families report (RTI International, 2019). In turn, these data points delivered context on the extrinsic motivations why first-generation college students may pursue a higher education—access to and potential promise of upward social and economic mobility (Garriott et al., 2013).

Although first-generation student identity has not been monolithic, disparate amounts of first-generation college students have come from racially and economically marginalized communities (Tate et al., 2015). Therefore, for students identifying as first-generation+, completing a "college degree is clearly tied to employability and mental wellness" (Tate et al., 2015, p. 294). This tie to mental wellness was significant to note because the college-going experience for first-generation college students can be perceived as a high-stakes reality—one that has taken much individual and filial sacrifice, one that can entail a generational shift in socioeconomic mobility. Failure to succeed in attaining a meaningful career is equivalent to failing one's loved ones and failing one's communities in need.

Complicating this inequity further has been the dearth of research, existing career theories, advocacy, and programmatic efforts surrounding identity-intersectional and culturally responsive career development processes (Garriott, 2020). Given the multiplicity of the R&EMFG experience, my research called for innovative career counseling practices that center student lives and an examination of the larger question: "How and why are institutions failing to serve first-generation college students?" (Garriott, 2020, p. 89).

Previous literature on first-generation college student populations has predominantly focused on the struggles of first-generation and low-income students (Choy, 2001; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Saenz et al., 2007). As these limited research developments captured ground, it is

imperative to note that first-generation focused, empirical research has, "to date[,] . . . focused on failure" (Demetriou et al., 2017, p. 20) and the overall propagation of a deficit perspective that has clouded the first-generation college student narrative. Yet, as the prevalence of first-generation college students in postsecondary spaces has risen, it is crucial that higher education domains identify what will help these students "meet future workforce demands, goals for national economic prosperity, and global competitiveness" (Demetriou et al., 2017, p. 19). The conversation, however, has stagnated when first-generation college students have not been perceived and permitted to become "individuals [who] must be active agents[s] in his or her environment" (Demetriou et al., 2017, p. 32), an action that "fails to account the changing nature of the student and the environment" (Demetriou et al., 2017, p. 33) they interact with and by which are marginalized.

Building upon these dominant perceptions, the first-generation college student reality is doubly characterized by the fact that "students who are first in their family to attend college are a diverse group who juggle numerous life roles and identities" (Jehangir, 2010, p. 534). These roles, identities, and desires to attain a degree, for many first-generation students, are directly correlated to upward mobility for multiple parties involved—the student, their family, and, consequently, their respective communities (Jehangir, 2010). In interlacing their personal success with their larger spheres, first-generation students come to conjoin their individualized hopes with their respective spaces (Jehangir, 2010). Collectively, the latter is further compounded by the "[sense making procedures enacted to understand] explicit and implicit expectations, rituals, and norms of the higher education culture—a process which can be simultaneously exhilarating, overwhelming, and alienating" (Jehangir, 2010, p. 536).

Despite these entangled sensibilities, the existence of these concepts, and their prevalence in emerging examinations, academic institutions—including research-intensive universities—have continued to be unprepared and unqualified for innovating environments of persistence and achievement for these students and their pluralistic worlds (Jehangir, 2010). To begin addressing these absences and serve this growing population, investigations must contextualize and scrutinize the ways in which these dualities and limitations are translated into isolated, silenced, and suppressive academic experiences at large, predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Jehangir, 2010). In using these contextualized purviews, existent literature and educative practices can, will, and must recognize, address, and bridge the reasons why first-generation college students doubt and continually question their place in academic realms.

Adjunct to these larger questions, first-generation college student-centered studies have explored notions of imposter syndrome, or "Imposter Phenomenon, [which] may be understood as a deep conviction that one is not good enough to deserve the title, responsibility, recognition, or job that one has" (Whitehead & Wright, 2016, p. 639–640). As Whitehead and Wright (2016) posited, the effects of imposter phenomenon (IP) go far beyond notions of humility and acknowledgment; the effects of IP can come to significantly devalue a student's sense of integrity, worthiness, and power—it can come to sideline all contributions from students because of their perceptions of insufficiency. When these emotions of insufficiency align with a first-generation college student's ideal that "college is in service to something greater . . . than just an education" (Whitehead & Wright, 2016, p. 648), disconnects heighten. Consequently, these disconnects—which include, but are not limited to, (a) concerns of financial security and insecurity, (b) academic contribution and competence, and (c) lack of social connectedness—

come to pervade the faculties first-generation student communities can come to imbue into larger academic discourses (Pratt et al., 2017).

Fundamentally, then, it is imperative educators and practitioners comprehend that the individualized social histories of first-generation students are inextricably different from those who do not identify as such (Pratt et al., 2017). For this reason, life trajectories cannot be handed to the postsecondary "future-focused mentality where one's past does not define one's future. . . . Past[s] should not be ignored, minimized, or discarded" (Pratt et al., 2017, p. 11). And if institutional authorities and administrators recruit diverse pools of students in the name of inclusivity, all while conditioning students' identities to fit the university norm, then this work is neither inclusive nor equitable; it is assimilative (Pratt et al., 2017). As a result, the operationalization of these research concepts in both theory and practice is crucial in determining the path of first-generation college student visibility and development. Examinations to come have to build on the "prior knowledge[,] . . . modes of thinking[,] . . . and lived experiences" (Castillo-Montoya, 2017, p. 599) first-generation college students embed into their sociopolitical, socioeducative tapestries. In doing so, higher education stakeholders can come to critically dismantle and redesign the structures that limit the success and collective development of first-generation student communities.

R&EMFG Students and Career Education

In the context of the following examination, the phrase "meaningful post-graduate lives" is operationalized as having enjoyable, significant, and purposeful career opportunities that enact forms of civic engagement and go beyond the desire for financial compensation (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Owen et al., 2019). This operationalization of the phrase "meaningful post-graduate lives" aligns with emerging research that has described this generation of students "as a

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civic generation characterized by unprecedented levels of community service, as skilled social networkers, and as seekers of new forms of activism and social problem solving" (Owen et al., 2019, p. 537). As this prosocial generation of students has entered collegiate spaces, the need for career and vocational processes that factor in sociocultural influences and contextual societal concerns has pushed for transformational changes in the ways career counselors provide advising (Fickling et al., 2018; Kantamneni et al., 2018).

Career advising, under a demand for change, however, does not signify that practices can come to serve first-generation college students. Most often, this impetus for change has been recognized by career counseling professionals, but career center culture currently has not had sufficient training, time, resources, and culturally sustaining knowledge to assist first-generation students who seek meaningful postgraduate preparation (Fickling et al., 2018). Consequently, as universities shifted their focus to becoming career-ready institutions, centers experienced heightened expectations to produce generalized career practices that responded positively to students with privileged sources of social capital but could disenfranchise R&EMFG students who do not have access to capital-driven networks. In turn, these career practices most often faltered because college-wide solutions could not respond to the particularities, histories, and sensibilities with which first-generation students enter spaces (Fickling et al., 2018). With this intersection of complexities in mind, R&EMFG students have currently stood on various points of academic and career-based disenfranchisement propagated by academia—the source of upward socioeconomic mobility many R&EMFG students were told to rely on.

Leaders in collegiate spaces must advocate for a reconceptualization of the measures that have kept R&EMFG and underserved, under-resourced, and underrepresented students from attaining an equity-led education (Garriott, 2020; Jehangir et al., 2020; Kantamneni et al., 2016;

Kantamneni et al., 2018; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). Included in these efforts, higher education

practitioners must reexamine the way they embed student leaders and student communities into

the career and vocational initiative-building process—an under-studied area of research and an

under-performed practice. To understand an institution's respective student populations,

institutions must comprehend the sociocultural histories and present-day complexities students

carry with them. Intentional disregard of the latter can create a culture of mistrust, disconnection,

isolation, uncertainty, and erasure between the institution and the student—this is especially true

for specific student populations (Kantamneni et al., 2016). It is crucial, then, that career and

vocational scholars begin to illuminate the marginalities and processes sidelining R&EMFG

students.

First-Generation Latinas

First-generation Latinas vividly have participated in and were a part of what scholars

Magnet and Diamond (2010) called the "affective realm" (p. 21). This emotional, physical, and

mental realm is embedded with "sorrow, pain, ecstasy, vulnerability, joy, and rage" (Magnet &

Diamond, 2010, p. 21). It is an encompassing experience reflective of the racing and ever-

changing pace of first-generation Latinas and their understanding of their lived histories.

Consequently, these histories have often been underanalyzed and continuously pitted as

unworthy of rational investigation. Yet, as Latinas in higher education have continued to expand

and shift, their conscious and subconscious realities have ruptured, and, as they have, they left

traces to follow. These traces have unearthed the marginality of the Latina. To dismantle this

marginal view, emerging scholars and scholarship have called for visibility in a form and version

that is capable of attaining what Delgadillo (2011) called the "transformative renewal of one's

relationship to the sacred" (p. 3)—a sacredness that is engaged with creating a new narrative of

what it means to centralize the first-generation Latina voice, third space, and consciousness in the way practitioners design services for and with this influential collegiate population. To initiate the process involved with (re)creating this master narrative, I present a network of literature attempting to conceptualize the situated knowledge and lived realities of first-generation Latinas in academic and filial spheres.

First-Generation Latinas and the Home

From the early beginnings of their lives, many Latinas have been conditioned to centralize familial experiences and priorities (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Adhering to these conditions, "Latinas may be expected to engage in self-sacrificing, submissive, and respectful behaviors toward family and community members with authority" (Liang et al., 2016, p. 151). As a direct consequence, Latinas come to internalize what Espinoza (2010) called the "good daughter dilemma" (p. 218). This dilemma, as it stands, already posits pervasive modes of functioning because it manifests consistently by

> (a) providing material and emotional support to other family members; (b) relying
> primarily on family members for help and support; (c) using family members as referents
> for attitudes/behaviors; [and] (d) placing the needs of the family or family members
> before individual needs . . . [which indicates] that the value of placing family first was
> stronger for Latinos than for Whites. (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000, p. 150)

When students face this dilemma, they encounter the expectation of attaining a higher education, but it can place first-generation Latinas in a "cultural bind" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 318). This bind is particular and laden with psychological processing because this "family interdependence is associated with a strong desire to do well educationally, to repay parents for sacrifices made in immigrating to the U.S." (Ong et al., 2006, p. 963). As academic culture

dictates, however, this familial connection juxtaposes the ideals of the academy because "the culture of academia expects one to be completely devoted to the pursuit of knowledge often making school-family issues of any kind nearly invisible" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 319). And yet, many empirical studies "indicate that Latino parents firmly believe in the importance of education for their children, even though they may convey this belief in ways that are different from White middle-class families" (Ceballo, 2004, p. 173).

Consequently, first-generation Latinas have been required to straddle two worlds that highlight demand and expectation but shed no light on the internal processes they manage. To address these emotional milieus, "the experiences of women of color require consideration of various factors, such as culture, ethnic discrimination, social class, . . . patriarchy" (Liang et al., 2016, p. 161), familial ties, academic dispositions, and psychological effects. A large body of existent research has alluded to the "Latino cultural values emphasizing family needs and the self-sacrificing role of women . . . the potentially conflicting demands from home and school, and the feeling[s] [that are] strongly connected to family [that] may provide a sense of emotional well-being" (Sy & Romero, 2008, p. 215), but a narrative analysis of career trajectories associated to these procedures draws large blanks. A strategic examination of the journeys associated with the first-generation, Latina experience is needed to situate Latinas in connection to their "pieces of . . . fractured histories" (Moraga, 2011, p. 29). In doing so, Latinas will be enabled to "look to [the] origins" (Moraga, 2011, p. 29) of their motivations for pursuing a higher education and can come to build resistant strategies capable of identifying the self in midst of the hegemonic dominions circulating their day-to-day lives.

Together, these works piece a history, a tool, that Anzaldúa (1987) described as the *alma* [the soul], a "great alchemical work . . . [that is constantly welcomed to] inevitable unfolding"

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(p. 81). This unfolding, as pitted by Anzaldúa, is incited by particular complexities that represent not only individual stories, but also "collective injuries that must be situated within specific familial, social, and historical contexts" (Magnet & Diamond, 2010, p. 21). These contexts, as Magnet and Diamond (2010) presented, are embedded with specific social locations and privileges, and, when considering the experience of first-generation Latinas, these locations, privileges, and contexts must be considered, scrutinized, and be made subject. This understanding of context and shifting space builds the current knowledge of first-generation Latinas in both the academy and the home. Building on our current understanding, experiences that have had little opportunity for complexity will now be enabled to attain formation—a sense of stability needed for restorative justice and social change. Because anger is alive, political, and transformative, anger—and its energy—can be a place of asset and opportunity; it is a place willing, reparative, and capable of managing and unearthing the unsaid, of redefining the said, and centering the lifelines—the multiple worlds—first-generation Latinas yield and balance.

First-Generation Latinas in the Academy

The current work about racially marginalized women in the academy has been connected to "previous stories of discrimination, resistance, and survival in academe in several ways" (Balderrama et al., 2004, p. 136). These stories tell about the ways "race and gender complicate power dynamics in the classroom . . . and [how current pedagogical literature] does not provide the language to understand the tensions experienced by women of color in [these spaces]" (Rodriguez et al., 2012, p. 97). In similar fashion, available literature has illuminated the emotional processes that racially marginalized women invested in educational institutions.

Particularly, these emotional trajectories "bear the scars, the anger, and the pain of living in a fragmented state" (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012, p. 450) that constantly must challenge "the

traditional claims the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472). As Latinas transgress against these claims, it becomes apparent that "they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within the formal educational settings [they exist in]" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 105). Surviving in the academy, under this guise, entails a form of compromise that pits livelihood against dignity, an oppressive reality under which racially marginalized women continue to operate.

Regarding this racialized and gendered duality, a gradually expanding population of first-generation Latinas has permeated higher education dominions—a movement that adds an additional identity marker worthy of exploration. Based on statistics, first-generation college students "represent less than 25% of all postsecondary enrollments indicating that fewer [first-generation students] enroll in college after completing high school than their non-first-generation counterparts" (Strayhorn, 2007, p. 83). Complicating this narrative for first-generation Latine communities, the Pew Research Center (2014) identified:

> Latino/a enrollment of 18–24-year-olds in all colleges, including those enrolled in community colleges and 4-year institutions, now exceed 2 million students in the United States. Despite these promising numbers, only 13% of Latinos/as have attained at least a bachelor's degree. (as cited in Storlie et al., 2016, p. 204)

Noting the prevalence of these figures, it is imperative that empirical research situate the reasons for marginal degree attainment rates. For scholars scrutinizing the structures of higher education, Lopez Figueroa and Rodriguez (2015) speculated:

> The underrepresentation of faculty of color in combination with the ongoing adherence to the principle of "merit" in higher education creates a challenging atmosphere for Latino

undergraduate and graduate students who trustingly assume that [their academic

institutions,] would be personally invested in . . . students' success and well-being. (p. 24)

The intersection of marginalization, sidling, and invisibility that characterizes the

existence of first-generation, Latine communities in postsecondary institutions only reinforce a

central conflict. A dilemma exists between the values of the individual and those of academia—a

crucial juxtaposition that warrants scrutiny of the decisions institutional agents "take to

participate in . . . hegemonic, exclusionary, and hostile professions" and processes (Lopez

Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015, p. 24). In piecing the dominant influences pervading the spheres

first-generation Latinas operate within and against, it becomes apparent that "Latina first-

generation college students may struggle with discerning the traditional . . . roles and values that

compete with . . . individualistic higher education system[s], thus affecting their [broader]

development" (Storlie et al., 2016, pp. 304–305).

As first-generation Latina development processes encounter stagnation and hindrance,

researchers must address "the perceived barriers and stresses of higher education experiences

[and] the responses or strategies by which Latinas cope [with these demands—an area of

investigation that] has received relatively little attention" (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012, p. 84).

Consequently, emerging studies must attend to the "affective realm" (Magnet & Diamond, 2010,

p. 21), coloring these larger processes of invisibility and the resulting resistance strategies.

Researchers who wish to understand the holistic reality of the Latine narrative must take

into consideration the emotional-mental trajectories that have received minimal dedication in the

emerging research about Latine students. Doing so is imperative for Latine students to

"overcome a plethora of challenges to pursue higher education" (Cavazos et al., 2010, p. 305). A

refusal to acknowledge how Latine lives emotionally understand these hindrances is to construct

a master narrative that silences the liberation, consciousness, politic, and *revolución* [revolution] this population can bring to academic and social spheres.

First-Generation Latinas and Career Education

Economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas have historically navigated detrimental experiences entrenched in racist ideologies that have propelled deficit-oriented misconceptions of the college-aspiring Latina (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2021). Albeit a complex representation of Latine resilience, existing scholarship has also demonstrated that college-aspiring and college-going Latinas can come to internalize these misconceptions to the point of lessening their own contributions and self-expectations as they proceed through their educational trajectories (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2021).

Connectedly, as revealed in a mix-methods study conducted by Chang et al. (2020), first-generation students maneuvered college while experiencing cultural mismatches between forms of hard and soft independence. Although hard independence praises self-reliance, soft independence seeks self-expression—a clash that Chang et al. (2020) concluded can doubly hinder a first-generation student's agency to use resource and support services on college campuses. Further nuancing this finding were the myriad associations to social class, as the authors' "findings make a unique contribution to the extant literature on cultural mismatch by illuminating self-reliance as tied to social class survival and to concerns about problem disclosure jeopardizing close social relationships (Chang et al., 2020, p. 291).

Considering the internalization of misconceptions and deficit-depictions as Liou and Rotheram-Fuller (2021) outlined and the social-class influenced cultural mismatched Chang et al. (2020) detailed, there exists enough of a correlation in the literature to conclude R&EMFG students, and in this case EMFL students, have had to deduce and make meaning out of external

and subconscious realities—all while attempting to make the collegiate experience worth the expense. As EMFGL students simultaneously seek synapses between required forms of interdependence and the assimilative forms of independence, they are also pitted with attaining future careers that can come to respond to the latter—an area of research and scholarship not yet intentionally explored.

Career Education, Counseling, and Preparation Services

State of Career Education for College-Going Students

Thompson et al. (2019) evaluated 292 survey results in an empirical study in which they attempted to understand the relationship between psychological distress, self-esteem, and career decision self-efficacy. Survey construction included several measurable instruments. To measure self-efficacy, authors used the 25-item Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (Betz et al., 1996); to measure psychological distress, Thompson et al. (2019) used the Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (Derogatis & Savitz, 2000); and finally, the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to measure self-esteem. Results suggested current day college-going students faced several stress-inducing realities that increased their mental health symptomatology; lowered their sense of self-esteem; and reduced their academic and career development efficacy, pursuits, and decision-making processes.

Thompson et al.'s (2019) results also aligned with prior research (e.g., Fouad & Kantamneni, 2013; Thompson & Subich, 2011) that indicated students from racially and economically marginalized backgrounds experienced higher levels of distress in relation to White-identifying students. These findings suggested prevailing modes of career education, counseling, and preparation must attend to the psychological components and matters permeating

into students' understanding of career attainment and career success. Further, Thompson et al. (2019) noted:

> Significant differences in psychological distress and career-decision making self-efficacy based on student self-identified race/ethnicity highlight the need for career practitioners to recognize that environmental stressors (such as experiences with racism) may heighten the psychological distress and exacerbate students' negative perceptions regarding their self-efficacy for making career decisions. (p. 293)

With continued research linking mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression to career development and education processes (DeBell, 2006; Swanson, 2012), Thompson et al. (2019) suggested career practitioners must attain the needed training to screen for mental health symptoms negatively affecting the way college students engage with career education. Beyond this response, Thompson et al. encouraged career practitioners to engage with the training and do the work necessary to destigmatize the mental health trajectories and realities now present in the field of career education. Destigmatizing mental health processes can lead to de-generalized career education services that Miller et al. (2017) outlined in their work about high-impact practices and their relationship with career planning and job attainment.

Unlike Thompson et al. (2019), Miller et al. (2017) offered readers a roadmap to specific higher education practices that hold the potential of de-generalizing career education. Some of the high-impact practices outlined in Miller et al.'s scholarship exist outside the usual career education platforms in university settings but can be adopted by professionals in career education and development centers. Using the 2015 Senior Transition module of the National Survey of Student Engagement, Miller et al. were able to examine module responses from 31,000 seniors spanning 126 colleges and universities. Via module outcomes, Miller et al. (2017) posited,

"programs such as learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research with faculty, internships, senior capstone projects or culminating experiences, and study abroad were recognized" (p. 490) as high-impact practices that could not only blur the boundaries between the academic and the cocurricular but could also enhance a student's career decision-making approaches and motivations. Specifically, Miller et al.'s (2017) results yielded the following:

> Seniors who participated in an internship had 25% greater odds of seeking employment after graduation than seniors who did not participate in an internship. Seniors who had performed a leadership role on campus had 23% greater odds of attending graduate school than their counterparts who had not held a leadership role. Students who had completed a culminating senior experience (i.e., capstone project) had about 22% greater odds of planning to seek employment after graduation. (p. 493)

These compelling results suggest participation in specific high-impact practices can lead to a specialized postgraduation course. This participation, however, brings up questions about the strength of career education, counseling, and preparation services in collegiate settings, specifically in liberal arts universities.

Stebleton et al.'s (2020) examination of career readiness in a liberal arts setting bridge Miller et al.'s (2017) work to the latter discussion. To supplement conversations about the effectiveness of career education in the collegiate space, Stebleton et al. (2020) began their work by mentioning the continued debates that higher education and career development practitioners still held regarding the merits of a liberal arts education and its expected affiliation with career readiness. Existing as a field meant to prepare students to engage with ever-changing workforce demands, higher education—and a liberal arts higher education in particular—are ideally charged to prepare students with the adequate high-impact practices, as detailed in Miller et al.

(2017), that then can be translated as career skills capable of assisting students' transition to their impending workplaces (Stebleton et al., 2020).

      To counteract the myriad ways a liberal arts education is undermined, Stebleton et al. (2020) investigated the impact of career planning courses, a practice that Stebleton et al. dated back to the early 1900s. In taking a qualitative approach to assess a career planning course hosted by the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Stebleton et al. were able to achieve two objectives: (a) methodologically, Stebleton et al. (2020) used their qualitative focus to challenge the quantitative norm typically employed to study career planning, and (b) they demonstrated "students benefit from an intentionally reflective curriculum that allows them to articulate and understand the value of a liberal arts education" (p. 23). Together, Miller et al. (2017) and Stebleton et al. (2020) created a sense of urgency on the importance of introducing practices that allow college-going students to interpret their career needs and channel them into intentional career-building opportunities early on in their undergraduate tenures.

      Without a doubt, higher education landscapes are at the edge of many precipices. These precipices have created a sense of urgency for leaders in higher education arenas to contend with the societal demands that have been influenced by the multiplicity of pandemics. Yet, Detgen et al. (2021) stated, "research on college and career readiness programs has primarily focused on outcomes during high school. . . . However, research examining how college and career readiness programs benefit students' postsecondary academic and career pursuits is also needed" (p. 231). By conducting a qualitative examination on a college and career program, Bridge to Employment, Detgen et al. were able to contribute to career education literature by expanding their own definition of what career readiness entails. Complementing their examinations, Detgen et al. featured work from Warren et al. (2017), who suggested career readiness "requires (a)

integrated education and career planning and preparation; (b) the ability to apply and link academic, technical, and career knowledge and skills; and (c) foundational (soft) skills for postsecondary academic and career success" (as cited in Detgen et al., 2021, p. 232).

As another high-impact practice, career and college readiness programs must occupy space in career education literature. Situated as a practice that occurs before collegiate tenures, additional scholarship must come to include and explore how college and career readiness models can assist specific student populations in their journeys to and through college and how such programs can intentionally lead students to meaningful postgraduate pathways. Existing literature must use college-going student narratives to build upon what is currently known about career education tools and strategies. In doing so, practitioners may come to strengthen career education, counseling, and preparation services by "(a) exposing [students] to a wide variety of careers, (b) offering activities and experiences to strengthen soft skills, (c) ensuring [students] understand practical steps in preparing for . . . careers, and (d) promoting and strengthening relationships" (Detgen et al., 2021, p. 243).

State of Career Education for Racially and Economically Marginalized College Students

The paucity of scholarship on de-generalized career education practices for racially and economically marginalized college students is an indicator that students with identity-intersectional experiences have potentially sought career education, counseling, and preparation services outside of the typical career development cultures on college campuses. To explore what these alternate career education spaces may be, I have brought attention in this section to two specific works that examined the identity work that marginalized students conducted to respond to class-based microaggressions (Gray et al., 2018) and the way student-based organizations can

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come to heal forms of aggression and prove to be sites of capital acquisition in the service of academic and professional development (Luedke, 2019).

Detailed in Gray et al.'s (2018) scholarship, higher education environments can produce and reproduce forms of dominance and erasure that affect marginalized students attempting to maneuver and challenge the university spheres to which they worked to gain entry. For students who hold racially and economically marginalized identity markers, these markers become heightened and subject to microaggressions in on- and off-campus spaces, so much so that students often must perform identity work to combat these repeated transgressions. With the accumulation of microaggressive experiences, students come to encounter forms of identity destabilization that can lead to identity collapses. According to Gray et al. (2018):

> An identity collapse occurs when observers make assumptions about one less visible aspect of a person's identity based on assumptions about the more visible identity markers. With respect to race and class, identity collapse occurs when people make assumptions about a person's social class (less visible) based on their race (more visible). (p. 1238)

Under Gray et al.'s (2018) interpretation, identity collapses for racially and economically marginalized students can impede "developing coherent, stable and positive identities, diminish their self-confidence, and [alienate] them from the organizations in which they are engaged" (p. 1231).

Critically, then, it is imperative to comprehend how racially and economically marginalized students respond to these repeated aggressions, as Gray et al. (2018) concluded these responses double as tools needed for personal and academic persistence. Gray et al. identified tools such as (a) internalizing forms of personal strength, (b) dodging issues or

circumstances where students are pitted to hide their identities, (c) developing code-switching practices to survive institutional cultures and preserve aspects of their identities that are crucial to self and collective understanding, and (d) the intentional construction of peer support networks with shared realities as assets that can be molded into success skills.

The tools outlined in Gray et al.'s (2018) examination were also tools the authors suggested should be studied when R&EMFG students entered the workforce. Developing knowledge on how R&EMFG students have continued to use the aforementioned assets and tools is crucial, as it means students are tackling the identity work and identity collapse encounters they will most likely continue to face in their career spaces postgraduation. Although Gray et al.'s work did not outrightly connect use of the mentioned tools as forms of career education, the connection cannot be further ignored. Dialogically, Gray et al.'s work mirrored that of Luedke (2019), who showed how students, particularly Latine students, used similar tools to attain a sense of academic and professional capital in higher education contexts.

Luedke's (2019) qualitative research arrived at a crucial point, as Latine students have become the largest racially marginalized student population entering and enrolling in higher education institutions. Despite this increase in enrollment trends, however, Luedke observed Latine students and Native American students continued to fall far below in college completion and degree attainment rates. This reality was closely connected to the detrimental experiences that racially and economically marginalized students must endure and make sense of (Gray et al., 2018). Given this, Luedke (2019) underscored the importance of what they called "subfields," spaces such as cultural organizations that serve as counter-spaces to proactively provide racially and economically marginalized students with a sense of belonging. Beyond this finding,

however, Luedke (2019)—via interviews with 28 students who identified as Students of Color—concluded:

> Student organizations provide a foundational familial-like supportive environment conducive to the acquisition of valuable capital. Specifically, findings suggest that within this familial-like environment, students develop social and cultural capital that assists them in navigating college and academics, and preparing them for their future careers, potentially disrupting the likelihood of college departure. (p. 373)

While simultaneously navigating university demands, marginalized students have attempted to traverse and understand the negative campus climates they have been charged with taking as is (Luedke, 2019; Gray et al., 2018). Noted throughout Luedke's (2019) analysis, these negative campus milieus complicated both a student's sense of marginality and belonging. Consequently, students retreated to subfields, or cultural organizations, to attain a sense of validation and visibility. Community-driven in their essence, these subfields allowed marginalized students to (a) foster the skills needed to survive harsh campus environments, (b) understand why those environments exist, and (c) bring their rich cultural histories and sensibilities from their home communities to the academic spaces marginalized students are attempting to bridge connections with (Luedke, 2019). Proactively participating in these subfields, or counter-spaces, has added to the retention possibilities of marginalized students, but they have also carried a set of concerns that can put marginalized students in alternate binds. Due to a frequent lack of institutional support, cultural organizations have often been pitted between abandoning their cultural spaces and/or doing beyond what is required (e.g., fundraising, advocacy efforts) to sustain these community-driven organizations.

Per university customs, student organizations are often asked to sustain their own funding sources and membership, but as locations that significantly produce a sense of home for marginalized students in a detrimental university context, having students fill the critical gaps universities are tasked to fill is inequity at play (Luedke, 2019). As safe havens for many marginalized students, cultural organizations such as the Latine student organizations underscored in Luedke's (2019) study, are epicenters for academic support and career development.

As demonstrated across interviews, Luedke (2019) identified the multifaceted ways students assisted students throughout graduate school application cycles and postgraduate career planning, indications that specific career education for and by marginalized students was sought and conducted by marginalized students themselves. With the increase of racially marginalized students entering colleges and universities, new scholarship is needed to investigate the ways students respond to the personal, academic, and career-based experiences that higher education practitioners are not providing. Students are providing other students with the information required to meet university requirements; yet, with this information also comes needed disruptions from practitioners and additional research from higher education practitioners. Action and scholarship are required, as students should not be forced to provide the education they were promised; students, their narratives of survival and service, and the way they protect and prepare each other in settings that add layers of marginalization would be further erased if their work went unacknowledged.

State of Career Education for First-Generation+ College Students

Existing work about the state of career education for first-generation college students has convened at a shared point—career education is, at its basic understanding, a hard endeavor for

any college student, but it is of particular importance for first-generation students who see university studies as a high-stakes reality (Ma & Shea, 2021; Maietta, 2016; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). Although interest and research regarding the academic and career trajectories of first-generation college students has gained traction over the last 20 years (Ma & Shea, 2021), many forms of scholarship have been stagnated in deficit-depictions of the first-generation college student experience. Although there are presently no exact statistics, first-generation scholars have agreed there is an over-representation of racially marginalized students identifying as first-generation college students.

Given this fact, it is important to assess how identity status shapes the way first-gen+ students interact with the academic spheres around them, and the career development processes ahead of them (Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). To further propel asset-rich explorations of the first-generation college student career education and development experience, prominent first-generation scholars Stebleton and Jehangir (2020) released a call to career educators, urging them to recognize the innate strengths and nuanced challenges first-generation and immigrant students bring to academic environments and how that shared knowledge is not heterogeneous in nature.

Stebleton and Jehangir (2020) noted "intersectionality is at the heart of the FG [first-generation] identity" (p. 5) and intersectionality can be quantified by the number of first-generation students who are "disproportionately female (60.2%), poor and working class (50.3%), and [S]tudents of [C]olor (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018)" (p. 5). As reiterated in previously cited research, Stebleton and Jehangir (2020) also echoed the many motivations of first-generation college students who pursue a higher education, and chief among them was the desire for the "promise of career mobility and economic stability for themselves and their

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communities" (p. 5). Referencing a study conducted by Saenz et al. (2007), Stebleton and

Jehangir (2020) reminded career practitioners that first-generation college students do not engage

in on- and off-campus opportunities that have been historically described as crucial in leveraging

meaningful career development and attainment. What Stebleton and Jehangir found via Saenz et

al.'s (2007) study, was that career practitioners can come to realize:

> FG [first-generation] students are less likely to participate in internships (for credit and
>
> not for credit), less likely to study abroad, and less likely to hold a leadership position on
>
> campus (Saenz et al., 2007). [Pointedly, these] constraints are often tied to institutional
>
> barriers that have historically designed programs of this nature for the participation of
>
> White, middle-class students with limited attention to fiscal challenges, familial
>
> responsibilities, and collectivist identities that shape first-generation experiences.
>
> (Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020, p. 5)

Scholarship about career education, counseling, and preparation has not taken

comprehensive or elaborative approaches to speak to the linkages between White, middle-class

centric career development opportunities and the way these programs further alienate first-

generation+ students, their aspirations, and interpretations of success. Stebleton and Jehangir

(2020) suggested the notion of career development for first-generation+ students goes far beyond

the individualized understandings and pathways that collegiate spaces indoctrinate college

students to adopt. Instead, first-generation students are deeply connected and fueled by the

collectivist ideals and agency rooted in many of the sociocultural backgrounds first-generation+

students pertain to. Taking inventory of the untold ways first-generation+ students are further

channeled into generalized career education practices in the name of serving all students serves

as a layered reminder that the career aspirations of first-generation college students must be

unraveled, a process Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016) detailed in their investigation of the application of social cognitive career theory to first-generation college student experiences.

Starkly, Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016) sought to understand how social cognitive career theory could be employed as a theoretical base to examine the career development aspirations first-generation college students hold while additionally accounting for environmental and identity statuses such as racial/ethnic identification and socioeconomic markers, an application not often conducted in first-generation career education studies. In reference to how R&EMFG students attain and comprehend career outcomes, Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016) cited Juntunen et al. (2013) about the intention laced throughout the work of Stebleton and Jehangir (2020), stating, "the 'focus on vocational interests as contributing to goals and actions does not fully address the reality of individuals who either do not have the option of making decisions based on their interests or do not have the resources to explore interests'" (Juntunen et al., 2013, p. 252).

Notwithstanding, the present literature has indicated generic practices are not only inaccessible to R&EMFG students but are also constructed in ways that do not recognize or consider R&EMFG realities—repeated styles of programming that are upheld as the norm. As these repeated patterns and development offerings continue to take dominance in higher education, R&EMFG students come to perceive these services as forms of career-based barriers that affect their career decidedness (Toyokawa & Dewald, 2020) and impact their career outcome expectations (Ma & Shea, 2021).

Toyokawa and Dewald (2020) conducted a study to compare the perceived career barriers on career decidedness between first-generation and continuing generation students. Using survey instruments, Toyokawa and Dewald were able to assess differences between their first-

generation participants ($n = 149$) and continuing-generation students ($n = 182$). Results indicated first-generation college students expressed a greater lack of support, time, and financial resources than continuing-generation college students.

Similar to Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016), Ma and Shea (2021) employed social cognitive theory as a gateway for underscoring "one's learning history as well as personal, environmental, and social cognitive factors that contribute to a student's career interest and goals" (p. 92). Ma and Shea provided conceptual evidence to demonstrate how increased forms of social support, campus connectedness, and coherence can come to address the lacks outlined by Toyokawa and Dewald (2020). Aligned to this conceptual evidence, Ma and Shea (2021) provided counseling implications for practitioners working with and for first-generation college students. The leading belief behind these practices is that existing programs should construct opportunities for first-generation college students to see the parallels and connections between their college education and their future career, all while drawing upon the personal, environmental, and social factors that detail students' realities.

Current scholarship has presented programmatic options that could bridge these parallels but does not offer the how. Of particular note, most present-day scholarship regarding the state of career education for first-generation college students has not outlined ways, if at all, first-generation students inform and/or co-construct these practices alongside career practitioners. Emerging research over the last 5 years, however, has begun to provide evolving recommendations and frameworks that can assist career educators in mapping this needed and unfamiliar territory.

In a 2016 contribution to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, Maietta (2016) reminded higher education practitioners, "for the next 15 years, increases in college

enrollments are predicted to consist of mostly FG [first-generation] students. The challenge with this forecast is that only 27% of FG students graduate within four years" (p. 19). Meeting community-driven solutions with this forecast, according to Maietta, will require colleges and universities to proactively recognize their first-generation students who are often unacknowledged and are further marginalized by being cast as a "hidden minority" (Maietta, 2016, p. 2016).

Gradually, campus leaders have begun to note the importance of first-generation college students on campus; yet, this recognition has been met with the long-standing battle of budget constraints that stem from a lack of sustained institutional support. Consequently, first-generation students are tasked to pursue general services they often do not realize exist on a college campus, including career development centers that are often stigmatized due to the complexity of career success processes (Maietta, 2016).

To magnify the importance of addressing the latter, Maietta (2016) conducted a 2012–2014 study of the career transition concerns of first-generation college seniors. Maietta's (2016) study echoed the work of scholars of the college transition process and

> supported the findings of Saginak (1998) who identified five discrete areas of significant change and challenge for college seniors: (1) changing roles and identities, (2) managing practicalities such as relocation and finances, (3) dealing with demands on time and attention, (4) establishing an action plan for job hunting, and (5) reflecting on self and assessing personal achievements. (p. 21)

Building on these findings, Maietta (2016) emphasized the at-large concerns first-generation college students grapple with, including, but not limited to (a) fears regarding the job hunt, (b) apprehension behind returning to their filial homes, (c) concern over having depreciated

the value of their degree by taking jobs that do not match their credentials, and (d) doubt over not having honored their family and community expectations by way of their chosen career paths. Unsurprisingly, first-generation students hold most of these concerns and feelings with them throughout their college tenures and very minimally encounter spaces that validate these narratives.

Yet, of these concerns, Maietta (2016) mentioned "actively seeking employment is the single most confusing and terrifying closure experience for FG students" (para. 11) because of the perceived and actualized barriers detailed by Toyokawa and Dewald (2020) and Ma and Shea (2021). In lieu of this closure experience, Maietta (2016) offered several common barriers that first-generation students face and that career services can support. Of the barriers and behaviors mentioned, many continue to be laced with deficit-depiction mentalities and approaches but provide a proper springboard by which first-generation studies can continue to critique and push the current understanding of the first-generation college student experience. Common barriers and behaviors, outlined by Maietta (2016), included the following:

- Among these students, there is an absence of a strong sense of entitlement.
- They have a high desire to connect and engage with faculty.
- They possess unrealistic career goals or make career goals without understanding the aspirations associated with their decision.
- They are uncomfortable in a college environment.
- They have trouble navigating campus services.
- They are more likely to work full time.
- They are more likely to commute.
- Their participation in events/extracurricular activities is low.

- They are underprepared academically.

- They face acute financial pressures.

- They are more comfortable with professors and staff than peers, viewing faculty and staff as experts whose acceptance they crave, while being less focused on the social aspects of college.

- They take longer to choose a major.

- They are under the impression they should not ask questions.

- They lack cultural capital--that is, they do not understand the "unspoken rules" and, therefore, can't make judgements that reflect those. (For example, a first-generation student may be unfamiliar with the concept of fraternities/sororities and/or unaware of the benefits of taking part.)

- They lack study skills/time management.

- They have low self-efficacy.

- They are more oriented to the present than to the future.

- They experience social/cultural isolation.

- Their professional network is nonexistent.

- They experience feelings of not belonging/imposter syndrome. (p. 20)

With Maietta's (2016) observations regarding common first-generation barriers and behaviors also comes potential collaborative opportunities for service and synergy among on- and off-campus partners. Maietta asked career service educators to strategize alongside campus admissions offices, arts and culture departments, advising units, faculty, study abroad offices, alumni affairs, student affairs, and institutional advancement partners to construct career education pathways that can positively impact a first-generation student's career trajectory and

that can redefine the way campus leaders assist the retention and postgraduate success of this rapidly growing student population.

Echoing, yet challenging, Maietta's (2016) offerings was Brown et al.'s (2020) qualitative study with seven first-generation college graduates who were now pursuing successful career trajectories in college counseling. As Maietta (2016) offered a myriad of barriers and behaviors still used to depict why first-generation college students fail, Brown et al. (2020) coalesced with Garriott (2020) by observing why institutions fail first-generation college students. By way of participant voice, Brown et al. (2020) stated first-generation college students were "not a problem to be fixed" (p. 245) and beckoned career education and higher education practitioners to object to the current state of research by turning the tide on deficit-laden research topics and instead investigate the strength-driven, asset-filled pathways of successful first-generation college graduates.

Studying the contributions of first-generation college student trajectories is critical, as scholarship has mostly focused on the surface-level realities of the first-generation undergraduate process and has had minimal focus on specific subgroups of first-generation+ students and their experiences postgraduation. The mapping of first-generation graduates' understandings of their emerging career and professional identities—and how they navigate the workforce before, during, and after hire—would give career educators insight into how their educational offerings may need to change to intentionally serve the waves of first-generation graduates' who are negotiating their identities in a multitude of career fields.

According to Parks-Yancy and Cooley (2018), being able to comprehend how first-generation college students interpret employment procedures and employment screening methods would be significant, because if "FGCS [first-generation college students] are unable to

obtain the jobs they expected after college, then they have not achieved the projected return on their college investment" (p. 1). As it stands, first-gen+ students have been reported to underuse career education services due to unfamiliarity or know-how of the hidden curricula pertaining to career development (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018), not due to a typically depicted lack of care.

Given this information, Brown et al. (2020) urged career practitioners to consider the internal and external motivations that contribute to a first-generation student's sense of success—a sense of success that is, at its core, more interdependent and collectivistic in comparison to the individualistic norms perpetuated in higher education spheres and career development cultures. Intentionally, emerging scholarship must anchor its foundation in strengths-based approaches, as many first-gen+ students feel "going to college did not feel like a choice they made, but a choice that was made for them" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 251). To sideline the narratives, expectations, aspirations, responsibilities, and sacrifices that align with collegiate undertaking and its resulting career possibilities would be to reaffirm that higher education is running contrary to the justice work it promotes. To further nuance the literature, it is imperative to observe what existing literature depicts about the state of career education for economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas. The emphasis of the following section is to consider where literature has stagnated and how that stagnation has affected the current understanding of specific career education for first-generation Latinas, if any.

The Call to Action

Existing literature on culturally responsive career education, counseling, and preparation services for R&EMFG, and specifically EMFGL, has been comprised of significant gaps and hurdles that reflect the dire need for asset-based research when investigating the career education trajectories of these ever-growing student populations. Between a fixated narrowing on the

challenges of R&EMFG students and gaps in understanding of how career educators can provide identity-specific, culturally sustaining career education and counseling, current literature has not made at-large strides in its comprehension of EMFGL student experiences with career education during the collegiate undertaking and after college.

With this acknowledgment, however, comes a persistent call for action. Despite holding knowledge of where R&EMFG literature is situated, emerging scholars have understood and agreed that first-generation+ students require career education services that are both de-generalized and contextualized (Brown et al., 2020; Detgen et al., 2021; Kitchen et al., 2021; Maietta, 2016; Nair & Fahimirad, 2019; Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020). De-generalized and contextualized career education practices will assist in bridging career practitioners' reliance on proximity work to a practice of advocacy work (Boyd, 2021). Boyd (2021), via a blog post for the Center for First-Generation Student Success, further explained the difference between proximity and advocacy, stating:

> To conflate proximity and advocacy means to promote the work of practitioners supporting first-generation students without giving them the budgetary and human capital needed. It means holding up first-generation students as a shining example of an institution's diversity and inclusion efforts without having the tools and strategies in place to help them succeed. (para. 9)

Boyd's (2021) explanation means existing forms of belonging, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work in the name of culturally sustaining career education must move away from the performative and must begin to create ecologies and pathways rooted in advocacy that are led with intent (Kitchen et al., 2021) and dissent (Boyd, 2021). Although university campuses with increasing numbers of first-generation students have offered programming for this student

population, there are no systematic approaches to disseminate first-generation career education information across nationwide channels (Kitchen et al., 2021).

Consequently, first-generation+ students, and R&EMFG students like first-generation Latinas who fall under the first-generation+ umbrella, are dependent on the content-knowledge and level of advocacy of higher education and career practitioners who may neither have the orientation for advocacy nor the support to begin and sustain this work (Fickling et al., 2018). Due to the rising number of first-generation college students entering universities globally, the call for higher education leaders to properly and specifically serve this multifaceted community rings truer than ever (Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020), as first-generation+ students look toward the career mobility higher education promises.

The future of career education, counseling, and preparation services for first-gen+ students—particularly for economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas—requires deep explorations of what career practitioners and counselors need to advocate for (Fickling, 2016) and a concerted commitment to shifting career education cultures to center social justice and cultural responsiveness (Edwards et al., 2014; Levesque-Britstol et al., 2019). The epicenter of this call to action is a belief that first-generation+ students are not a population to be fixed (Brown et al., 2020) but a population from whom to learn. Unique realities play a significant role in a first-generation+ student's interpretation of values and personal missions, and career aspirations are, connectedly, influenced by sociocultural expectations, responsibilities, and the emergence of these value-laden personal missions (Stebleton & Jehangir, 2020).

Movement forward must build on an asset-based understanding of this population and respond to the nuanced trajectories of first-generation+ students who experience the home, the academy, and the career realm differently in comparison to continuing-generation students with

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racial, economic, and gendered privileges. The unfamiliarity of specific career education for economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas is daunting, but, as Maietta (2016) stated, this unknown territory is "good news for the [career education] industry" (p. 22) because it positions the field of career development as an informant for what social-justice centered career education can come to be and mean to one of the most rapidly growing student populations in the United States.

Conclusion

Research on first-generation college students has pushed significant boundaries, an important recognition that carries with it the sacrifices, criticality, legacies, and never-ending questions of scholar–practitioners who knew more was possible. Simultaneously, research on first-generation college students has often grappled with how to explore first-gen+ histories and present-day narratives in a manner that explicitly and critically assess how identity intersects and how those intersections interact before, during, and after college and influence subfields of higher education such as career education.

Yet, evolving scholarship has come to an agreed-upon boiling point—the field of career education is fundamentally misaligned with the collectivist core values of the racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students it means to serve. This boiling point, however, has remained largely unexplored and stood as this study's objective. Accompanying this objective is a commitment to "calling on" (Taylor, 2021) higher education's systemic and purposeful construction of career education, a "call on" process that aims to critique that construction and its roots in Westernized and capitalistic perceptions of career success—an additional gap in scholarship. Committed to educational justice and transformation, I have asked why past research was hyper-focused on administrative, faculty, and staff-based experiences for

solutions to the complex questions being offered for this study when meaningful and experiential change can be found in student-led, student-engineered, and student-facing actions of first-generation students. Scholarship, writ large, often considers student narratives as hotbeds of information, but I have sought to move from wading in pools of data into formally centering, and seeing, students as scholar-practitioners, too.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The foundation of prominent literature on first-generation college students has primarily featured deficit-laden and led perspectives of this multifaceted student community. Existent literature has employed a hyper-focused lens on the obstacles first-generation college students face and largely has omitted community-informed criticality and systemic scrutiny. As a counternarrative to dominant scholarship, my intention in this qualitative study was to assess the ways current collegiate career education, counseling, and preparation models serve, or disserve, economically marginalized first-generation Latinas (EMFGL) and their career identities. In this study, I centered recent EMFGL-identifying graduates, used interviews to glean an understanding of what the EMFGL career education experience is like, and examined how forms of career preparation in college has equipped, or unequipped, students' career pathways.

Research Questions

As a guard rail for this research, I developed the following leading question: What are the experiences of economically marginalized, first-generation Latinas as they pursue their career aspirations during their college tenures? Accompanying this question were the following research questions that doubled as critique markers for the current dialogue on career education and development:

1. What are the understandings of EMFGL graduates on the effects of career education services on their career development?

2. How can economically marginalized, first-generation Latina epistemology inform practices for career development services?

To guide my analysis, I used Garriot's (2020) critical cultural wealth model (CCWM) of academic and career development, critical race theory (CRT), and borderland theory, to asset-map the contributions of first-generation college students while holding accountability for the structural and institutional conditions that harm the progress of first-generation students.

Rationale for a Critical Qualitative Approach

Critical qualitative research is an embodied practice that allows a researcher to become an accomplice to an individual's truth, a witness to voice and story. Through qualitative studies, the hierarchical, classist, and inaccessible line between academia and the world is blurred. What a researcher—a potential accomplice—cocreates in that in-between state is a love letter to what was shared, a vulnerable act of academic insurrection that shows the collective "us" how to story tell and story share. I hoped to double as a support system to first-generation students attempting to translate their academic trajectories into meaningful postgraduate lives—a promise and source of internalized motivation that merits space in the academic understanding of the first-generation student narrative.

In using a qualitative approach, I provided contextual richness to an area of higher education student support services that has, historically, gone under-nuanced and under-examined as first-generation college students continue to enroll in colleges and universities across the nation. Analyzing this population via a critical qualitative lens was imperative, as I aimed to assess if and/or how students' engagement with career education and preparation services has equipped students to attain their personal and professional objectives past graduation day. In explicitly attending to the field of career education and preparation, this critical qualitative work bridged reality to the "what could be," as this work can add to the larger reform

and transformation of career education services because its current "one-size-fits-all" approach does not serve the student realities to which it must be accountable.

Method

In this qualitative study, I centered the career education trajectories of young alumni who identify, or identified, as economically marginalized, first-generation college-going Latinas. Using verbal counterstories in the form of a prolonged semistructured interview, I attempted to underscore and uplift a range of experiences, expectations, and realities often lost in dialogues about career education, the potential impacts such an education can have, and what the field of career education can come to be and mean to EMFGL students and adjacent populations. In the sections that follow, I provide additional details about this study's participant pool, research setting, critical data collection strategy, and analysis plan.

Participants

Given the time-based limitations afforded in the available data collection period for this study, I interviewed nine EMFGL-identifying first-generation professionals. In the context of this study, I qualified young alumni as any student who graduated in the last 10 years. The rationale behind focusing on young alumni 10 years postgraduation was due to the range of realities on which I sought aims to focus. Specifically, I endeavored to garner a thorough understanding of the career education-related messages, lived histories, perceptions, expectations, aspirations, and eventual realities tied to an EMFGL's experience before college, during college, and after college. As such, interview questions for young alumni focused on their professional identities and the formational process undergirding the latter. In employing a purposive participant selection process, I contacted community members to nominate potential participants who spoke to, or highlighted, similar identities and histories related to my target population. In carrying and

building on shared and mirrored stories, I was able to see my participants—my sisters—in each other as an act that connected my criticality and curiosity to the grander purpose and enaction of community.

Setting and Process

Interviews were held via Zoom, an online conferencing tool facilitating connections across national and global lines (www.zoom.us). The availability of an online interview space was imperative, as the subject matter dictating this research elicited memories, emotions, and/or realizations that required a sense of heightened emotional and mental safety, a sense of heightened comfort, and a sense of heightened trust, both spatially and relationally. The added accessibility to virtual meeting points extended the autonomy needed for my participants to direct the interview process in a way they felt empowered to conduct what, when, how, and where content and context was shared.

Participants were offered a range of online meeting modalities meant to maximize accessibility and comfort. Given this range, participants were given the choice to forgo being video and audio recorded via Zoom, but all participants agreed to being recorded in both manners. To manage data security and storage, I provided the following measures: (a) participants were asked to create or choose a pseudonym to be referenced by when I analyzed their contributions, (b) participants participated in member-checking processes as their respective interviews progressed to ensure the integrity of data interpretations, and (c) participants' audio recordings and transcripts were stored in a private folder, which will be erased upon the completion of the dissertation project and given to participants alongside a final copy of this study. In culmination of this project, participants will be invited to a participant-only session

where the stories and realities shared in the research can be debriefed and further investigated in a community-driven space.

Interviews and Testimonios

To prevent "treading on contextual ice" (Seidman, 2019, p. 21), I conducted an extended, multisection interview to reach a level of experiential depth that permitted and prioritized scaling trust, member-checking, and a flexibility to create spaces for participants to share freely without limitations. Given the choice of purposive sampling, participants shared a degree of familiarity with the researcher, and, as such, interview spaces were embraced by a pre-established connection and credence.

As outlined previously, this study was supported by a multihour interview process. Each interview lasted between 90–165 minutes. Each interview was loosely guided by a semistructured approach that provided at-large interview questions corresponding to the leading research question and its accompanying subquestions. Each interview focused on the participant's life history with the topic of career education and proceeded to explore how that life history informed their career formation as a first-generation professional. The goal was to explore (a) the messaging each participant received about career success, (b) how that messaging influenced career education and formation during college, (c) how any existent experience with career education benefitted or hindered their individual pathways toward meaningful postgraduate lives, and (c) how, if at all, their exposure to career education shaped their personal career identities in the workforce. Each subsection of the interview featured two to three key questions related to the supporting research questions, but each section also provided ample space for me to informally guide the interview toward conversations participants felt driven and/or conceptually taken to.

Throughout each interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences, and their responses aided the thematic decoding process. Because participants were repeatedly asked if the interpretations of their contributions were correct during the interview phase, I was able to connect individualized responses to larger thematic patterns that arose as I gathered more data. By creating a research experience based on participant affirmation, I was able to draw on participants' intentional critique to identify what was missing in EMFGL-specific career education and preparation. In addition to this multifaceted interview experience that included member-checking and thematic interpretations, participants were asked to visualize what identity-specific career education could have looked like in their respective college tenures. The purpose was to center graduate innovation, as the field of higher education has not yet normalized student engagement in the form of student-facing initiative building. In gaining insight on what identity-specific career education could look like, participants contributed their ideas as suggestions for further action and research.

Upon drawing a pool of potential participants, I sent interview requests explaining the study and the structure of the interview. The interview was described as a dialogue and a verbal testimonio (Nuñez, 2021) that would permit both the participant and me to cocreate a moment where the lines of research collection merge with the emotions and possibilities defining the EMFGL narrative. In total, this extended, semistructured interview practice yielded nine interviews for critical analysis.

To protect participant privacy and attain consent from each individual, I offered and presented participant consent forms before formally inviting participants to the virtual research site. Upon arrival to the Zoom space, I (a) shared the consent form with each participant and clarified their rights as research contributors, (b) outlined the objective of the study, (c) explained

the methods I used to protect participant information, and (d) mentioned the small research compensation available for participants upon the conclusion of this research project. In combining a written document and in-depth conversation describing the project's objectives and need for participant privacy, I cocreated a foundation for the data collection and interview experience rooted in courage, belonging, and collectivity.

To coconstruct a space where participants felt inclined to engage in testimonio sharing, I asked participants to consider the interview space as a moment to honor memory work. By means of viewing interviews as testimonios and not as transactional processes, participants and I were emboldened to participate in an act of reclamation and disruption, for "testimonios are a cultural practice that affords opportunities for shared understandings, empathy, self-love and love for others, and collective solidarity to be nurtures in and across communities" (Nuñez, 2021, p. 312). Testimonio, in this case, became an embodied practice that reached into wells of ancestral teachings and shared knowledge that can name a consciousness that was forcibly erased and/or assimilated to survive or abide by hegemonic cultures, higher education included.

The at-large goal was to adhere and commit to the holistic wellness of participants involved in this study because this intentional methodological focus needed to "create spaces for healing the body, mind, and spirit both as an individual and collective activist effort" (Nuñez, 2021, p. 312). As such, the interview period turned into a home for participant testimonios, a space transformed to make room for shared vulnerability capable of adding to collective subversion efforts needed to challenge the academy as it stands. In prioritizing participants' emotional, mental, and spiritual exploration as they contributed to this study's understanding and critique of career education's hegemonic, structural, and systemic hold on higher education

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outcomes, I centered the perspectives and realities of an experience participants, and their communities, were indoctrinated to accept as is.

Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data, I used a thematic coding process influenced by emergent and a priori codes stemming from member-checking interpretations and the conceptual framework identified for this study, Garriott's (2020) CCWM of first-generation and economically marginalized college students' academic and career development. The CCWM features five intersectional dimensions, but I primarily focused on these four: (a) structural and institutional conditions, (b) social-emotional experiences, (c) career self-authorship, and (d) cultural wealth. Considering the foundational ties of this research to critical analysis and connection to educational leadership for social justice, I used Garriott's dimensions to understand the thematic patterns that arose in my testimonio-interview periods.

Using a mixture of inductive and deductive coding, I was able to take a ground-up and conceptually grounded approach that built upon the emerging scholarship addressing career education while providing the analytical space that shared narratives need to explore an at-large sociopolitical experience. This approach was significant because it permitted data interpretation to make room for emergent codes that did not align with Garriott's (2020) CCWM but that were analyzed through the theoretical influences of critical race theory and borderland theory— theories that focus on identity-intersectional fluxes and the in-between states that may be engulfing the EMFGL before, during, and, potentially, after their college experience.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included participant bias and reliance on participant memory. All participants in this study were young alumni, individuals who had graduated within the last

10 years from their respective universities. Although I did not purposefully seek graduates who were solely 10 years out of their undergraduate experience, I did provide 10 years as a stricture for data collection because first-generation services in a college context have increased during this specific time frame. Due to the time lapse associated with this study, alumni participants did not recall all the details about their career education and formation trajectories as they maneuvered their multifaceted first-generation experiences throughout college. Beyond this limitation, reliance on memory proved to be particularly challenging for alumni as the medical, financial, political, racial, and ideological pandemics they had simultaneously lived through had caused additional challenges that further complicated how memory, and the act of memory, was internalized and processed.

Although I did not center a specific college or university as a research and recruitment site, by nature of the purposive sampling I used for this research, many participants identified other potential participants from their same university. Hailing from the same university site may have led to participants holding similar commentary about their career education experiences, a possibility that could have led to a version of research bias that may have served as a limitation but that could also double as a critical and constructive critique for the university in question. Participants, however, were encouraged to nominate alumni from other collegiate spaces to maximize differences in the interactions with career education and formation.

Conclusion

Because the crux of this study was to interpret the career education experiences and trajectories of EMFGL students, I employed a qualitative lens to capture the essence of the student experience. Using qualitative research allows researchers to surpass internalized biases and perceptions and explore what is not yet known. To situate and examine the career education

and preparation trajectories in question, current self-identified EMFGL alumni served as my main participants for this study.

To intently glean an understanding of participant voice and narrative, I stood witness to participant histories and present-day accounts via a semistructured testimonio/interview, a medium that "allows the researcher to respond to [a] situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on [a research] topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Given the format's ability to hold and address both poignant questions and exploratory conversations, the semistructured interview directly aligned with the intentions of this research. This methodological approach, consequently, bridged my experiences to theirs, for no researcher can "ever pretend that this border, [this enactment of research,] is inconsequential" (Behar, 1996, p. 90). None of us—especially those who identify as researchers—can pretend the words and questions we shape and the way we convey them is not laden with cause and free from effect. It is a reciprocal process that stays with a researcher and becomes a defining experience involving the physical sharing of ideologies and reactions.

Qualitative research, as it exists, can be a symbiotic partnership with no direct and/or perfect equations outlining it. It exists as something of a whirlpool with no clear exit and, if done "right," with no singular result. Using qualitative methods as a guideline, protocol, and inconsequential border, I designed this study to include the voices and stories of nine EMFGL graduates because I wanted to map the career education trajectories pre-, during-, and post-college life. In obtaining a glimpse of the shifts or experiences during each of these stages, I was able to examine differing themes that emerged when comparing testimonios—an opportunity for a type of embodied research that also took my own memories as a source of information and connection to participants.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study enters higher education scholarship at an intersection of multiple epidemics—medical, economic, racial, and climate crises—that call for innovative, principle-driven, and prosocial change agents who can bring possibility to the forefront. As a vehicle to this possibility, institutions of higher education have been, and continue to be, called to cultivate and induct a generation of leaders whose collective responsibility will be to find answers to our ever-evolving societal ills. Given this charge, the primary purpose of this research study was to examine how current forms of career development services—referred to as career education—have benefited and/or hindered the career-identity building processes of economically marginalized, first-generation Latina graduates (EMFGL).

Paired with an analytical inquiry of how dominant and westernized cultures of career success have influenced the field of career education, the accompanying goal of the study was to understand how career education cultures in higher education settings have equipped EMFGL graduates to enter a myriad of workforces that recapitulate systematic forms of oppression. Holding both analytical critique and recommendations for future progress, the participants—referred to as *compañeras* [partners, companions, accomplices]—of this study contributed perspectives that illuminate an EMFGL epistemology that beckons transformation in career education practices for and with racially and economically marginalized, first-generation students.

Research Questions

With the guidance of Garriott's (2020) critical cultural wealth model (CCWM) of academic and career development, I was emboldened to center the purpose and goal of this study by narrowing in on two subversive and leading questions that inspired this study:

- What would it look like to create social justice-driven, culturally sustaining, and identity-intersectional career education services for racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students (R&EMFG)?

- "Why do institutions fail first-generation students?" (Garriott, 2020, p. 89)

To attend to the catalyzing questions cushioning this study, I responded with the following research questions:

1. What are the understandings of EMFGL graduates on the effects of career education services on their career development?

2. How can economically marginalized, first-generation Latina epistemology inform practices for career development services?

In contemplating the epistemologies and understandings I endeavored to acknowledge and comprehend, I employed nine semistructured interviews ranging from 90–165 minutes. Interviews spanned five thematic dimensions: (a) precollege experiences, (b) cultural wealth manifestations, (c) social and emotional crossroads, (d) structural and institutional conditions, and (e) forms of career self-authorship. Four of the five dimensions—cultural wealth, social and emotional experiences, structural and institutional conditions, and career self-authorship—are integral to Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development, and as such, became conceptual and organizational structures for this study's interview protocol. Though Chapter 3 narrowly focused on the research design framing this investigation, this chapter includes findings

that correspond to elements Garriott characterized for each of the mentioned dimensions and will uplift emergent themes that, too, need to flourish in an expansion of the work Garriott commenced with their current interpretation of the CCWM.

Chapter Overview

This chapter features two sections. Each section is led by a corresponding research question. I begin by engaging EMFGL graduates' understanding of the effects of career education services on their career formation. This understanding includes a view of their ideological principles and how those principles dictate their perception of the effectivity of their interactions with career education. Specifically, in the first section, I attempt to elucidate these effects by exploring the structural and institutional conditions dimension and the various subthemes respectively connected to this dimension. This opening segment is followed by the second research question with which I seek to interpret how an economically marginalized, first-generation Latina epistemology can come to inform career education practices.

In further digesting how Garriott's (2020) conceptual elements of cultural wealth and social and emotional experiences—and their respective subthemes—arise in day-to-day realities, the nine participants integral to this study were able to contribute their experiential knowledge as roadmaps to progressing career education forward. This same section also includes a dimension not found in Garriott's original CCWM model but was a pertinent theme that frequently populated participant contributions. Titled Resisting and Responding to Structural and Institutional Conditions, this emerging at-large theme contributes epistemological connections addressing this study's second subresearch question and, as such, is placed under the second section in Chapter 4. However, this thematic appendage holds ties to Garriott's (2020) structural

and institutional conditions dimension and should be considered as a representation of participant-driven resistance to the forms of harm outlined in the original dimension.

The intention behind highlighting the myriad of ways participants resist and respond to institutional and structural aggression is two-fold: (a) to serve as a call to researchers to elicit research studies that investigate first-generation student advocacy and resistance, and (b) to document EMFGL rise to resistance against the academy and the workplace. The final dimension, Career Self-Authorship, is addressed in Chapter 5, and the data presented in that section double as recommendations from research participants for the field of career education. To visually represent parent dimensions, their respective subthemes, and the organization of the data, I offer an organizational structure of Chapters 4 and 5 for reference (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Organization Structure of Chapters 4 and 5

Chapter 4 and 5: Organizational Structure

1. Location: Chapter 4, Section 1 (Research Question #1)

    a. Structural and Institutional Conditions Dimension

        i. Theme #1: Defining Dominant Interpretations of Career Success

        ii. Theme #2: Limitations to Current Forms of Career Education

        iii. Institutional Expectations

        iv. Inaccesibility to Specific Identity-Based Career Education

        v. Theme #5: Equipping for Workplace Oppression

2. Location: Chapter 4, Section 2 (Research Question #2)

    a. Cultural Wealth Dimension

        i. Theme #1: Familial Expectation as Motivation Encouraging Post-Graduate Success

        ii. Theme #2: Chaos of the Question Mark: Perceptions About Career Outcomes

    b. Social-Emotional Experiences Dimension

        i. Theme #1: Living in Systemic Juxtapositions

    c. Resisting Structural and Institutional Conditions (Not originally apart of the CCWM)

        i. Theme #1: Defying Deficit Narratives as Gateway to Resistance

        ii. Theme #2: Counter-Culturing as the Source of Community-Driven and Subversive

           Career Education

3. Location: Chapter 5—Recommendations

    a. Theme #1: Societal Influences on the First-Generation Professional Identity

    b. Theme #2: Challenging Dominant Forms of Career Success

    c. Theme #3: Building Collective Career Authorship: Co-Creating Career Education

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What are the understandings of economically marginalized, first-generation Latina graduates on the effects of career development services on their career development formation?

Structural and Institutional Conditions

Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development is a subversive tool stemming from the bedrock of critical theory. Garriott's CCWM is a needed and nuanced unfolding of several frameworks—such as the psychology of working theory (Duffy et al., 2016), theory of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the student integration model (Tinto, 1987), and the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994)—that have had integral contributions to the field of career education but are not fully "comprehensive in their inclusion of sociopolitical factors . . . or how these factors may interact to reproduce or disrupt marginalization" (Garriott, 2020, p. 81).

Through a personal interpretation of Garriott's (2020) work, this study aligned Garriott's intentions with Harris and Patton's (2019) "Un/Doing Intersectionality through Higher Education Research," which beckoned scholar–practitioners to assess the hegemonic ways higher education has erased the impact of evolving theories to co-opt and create prescriptive forms of the same theoretical constructs that marginalized communities have created to explain, make sense of, and dismantle the systemic symbolic violence that institutions, like higher education, have enacted. To center the experiences and systemic critiques of marginalized student populations, Garriott's (2020) first dimension—structural and institutional conditions—stands as the leading concept serving as context for the purpose of this research. In underscoring the structural conditions that have harmed, limited, and shaped the experiences of the nine participants sharing their

testimonies through this work, the following contributions also demonstrate how current institutional practices continue to further forms of marginalization that are then magnified in workplace and career-based settings.

Although Garriott (2020) identified five forms of oppression—exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—under the scope of the structural and institutional conditions theme, the intention of this research was to identify additional subthemes that fall under the multiple forms of oppression Garriott identified for this dimension that were content-specific. A series of subthemes have emerged in correlation to this at-large parent theme: Defining and Experiencing Structural and Institutional Conditions, Limitations to Current Forms of Career Education, Institutional Expectations, Inaccessibility to Specific Identity-Based Career Education, and Equipping for Workplace Oppression—all elements that demonstrate connections to Garriott's original dimension but also begin to highlight the resistant and insurrective fuel present in the EMFGL experience.

Defining Dominant Interpretations of Career Success

This subtheme introduces *compañera*—research participant—worldviews and how these perceptions guide participants' operationalization of dominant forms of career success. In participating in a naming process that had compañeras reflect and thoroughly explain their perceptions of career success, compañeras created a collaborative depiction of the capitalistic, individualized, and hyper-meritocratic structures currently embodying dominant iterations of career success. In turn, this depiction is met by additional testimonios that identify the gaps and limitations in career education. What these gaps and limitations reveal serves as a commentary for what career education models prioritize and what is often left to the student and the graduate to figure out alone.

Throughout the duration of their interviews, compañeras defined what they believed dominant forms of career success to be. Ideologically, compañeras were able to connect their personal definitions of dominant interpretations of career success to the invasiveness of capitalism and hegemonic inclinations to translate career as identity. All nine compañeras demonstrated complex relationships with the concept of career success as gateways to economic stability—a goal participants yearned for because of their experiences with economic marginalization—but treated with critical and multilayered *conocimiento* [consciousness]. For Ailina, widely accepted interpretations of career success were directly connected to money, as she said:

> How much money can you get? How much recognition can you get? How many things can you be elected for? How much can you take on, even if you're not getting adequately compensated for it? It's very capital driven. How much can you be overworked? How much can you make your job your identity? I think that's the big one. I think the minute you decide that your job is your identity. You don't have anything else. The first thing you bring up is, "I'm a Dean. I'm a professor [or] whatever." That is the moment that Western career viewers would be like "a round of applause! Yes, you have been successful." You have been indoctrinated, and the minute that you refuse to have a life outside of your job, I think that's the moment you're gone [from what may have been your real intention for pursuing your career]. That's when you're lost to [this capitalistic, hyper-individualized culture of success].

Liseth also linked her Western-influenced view of career success to systemic procedures and echoed Ailna's commentary regarding the pervasive ways one's career becomes a powerful identifier that can evolve into self-erasure. Liseth said:

> I mean, at its core, [career success is] based on capitalism, because it's all about making money to further the economy. And you are going to college to . . . learn how to be an asset for somebody else, for some other corporation, that then is going to further the bottom line of the country and your career . . . and in the Western idea your career becomes your identity. Like, how many times have you met somebody, and the conversation goes like this: "Hi. What's your name?" And you say your name. And they're like, "Oh, great. What do you do?" That's always the second question, and that question is getting at what you do as a job, but it's not getting to who you are as a person. But I think people equate who you are as a person to what you're doing with your job.

For Ailina and Liseth, privileged renditions of success were characterized by economic

gain and individualized career identity processes, a combination that was further affirmed by

Gina's contributions. In Gina's viewpoint, pervasive conceptualizations of career success looked

like this:

> Being a CEO. Being a leader. . . . I think global leadership in the Westernized sense is very much limited to the roles and the positions and the titles rather than a style or a way of relating to people. It's very much like, "No, I climbed my way to the top at all costs, and I am . . . picking [myself] up from the bootstraps" all the while doing it on [my] own. . . . Career success, in that sense, is very much getting to the top by any means possible.

Each compañera highlighted both a complicity with belief systems that were deeply

ingrained by Western ideologies of what success should be and a dual consciousness that

assessed the structures shaping definitions around career success. Messages around what success

had to be or look like were ever-present in the upbringings of each participant and were further

propelled by the emphasis of college-to-career cultures that were, and continued to be, steeped in

meritocratic principles. Simultaneously, although compañeras were urged to equate career

success to economic status, they were also able to cultivate subversive beliefs that ran counter

and challenged the latter.

To Estrella, career success had generational ties to survival, but an even deeper tie to

personal growth if motives extended beyond capitalistic advances. To Estrella, career success

"equals money. . . . It's survival. It pays our bills." Yet, it can also entail growth. The reason

Estrella mentioned growth was "because growth allows you to really identify what you like, and

what those skills have developed for you to become into as well."

As Estrella expanded on the reflective possibilities into which the realm of career

education could evolve, for both Dora and Gina, it was essential to underscore the root causes

undergirding their depictions of career success. To Dora, the construction of what was

considered successful was founded in white supremacy, as she said, "You produce, you're churning something, and as there's a higher need or as demand rises, so does the work." Within the context of white dominant culture, this "churn" is by design and for the purpose of perpetuating inequality.

Gina, too, took her definition of what was hegemonically considered to be postgraduate success and shared a similar viewpoint as Dora. Gina's response also offered an analysis of operating structures dictating characterizations of success, as she said:

> [Westernized and dominant definitions of career success] run contrary to social justice agendas because social justice agendas are meant to uplift everyone. . . . The image I'm getting in my head is of someone just like stepping over everyone else. . . . [Career] success is getting to the top by any means [and] not caring about your neighbor, not caring about other people, and not caring about how to support them. You just invest in your own well-being. I mean, social justice is all about the collective, all about community. And career success in the Western world is very much individual. There can only be one person on top, it's all hierarchy.

Similarly, to Azucena, the ideal of the collective is not reflected back or existent in the current fashioning of career success. According to Azucena:

> *Career success en Western sociedades no es medido por lo que haces o lo que estás devolviendo a la comunidad o como tú te sientes como persona, sino al cheque que recibes por el trabajo que estás haciendo. So, pienso que la mayoría, no todos porque no es injusto que estemos hablando en general o estemos hacienda un estereotipo a la hora de responder a esta pregunta, pero, bastantes. Para un porcentaje bastante alto no alcanzas career success hasta que agarras un trabajo que te paga un sueldo bastante alto en el cual te haces un nombre en un lugar. No importa cómo te sientas, si estás estresado o te sientes sin valor propio de algo que estás haciendo/realizando cada día. Eso no importa, deja de importar. Lo importante es el dinero que está entrando a la mesa.*

> [Career success in Western societies is not measured by what you do or what you are giving back to the community or how you feel as a person, but by the paycheck you receive for the work you are doing. So, I think most, not all because it is not unfair that we generalize or stereotype when answering this question, but for a fairly high percentage [of people,] you don't achieve career success until you get a job that pays you a fairly high salary and in which you make a name for yourself in a place. It does not matter how you feel, if you are stressed or feel worthless due to something you are doing or

performing every day. That doesn't matter, it doesn't matter anymore. What is important is the money that is'coming to the table.]

Conveying critique about their operating in cyclical, marginalizing workforce systems, compañeras cumulatively agreed and shared similarities on the makings of prevalent interpretations of career success. Dora captured similarities that additionally demonstrated a sense of frustration and disillusionment, when she said:

> We're still a part of the system; . . . we're still supporting the system of systemic oppression that we're fighting so hard to fight. We're working so hard to fight and dismantle, but it's still nothing, you know?

This subtheme establishes compañeras' foothold on the findings to follow. Compañeras' contributions doubled as a love letter to EMFGL emerging graduates and a testament telling young alumni they are enough—a powerful sentiment that places interlocking ideologies on center stage to be both analyzed and re-created. What compañeras shared via their experience-driven definitions of dominant and persistent career success exposed the possibility of an ever-growing culture among EMFGLs that has aimed to innovate differing approaches to defining and achieving career success.

Limitations to Current Forms of Career Education

Compañeras in this study articulated various limitations to the career education they experienced in college. Chiefly, compañeras disclosed the disconnection they felt with their respective career education centers and units. To compañeras, the disconnection between student and services was caused by nonspecific and fleeting outreach, or lack thereof, to student subpopulations who required targeted communication and service walk-throughs. Further, for several compañeras, the experiences at career centers propelled their distrust in the quality of the career tools offered because of the manner with which content was delivered. Ailina described it like this:

[I] utilized [the career center] once. I think I submitted my resume, and the feedback I got was not great, like I don't know who reviewed it, but the feedback was essentially like "It's wrong, but I'm not going to tell you how it's wrong." I was like "the fuck? Isn't that the whole point of your job? You're supposed to help me understand how I'm supposed to do it." So I think that was the only time that I utilized it, and then I never bothered to go back to it. . . . But yeah, I would say I never utilized it. But I also don't think our [career services] were intentional with the groups that they were trying to target. I think back on it now: Why didn't they collaborate with [other centers and programs]? Why didn't they collaborate with [the first-gen program on campus]? Why didn't they collaborate with specific departments? I don't know. . . . Those are the things I wonder; . . . I think they're complacent. They assume that because careers and jobs are a necessity, that that's what you go to college for, that people will just naturally go to them. But people don't want to go to something that they don't know or fully understand. I don't think people know; I didn't. I didn't fully understand what their purpose was. If they couldn't even give me substantial feedback on my resume, why would I trust you with trying to find an internship or a career?

Relatedly, Jimena also encountered forms of alienation during her time at her university's career center. Jimena's experiences as a result of the outreach she personally sought affected her sense of belonging. Jimena described starting off by going into the office first, as she said:

I got all these resources; they had brochures, and I walked around trying to find somebody . . . like another Latina, Latino, somebody that looked like [me], right? I didn't find anybody, but I made an appointment either way. I went into this office with this career counselor. And I was really trying to figure out career plans, right? I didn't know, I was a psychology major, but I didn't know what I could do with it. So I was trying to seek some guidance. And all she gave me was a list of potential jobs. Just like here, here are some careers that you can do with psychology. I was like, "Okay, but I need help." You know, like, I need more than just a paper, more than just the list. And it was very, very much [a] transactional conversation, like, "Here's this paper, here's this list. Go on." And that experience . . . I was like, I don't want to come back here again, you know. . . . It kind of just reaffirmed that I didn't belong in that space. And so I had all these thoughts: What do I ask? What should I do? It was just a lot of questions and no answers.

Estrella mirrored Ailina and Jimena's opinion and furthered her observations by attempting to rationalize the reasons why a gap in servicing existed but also acknowledged the outreach was derived from small campus programs that made small efforts to conduct identity-specific programming and outreach. Estrella mentioned she did not know if the paucity in resources was due to staffing or other factors but pointed to other sources of information on

campus, stating: "The main outreach that we did have was just from our [first-gen program]. And we only knew what they would tell us. And that was about it. Or, if I was involved in other organizations, I would find it through that as well. But it wasn't much; [there wasn't enough] access."

For Dora, her at-large career education outreach experience contributed to the inaccessibility other compañeras detailed, and to her it was "like at some point it felt like [the students] outreaching . . . like [them] seeking information." Resource-seeking and self-advocacy are processes in which all college students are encouraged to engage, but when information regarding *how* to engage with career education tools and cultures is absent, so are the students who are already contending with back-to-back hidden curricula. To Dora, the crux of career education came down to this factor, as she said:

> Knowing about it. Frankly, I think it's, again, it's information . . . like, where are these people getting this information from? You know, like, where are people [receiving information]? Like who's telling [students], "Oh, did you check out the career development center? . . . [This information is] probably [coming] from [students'] parents who probably went [to college].

Dora, in the tail end of this observation, marked a shift in the manner compañeras managed and navigated their perceptions of career education and its current limitations. Dora demonstrated how compañeras translated their experiences into robust critiques that paired their realities with nuanced explanations of how and why career education cultures needed to shift their practices. Dora, despite not expanding further, identified sources of network capital that served as one of the underlying causes that resource-privileged students were privy to information.

Bella pointedly stated what many EMFGL students come to observe:

[The] majority of [these privileged students] weren't going to have to have to deal with

these [larger limitations]. Nor do I think that [career centers] really made the time to think about these impacted communities. . . . I don't think that they're thinking [to] dig into these small percentages of 11%, 12% of Latinos, or so forth, I don't think it's a priority. . . . It's just not really at the top of their list. I think a lot of things come before that. But also, maybe [university leaders] didn't raise it enough. Maybe they should dig deeper and say, "Hey, this is what we're hearing from alumni." I don't think [this conversation is] loud enough yet. But it should be.

Dora and Bella described the relationship between resources and the structures that reproduce them. Both Dora and Bella shared these experiences in a period where the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and justice (DEIBJ) work have become priorities in several fields, but the extent and depth of that prioritization has varied significantly from context to context. To Azucena, the forms of ineffectual and surface-level justice work higher education cultures promote are a result of the manipulation of DEIBJ concepts. Azucena described it like this:

> *Una de las razones que a la vez buscamos mucho, pero en este sentido no está cumpliendo su propósito, es la famosa inclusión. Puede ser porque los programas universitarios quieren usar la inclusión como una manera de que todos pertenecen y nadie se sienta rechazado por ningún motivo de discriminación o diferencia social económica y educativa, pero en ese sentido creo que no está cumpliendo su función porque a la hora de las instituciones querer incluir a todos en un solo grupo y generalizar el ámbito professional, están excluyendo a todos los estudiantes que no tienen un sentido de pertenencia porque no tienen las mismas oportunidades en el ámbito educacional ni tienen las mismas oportunidades económicas y sociales. Y no pertenecen a ese grupo, no tienen esa identidad cultural, no tienen la identidad lingüística. Por lo tanto la inclusión no funciona en ese sentido. La inclusión, de esta forma, esta excluyendo a los estudiantes que no encuentran su sentido de pertenencia. Entonces creo que tal vez la intención no es mala. Pero el delivery es en dónde se va a quebrando todo.*

> [One of the reasons–one that we often seek, but in this sense, is not fulfilling its purpose–is the famous inclusion. University programs may want to use inclusion as a way for everyone to belong and for no one to feel rejected for any discriminatory reason or social, economic, and educational difference. Yet, in that view point, I think it is not fulfilling its function because when it comes to institutions wanting to include everyone in a single group via the generalization of the professional field, they come to exclude all students who do not have a sense of belonging because they do not have the same opportunities in the educational field nor do they have the same economic and social opportunities—they don't belong to that group, they don't have that cultural identity, they don't have the linguistic identity. So, inclusion, [as it is typically portrayed,] doesn't work here.

Inclusion, in this way, is excluding students who do not find their sense of belonging. I think, maybe, that the intentions are not bad, but the delivery is where everything breaks.]

Compañeras identified personal interactions with what they interpreted to be the current limitations with career education resources and engagement models. The limitations included (a) lack in both content-specific tools and content delivery; (b) the absence of racially diverse career education advisors and counselors; (c) the dearth of intentional and proactive outreach strategies; and (d) the manipulation of DEIBJ principles that have led to inconsistent and uncritical approaches to strategic change.

Considering these limitations, however, compañeras also offered pathways that were student-centered and uplifted the value of transparency and choice. Correspondingly, Gina further reflected on the messaging she received upon proactively requesting support. The information she received further discouraged Gina from seeking on-going guidance, especially because the support she sought was delivered by one of the only programs aiming to serve first-generation students on her campus. Gina recalled:

> [I was] feeling pressured, because I didn't know what I wanted to do with my [primary] major and feeling like [I loved my second major], but like, what am I going to do with [that second] major? And I remember [support staff] telling me like, it doesn't matter, like, college is for you to explore and for you to figure stuff out. And so, in that way, [this staff member was] very much like, "You're gonna figure it out as you go." But it wasn't a full-fledged conversation . . . that [was] a very idealized conversation. Like, yeah, you don't have to worry about [your major], now. But eventually, we'll have to worry about it. And I wish I would have had conversations in my 3rd and 4th year where [we talked] about tangible ways you can continue with your passions and interests and make it work for you. Because, for first-generation students, for many of us who are also low-income, money is always going to be a big issue. Like that's a reality that students from wealthier backgrounds maybe don't have to worry about. They're like, "I can be a bohemian artist and not earn anything and be okay, because my parents will pay for my rent." And they're fine. It's like, I can figure myself out, even after college, but for first-gen students . . . like no. I feel a pressure, like I need to prove that this was all worth it. Yeah, I don't feel like [my university] did teach me. . . . I didn't have those . . . [transparent] conversations, and I kind of had to stumble into it on my own. . . . I wish things had gone differently.

Gina's disillusionment is two-fold. Principally, Gina mentioned she had to "stumble upon" experiences that necessitated preparation. Gina needed transparent conversations that considered her socioeconomic concerns, concerns that led her to seek a university education. In turn, these concerns magnified internal pressures that were, and have continued to be, exacerbated by narratives of sacrifice. The connection between career education and "making the experience worth it" requires much more than the idealized conversations that serve as the norm in a multitude of career advising spaces. Secondly, in this specific circumstance, Gina was advised by a program catering to students with her similar identities. Given this program's mission, Gina expected to hold a much more nuanced conversation regarding the realities she entered her university culture with. Seeing that she could not receive this multilayered dialogue in the space she trusted, Gina felt like she had to map out her career education trajectory on her own.

Similarly, Azucena held related beliefs about what models of career education should achieve, as she said:

> *Creo que la expectativa primordial sería la navegación de los recursos que hay en cuanto a tu elección sobre la carrera en la que tú estás desenvolviendo. Creo que siempre es importante hablarle a un estudiante con la verdad de que no inmediatamente obteniendo un degree vas a obtener un trabajo, porque eso no es verdad. . . . Creo que la expectativa es simple: más apoyo, más recursos, más herramientas para hacer a estos estudiantes más seguros de sí mismos para cuando salgan a exponerse a lo que es la realidad de la vida, no se sientan broken.*

> [I think the primary expectation would be to [help students] navigate the resources that exist regarding their career choice. I think it's always important to speak to a student with the truth. [Having students assume] that immediately getting a degree means getting a job [is untrue]. . . . I think the expectation is simple: more support, more resources, more tools to make these students more self-confident so that when they go out to expose themselves to the reality of life, they do not feel broken.]

In summary, compañeras drew their views on the drawbacks of career education from complex personal interactions. Feeling a combination of institutional distrust and

disillusionment, compañeras were driven to provide suggestions for the reconceptualization of

the career education field and what it prioritizes as worthy. Gina outlined these ideological and

tangible changes by stating:

> I think there needs to be a bigger shift in how we talk to students, especially first generation students about careers. And, you know, because *career*, [because] this word [signifies] that you've made it, that you're going to be okay, [that] you're going to be set [once you get] a career, we need to do our best to dispel that college is the only way to get there. . . . I mean, now I see that college . . . I don't want to say it's a scam, but like, it isn't the only way [to get a career]. And sometimes [college is] not the best way for different learners. . . . [We are] slowly starting to shift in that we're coming to understand that there are different ways of getting a career. [This] is the path that has been advertised and sold to us for so long, [but it] may not be the most direct path and may not be the most adequate for everyone, because everyone has different learning abilities and learning skills. And I've seen so many students struggle at 4-year institutions, community college, students doing classes that they're just genuinely not interested in, but then excelling in the things they are passionate about. So I think, right now, it feels very limited. Career training feels very limited. It feels very much like if students want more [guidance], they need to go out on their own . . . and figure it out on their own.

Limitations in current forms of career education can be traced to interwoven complexities

that are university-specific but propelled by the ideological confinements that surround the

culture of career education, and, consequently, career success. Compañera's encounters with

these limitations left lasting impressions that ultimately dictated their hesitancy to re-engage with

their career centers and/or other university departments. In turn, this hesitancy added to a career

identity formation process that already consisted of minimal structured guidance from university

programs and personnel. As these limitations exist, so do the institutional expectations that

maintain the lifeline and usage of generalized career advising. Navigating a university with

institutional expectations of how students should use university experiences in service of career

growth propelled a growing misalignment between compañeras and what they hoped college

would help them achieve. In turn, these institutional expectations became, and are, the prevalent

reasons why higher education has remained purposefully unequipped to serve identity-intersectional students.

Institutional Expectations

In this context, I equate institutional expectations to hidden curricula. Delgado (2020) paraphrased Jackson's (1990) definition of hidden curriculum as the "unspoken transmission of norms, values, and beliefs at school" (as cited in Delgado, 2020, p. 2). In addition to norms, values, and beliefs, the experiences outlined by the compañeras in this study also indicated practices and actions also contributed to the propagation of hidden curriculum. When asked if and how compañeras were expected to know how to prepare for their lives after college graduation, compañeras agreed, in some instances, having "made it" to college meant university leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff believed they would know how to "make it" to a stable career.

For Ailina, the expectation to *know* how to navigate different social spheres and attain any relevant goals began early on in their childhood and heightened in college. When prompted to respond to the aforementioned question, Ailina responded:

> Fuck yes! I'm talking about this in therapy. I'm the perfect first-gen child, at the time, daughter. Of course I'm supposed to know everything. Of course I'm supposed to know how to go forward. Of course I'm supposed to know how to write my resume. Of course, I was supposed to have multiple resumes to send out and that each resume should be specifically tailored. Of course I was supposed to know how to write a cover letter. You have a career center on campus that you never have time to go to, but it's there. So, therefore, you should learn through the process of osmosis how to write a cover letter. Oh yeah, I felt like I was expected to know [how to plan for what's next].

Dora, too, recognized college-related expectations loomed years before her arrival to a college campus and reached a tipping point during her senior year. Dora described this recognition by stating:

[I was] expected to know how [college] worked. I think even from the onset, even from the application process. There were a few [of us] that were pushing, were fighting with our guidance counselors in high school to help us. . . . I mean, like, I feel like you're just supposed to know when all these things are supposed to happen. And like, you have to open up this chest of knowledge that you hid in the back of your head, and like, pray that you never had to reopen. And then you're just expected to know all over again. It just makes you feel like an impostor. Because you're like, why? Like, why don't I know what to do? Even before we graduated, like the first semester of senior year, I felt like somehow people knew what was next, like, people were saying "Oh, yeah, like we started applying to jobs and grad programs," you know, and others had already been applying since the summer. And I remember being in my senior year, in my dorm thinking like "Shit. I feel like I should apply to programs." Other people were talking about their applications, or they've already submitted shit. Like, I hadn't done anything.

Even for compañeras who had close ties with faculty mentors, the need to rehash the extent of one's minimal familiarity with college and career choice processes was ever-present. Estrella, upon feeling the weight of her mentor's expectations, had to explain her current understanding of what she was living through to her faculty mentor—an action that required self-advocacy. Estrella described this feeling by stating:

People thought that we all knew exactly what we're doing, what our pathways were like. And I think that's where sometimes Dr. D and I had trouble because she was not a first-gen student. And that's where I was like, "Well, Dr. D, I don't know that right? I don't know the procedure." And I think once I made that aware, she made it a lot easier for me to understand what the actual application for the master's program was like. I was ready to do the same thing as high school. But after speaking to her, Dr. D was like "No, apply to at least two [programs], only two, if at most like three or four, and be intentional with your programs, and I'm like, "Oh, I need to be intentional with my programs?" I didn't know that. But if it wasn't because I didn't have her support and understanding about what came after, I don't think I would have been able to understand how to apply for my master's program. I think I would have been stuck.

What Estrella outlined is a critical offering to this work, for it underscored the hyper-complex roles first-generation students often play but for which they are rarely acknowledged. First-generation students do not get to be *just* students but oftentimes must play multiple roles to get served in specific and nuanced manners. Apart from being a student, the EMFGL graduates featured in this study served as institutional accountability agents and self-advocates. Already

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serving as caretakers, leaders, and cultural brokers, EMFGL students took on these layered

identities out of necessity. In turn, this necessity doubled as a need to "figure it out," a solitary

experience that Bella commented about by stating:

> [It] was on you to figure it out. Not that you knew the next steps, but you had to figure out *how* to figure it out. Yeah, I feel like it's just kind of a lost conversation. Like I said, I feel like it's just you once you graduate. It's this idea that you're set. But we don't talk about the students that graduate but can't seem to, you know, find a career or find a job or [know] what kind of jobs to look for. It's just a matter of like, well, you did it. So figure it out. It's kind of just this, "I did what I had to," and that's it. And I'm sure maybe, maybe it's different for other people who have those resources. They have a friend, a friend who knows someone who says this could be a good fit for you, right? And you have something in line. And I knew a lot of people that I was in class with who were like, "Oh, well, I have a job right after college that my dad got me at his firm" and this and that. And it sounds great. But I mean, not everyone is like that. So it's just very much like to each their own, but we, [the college,] wish you the best. Because that's what it felt like.

Coupled with Bella's input, Gina's view also suggested there existed an institutional

expectation to automatically know what practices and strategies to employ to obtain a formal

career once students crossed the graduation stage. In Gina's case, she felt like her university

culture spoke of the degree as the means to all ends. Gina said:

> Like, okay, you have your degree. Now, that degree is gonna automatically unlock a feature in your brain where you know where you're headed, and you know how to apply for jobs and know how to negotiate your salary. So, yeah, it was expected, but I was really caught off guard.

As an illustration of the extensive reach of college-related expectations, this subtheme

serves as supplementary evidence of the environment compañeras were influenced by before

their college days and were disservice by as they maneuvered their campuses. This subtheme

follows the Defining Dominant Interpretations of Career Success subtheme because both themes,

in tandem, present the ideological beliefs and representative practices that dictated compañeras'

interactions with their college's service-rendering cultures. Altogether, the presentation of

institutional expectations on at-large student bodies speaks to the withering effectivity of a

university education because repeated assumptions regarding students' knowledge about their academic and career journeys dismisses societal contexts and how those contexts change students' interactions with university services. In essence, what universities deem as obvious can no longer be treated as such as the cultures universities maintain because of custom or tradition disempower what a college education can come to be in these evolving and turbulent times.

Inaccessibility to Specific Identity-Based Career Education

Inasmuch as universities are intent on serving *all* students, universities hold the responsibility of catering a curricular and cocurricular experience that will equip students to address societal demands and needs. Complications with the latter arise when universities stop, or have never engaged in, a decoding process with a purpose to assess the multiple elements of a university experience. Questions such as "Does this practice still work for our students?" and "What about our first-generation college students?" may not be the norm in college task forces and committees, but the need to center and unravel these questions is a crucial task if universities mean to provide tangible and intangible services, resources, and cultures worthy of identity-intersectional students.

Markedly, the compañeras of this study said their university interactions rarely addressed or held dialogues about workforce environments and how those environments may come to affect their meaning-making and sense of self. Chiefly, compañeras mentioned wishing for the type of guidance that combined knowledge about the practical and tactical tools associated with career preparation with conversations about interlocking systems of oppression and how these systems unfold in a work environment. Equally important, compañeras like Gina felt the lack of specific career education that spoke to her soon-to-be experiences as an EMFGL professional dampened her self-confidence and did not arm her with information needed to seek out high-

paying positions aligned to her person, her values, and her nurture—all elements cultivated by

her life history. Gina explained:

> [I wish] that maybe I had been trained to believe in myself more to seek out these . . .
> like, it's, it's, it feels wrong to say but like a lot of these, like, systems of oppression in
> our world right now go hand in hand with capitalism and like, money. And, you know, I
> wish I had money. . . . And a lot of these high, high paying jobs, like, you look at the
> personalities of the people who have these jobs, and they are very confident in
> themselves and they're risk takers. And I don't know if I was taught to be that way. I am
> nurturing and I want to make people feel seen and validated. And that's the career I'm in
> right now, and that [nurture] came out of my own struggles. So yeah, I just don't feel like
> college did anything to move me up to get me into positions that are well-paid and spoke
> to who I am.

Jimena felt similarly and shared memories about the emotional ties she held, and still

holds, about the career search process. Jimena addressed multiple layers to her experience,

stating:

> I wasn't prepared for even the interview process and what to do during an interview, how
> to properly answer questions during an interview, how to really talk about my values. . . .
> I almost felt like I had nothing to offer. I didn't even have a professional attire to wear,
> you know, like, I was like, "What do I do? You know, I don't even have a nice suit or a
> nice blouse?" I remember having to go to the Salvation Army, because there was one by
> my house. And so I was like, I'm just gonna go there. And so I did that. I just wasn't
> prepared. You know, I wasn't prepared for the really important reason why I went to
> college, which was to get a job, a career. Even thinking about how to negotiate your
> salary, you know, like, that's just so hard. It doesn't come easy, I think, especially for
> Women of Color. And I remember, when I first tried to do it, I had to be guided through
> the whole process. And I'm not gonna lie, I cried afterwards. You know, because I was
> like, "Oh my God, like, I am so scared." And this was just recent, you know, like, I've
> already been working for years. I didn't even know I didn't need to accept the salary that
> they were offering me. I didn't know that I could be like, "Oh, actually, no, you know,
> like, I want to ask for this." And I didn't even know how to do it. And it's so crazy
> because, you know, we come from low-income backgrounds and sometimes it seems like
> you're always a step behind from other people. It's frustrating.

Furthermore, Jimena continued to speak to the reasons she believed career education and

relevant programming were not offered to her. Because Jimena was a commuter student during

her undergraduate years, she could not access related events, workshops, and/or training that may

have spoken to some of the topics and realities she identified in the previously shared quote. The

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disillusionment regarding the dearth of accessible programming was further augmented due to the frigid and dispiriting environment of her campus' career center. The merger of degeneralized programming and an indifferent environment led Jimena to self-educate and gain a critical perspective on the state of career education. As mentioned, Jimena felt the gaps in her career education journey may have been because she was a commuter. She explained:

> So I wasn't always on campus, right. And sometimes I was there during later times when maybe things happen, which is another thing when it comes to commuters, making certain times accessible for us commuter population that, you know, are commuting from home. I was also one who waited until I was in senior year to even go to the career center, you know, even just walking into the space, it didn't feel welcoming or inviting. I didn't really see somebody like myself there. It just seemed like everybody already knew, you know, how to maneuver you know, the career aspect of it, but there was not a program or like somebody that came to outreach. It was more like you had to seek it yourself. And it's really . . . it makes me really frustrated, now that I think back because why wasn't there the support? But, you know, when I was [at the career center], I waited and sat there, and I looked at the books and I found a resume template. And then I worked my way on my own. And I was like, "Oh, this is what it looks like!" I was barely learning all these things that I should have known, you know, or I wish I would have. And I just followed the template and I did my own research. I knew that I had to get a job, right, I think the purpose of going to college for most of us is like, "Oh, we want to get a better job, because we want to provide for our families; [our parents] always tell us we want you to have a better life than us and a career in a job that you like to do." And, and so part of that motivation to go to college is because essentially, you want to get a better job. And, you know, it doesn't always happen that way. You know, I think they don't really tell us, you know, how it really is and how long it can actually take to get a first job and the process of that. So my knowledge about career development was like, nothing, really; it was close to zero. And I just think I just learned on my own by going into this office, looking at all the templates, the brochures, the handbooks they had, and just self-teaching.

The lasting impact of not having specific career education that spoke to workforce realities that are closely tied to identity markers left compañeras with a sense of loneliness and loss. In realizing that many day-to-day occurrences merited a conversation before they happened, compañeras had to learn how to cope and maneuver through manifold circumstances as they experienced them. Consequently, managing complex situations in the workforce further perpetuated compañeras' feelings about navigating systems on their own—a feeling compañeras

already had in-depth familiarity with because of similar histories and interactions they held in college. Bella described her feelings about the programs that surrounded her, stating:

> None of them could have prepared me for how to maneuver through these situations as a first-gen Latina in the career world. Because it's easy to tell someone you should know how to dress business casual versus professional or you should know how to write out a resume and things like that, which is great right. Those are great resources to have. But how do you maneuver through a world that isn't entirely always rooting for you? And how do you show up for yourself? I feel no program actually helped me on that front. So, I did go into the career field feeling very alone. . . . There wasn't anything that said, "Hey, when you get into the career world, you're going to run into situations where this might look like this. Let's talk about it. And this is how, like, [you train your] mind on how to get through this and how to validate myself." Or, for example, if someone were to ask me about giving me a massage? Like, that's probably not okay. So how do you have those talks? How do you get rid of that fear that you're gonna get in trouble [that you learned] because of how you were kind of raised? So things like that. I don't feel like any of those things could have really prepared me. I don't think any of the programs I was involved in could have prepared me for that. I think you can't go to your parents either, right? Like, or even my, even my own siblings, right?

This subtheme is a testimony highlighting the aftereffects of not having access to identity-intersectional career programming, dialogues, and mentorship. Compañeras presented (a) their histories with their career center departments; (b) the impact those histories had on their sense of self-confidence and self-advocacy; and (c) the resulting mixture of fear, insecurity, and instability that dictated past and current interactions with career procedures and the damaging surroundings that were embedded within their respective career cultures. By answering the question, "Was there specific programming that engaged you in career education that spoke to any or all of [your] identities?," compañeras were able to reflect and analyze how the absence of identity-specific programming transcended the undergraduate space and permeated their work trajectories. The latter then produced, and kept producing, a reality that not only exacerbated the marginalization compañeras felt throughout their college years but also re-introduced versions of oppression in a high stakes environment where action toward aggression can have multifactorial consequences.

Equipping for Workplace Oppression

Alleyne (2005) used the term "workplace oppression" deliberately to "address complex

organizational dynamics and silent forces that give rise to difficulties involving issues of power

and powerlessness and of the dominant and dominated" (p. 287). Although Alleyne's

operationalization of workplace oppression is not a comprehensive embodiment of the

experience, I use this definition to report compañeras' sentiments regarding their encounters with

career education and their effectiveness in preparing them to confront and cope from

presentations of workplace oppression.

Across compañera interviews, nearly all contributors agreed their colleges did not

provide them with tools to equip them to address forms of oppression in their work

environments. For Bella, the lack of antiracist and justice-driven models of career education

rendered significant ramifications. When asked how her campus prepared her to confront

systemic forms of workplace oppression, Bella responded:

> It honestly didn't. I think that's why it was very hard. I'll give an example of the first time
> that I experienced [workplace oppression]. And it wasn't towards me, but I saw it and I
> was like "that can't be right." My workplace is comprised of predominantly white
> women. And you know, if you're Latina you're casted as being more seductive if you
> wear red lipstick, but if a white woman does it, it's elegant, it's classy, but if it's you they
> ask you to dumb it down. I would see things like that, but I didn't know how to react to
> them or what to do, if that makes sense. Um, I would even see my own coworkers, like,
> my old roommate, actually. . . . She used to work in the same team as I did. And if she
> didn't say goodbye when she was leaving, it was a very big deal. HR had a conversation
> with her, because that's "rude." But the white woman who's the supervisor can, you
> know, go about a day responding in a snappy way. And that's considered professional,
> and she's seen as "firm," and she's a "leader," right? . . . I started to feel guilty because
> you're just seeing this happen, and you're just trying to navigate it because your parents
> told you to always play on the safe side, right? Don't risk your job, don't risk your
> security, don't risk what we all worked for, don't dare speak up. But you're looking at
> these things and you're hearing these things . . . and you have no idea how to personally
> navigate them. . . . So you're just kind of navigating through situations that college didn't
> walk me through. So here I am questioning everything. It's just that fear of like, how do
> you defend yourself? How do you defend People of Color that you work with, or women

that you work with who are not in roles that are high up there and don't really have, you know, a voice in a way?

Bella continued to state that portions of her undergraduate curriculum honed in on social justice outcomes, but the majority of these conversations often resided in the theoretical and rarely—if at all—transitioned into practice-based dialogues. Although Bella's personal history and in-class experiences formed her pro-social ideological views, she believed she was ill-prepared to maneuver race-based micro and macro aggressions, which resulted in an internalized fear of becoming a bystander. On the occasion that contributors received guidance, support was minimal and often referred to singular parts of one's identity in ways that did not demonstrate how identity, or a matrix of identities, can serve as cultural and ideological additions to an environment.

Like Bella, Liseth stated her university did not arm her to face workplace oppression or present conversations that channeled her interwoven identities as an asset. Liseth said:

> Nothing academic prepared me honestly. My first graduate program, my advisor was a woman. And she was the only person that was very honest. . . . She sometimes brought up me being like Latina, but she never talked about, like, how hard that would be in itself. She always had the lens of being a woman, but not a Latina . . . . She had a lot of lessons of like doing research and stuff and saying, you know, like, "You need to make sure that if you're going to publish with other people, you need contracts that say how exactly you're going to contribute, and how exactly your name will be placed on this." And, you know, she had a lot of life experiences of a woman in an academic setting that she passed on and talked about, like advocating for yourself. But I think that was probably the closest thing that prepared me. A lot of her lessons were, like, "You're gonna do a lot of work, and you will probably not get credit for it." And that's like, the closest thing that prepared me for being out in the real world and dealing with those types of situations.

Gina also stated she did not feel like her college campus taught her to approach career education procedures, let alone how to address forms of marginalization that ultimately permeated her workplace realities. The problem, according to Gina, was the insulation and unattainability of career resources. About her campus, Gina noted:

All the resources were through the career center; the career center was the gatekeeper of all of this knowledge. And if you couldn't make it to their 8 to 5 hours, well, you were screwed out of luck, and you just didn't have access to those resources. So I don't feel like I got too much.

As students with interlocking responsibilities, contributors were left to sense-make experiences as they lived them, oftentimes without the support of a community or network of mentors with similar histories. Now, being in workplace circles, contributors were able to connect what they confronted in their workplace environments to their college tenures—a realization that is replete with emotion but guided by a consciousness of root causes. Dora explained:

[College] was teeing up what it's like now. Because of the institution that I went to, a predominantly white institute, I [experienced] culture shock. And that is how the workforce is nowadays. It's very rooted, and its foundation is white supremacy culture, it's white dominant culture [that demands you to] produce, [to churn] something as there's a higher need, and as demand rises, so does the work. The managers that manage you are the people who are creating the expectations of those experiences, you know, and they just also happen to be white and it's not a coincidence, right?

Correlated with Dora's analysis, Ailina mentioned how forms of career education in higher education have slowly evolved to address hidden cultures and norms in the workplace but have yet to bridge into intentional practices that are founded on experience sharing. The lack of experience sharing led Ailiana to traverse through situations that many individuals with shared identities had lived through before her. The dearth of insight regarding the pitfalls of her field, amassed with her ideological principles grounded in collective justice, resulted in a single-sided conversation between her and what she was experiencing. Yet, Ailina took that awareness and fused it with her commitment to community work, a tool and sense of purpose that yielded a language she could continue using to critique what she witnessed and was subjected to. Ailina stated:

When I was in college . . . that whole concept of hidden curriculum in the workplace was so new that even programs like our first-gen program on campus didn't really exist so they didn't address it. And so I don't think that started getting addressed until after I graduated. . . . That was when, you know, I started seeing those conversations happening, and I was like, "Oh, that's so cool, I wish I would have gotten that." I wish we would have gotten that type of conversation when I was an undergrad, because I think it really would have benefited me, especially as someone whose academic and professional career led me to working in a nonprofit with peak savior mentality, peak exploitation of Black and Brown bodies and labor and love. I would have liked to have known that [many nonprofits] take advantage of the love that Black and Brown folks have for their communities, and the fact that they want to give back to their communities, and they take service and just turn it into something ugly. Turn it for profit. I wish I would have gotten that insight. I wish I would have gotten the insight from people who work in higher education, specifically community colleges, [where a lot of] necessary positions are grant funded and therefore are not a true part of the school's priorities because it's not institutionalized. If you're not institutionalized, you're not a priority, that is what I've learned, and I wish someone would have taught me that. And [administrators] know the people who are in those grant funded positions at community colleges are Black and Brown folks, because Black and Brown folks are the ones who want to be the Latine cultural center coordinators, and they're the ones who are willing to accept a 40K salary that could potentially be cut at any moment because they are the ones who care, because they're the ones who see the importance, not the institution itself, but them–the coordinators–and the students. And so I would have liked that conversation, I think, especially for those of us that want to go into service-based roles. Actually, I saw a really interesting quote once that said, "We don't accept the conversation of equitable compensation from people that are in service, because the service should be enough to compensate for what you're not making," and that's why we only talk about equitable compensation when it comes to private industry, because it's like you're already selling your labor. You might as well be compensated for it. But my response to that is not only am I selling my labor, I'm also selling my love. I'm capitalizing on my love. Why shouldn't that also be monetarily compensated for that in this capitalist society?

Equipping for instances of workplace oppression, and the ideologies that perpetuate them, requires support structures that comprehend the granular experiences of identity-intersectional students. Writ-large, higher education leaders have attempted to strategize approaches to reach versions of equity work, but the metrics potentially used to assess equity markers and operationalize equity cultures have remained ambiguous for many campuses.

Consequently, the call to serve historically and systematically underrepresented students, including first-generation college students, has often been compromised by one-size-fits all

support service tendencies that universities aim to conduct to serve the entirety of a college campus. As a result, institutional demands to support all students in a similar fashion have created hindrances for resource centers and support staff who may aim to construct specific career tools but are limited due to bureaucratic limitations. Because context-specific DEIJB changes on college campuses are enacted by university leaders who often do not represent marginalized student populations, the agency to create services that prepare students for different presentations of workplace oppression via career models may not be a top-list priority for administrators. Resultantly, EMFGL graduates are entering work environments and reconfronting race-based and gendered-based aggressions without the potential preparation that could have derived from their educational experiences.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked: How can first-generation Latina epistemology inform practices for career development services?

Cultural Wealth and Social-Emotional Crossroads

The interview protocol was based on the dimensions integral to Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development. To critically understand how first-generation Latina epistemologies can inform career development and education services, I created interview questions that elaborated on modes of cultural wealth and social-emotional experiences that inform the ideologies and values compañeras hold—principles that double as dimensions featured in Garriott's CCWM. In this chapter, Cultural Wealth and Socio-Emotional Crossroads serve as umbrella themes with their own respective subthemes. However, an additional blanket theme emerged from compañera interviews that has assisted me in responding the research question at hand: Resisting and Responding to Structural and Institutional Conditions. In

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preparation of the findings, I (a) offer an abbreviated overview of the at-large themes mentioned above, (b) introduce the subthemes aligned to each of them, and (c) explain their relevance to the discussion of findings that follow.

As presented in Chapter 1, Garriott's (2020) interpretation of cultural wealth attempts to shift conversations around what is lacking in first-generation students to emphasizing the cultural additions of first-generation students that contribute to their purposefulness and resoluteness while in college. Imperatively, Garriott situated this dimension within its origins—Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth framework, which is principally grounded in critical race theory.

Explicating on the assets of first-generation college students who hold an intersection of identities, the purpose of the cultural wealth dimension in Garriott's (2020) CCWM is to affirm the myriads of capital that have contributed to the following: (a) heightened career aspirations; ability to grapple with institutionalized hardships, (b) urgency to seek an on-campus sense of belonging, (c) drive to seek support resources to cope from added marginalization, and (d) use of critical consciousness to resist oppression and advocate for the collective.

The elements of the cultural wealth dimension align well with the subthemes that emerged from compañera interviews. Each subtheme is specifically aligned to familial capital and aspirational capital; yet, each subtheme—and its respective form of capital—does not go without a nuanced lived experience that shows additional support services are needed to understand the thoroughness of how those forms of capital play out in filial, academic, and career spaces. Specifically, two subthemes merged: (a) Familial Expectation as Motivation Encouraging Postgraduate Success and (b) Chaos of the Question Mark: Beliefs about Career Outcomes. The first subtheme aligns to familial capital, and the second subtheme aligns with

aspirational capital. Both subthemes—and their related testimonios—underscore the influences that must come to inform career education models moving forward.

As a counterpart, Garriott's (2020) CCWM portrayal of Social-Emotional Crossroads is a move toward comprehending the psychological and social realities of racially and economically marginalized first-generation college students–an area of research that has yet to be represented and analyzed through its own framework. As individuals who travel among spaces, interactions, expectations, and identities, EMFGLs travel among multiple worlds, often finding juxtapositions between them. The tensions, learnings, responsibilities, trials, and triumphs found in these filial, academic, and career realms vary in their presentation and manifestation, but the opportunity to understand how they are triggered, how they operate, and how they dictate an experience can potentially find freedom and validity in a higher education context because of the communities that can be found there.

Realistically, however, there are several dimensions Gariott (2020) illustrated that require dismantling to create campus environments responsive to the worldly juxtapositions EMFGL students and, ultimately, graduates live through. Gariott identified three main dimensions to the Social-Emotional Crossroads—campus cultural fit, normative capital, and school–family integration—all of which were described in Chapter 1. The essence of the combination of these dimensions, however, is a reminder that the parameters of higher education's knowledge of first-generation students' social, emotional, and psychological journeys continues to follow, be designed for, and uphold the needs of White, middle to upper class students whose capital and histories are equipped to maneuver the hidden curriculums and norms of institutions that built the latter for them. Connectedly, the compañeras in this study spoke to the social-emotional trajectories that bolster the manifold worlds they operate in and how these worlds are often

thrown off their axis as they juggle the juxtapositions and systemic marginalizations that arrive with them. Appropriately, the subtheme representing the aforementioned experiences is titled Living in Systemic Juxtapositions.

The last overarching theme present in contributor interview findings was not titled or featured in Gariott's (2020) CCWM: Resisting and Responding to Structural and Institutional Conditions. Like the other thematic buckets, this umbrella theme features three subthemes: (a) Defying Deficit Narratives as Gateway to Resistance; (b) For Us, By Us—Models as Source of Community-Driven Career Education; and (c) Purpose Building: Community Work as Subversive Career Education. Although this theme has no direct ties to the cultural wealth dimension via resistance capital, the prevalence of this theme and its accompanying subtheme were frequent enough to garner its own section outside the CCWM framework.

The emergence of this at-large theme beckons observation of how first-generation college student resistance contributes to academic and career success and how that success can come to promote culture shifts and disruptions that speak to the values of this prosocial wave of racially and economically marginalized students. Via this theme, contributors highlighted the effectiveness of learning from and leaning on the collective as a form of survival and necessity, and understanding the self amid individualized higher education climates.

Cultural Wealth Dimension

As mentioned previously, two subthemes emerged in the cultural wealth dimension: (a) Familial Expectation as Motivation Encouraging Postgraduate Success and (b) Chaos of the Question Mark: Beliefs about Career Outcomes. I discuss each subtheme in turn.

Familial Expectation as Motivation Encouraging Postgraduate Success

A first-generation college student's personal identity and understanding can significantly be shaped by parental and institutional expectations. As noted in many first-generation narratives and scholarly works (e.g., Espinoza, 2010) and edited works (e.g., De Leon, 2014), much of this identity is shaped by filial and educational expectations or involvement. Specifically, EMFGL students often experience living two lives or must construct and maintain a conscious third space because they feel pressure to balance life at home with their life at postsecondary institutions. Some women have experienced anger and apprehension toward parents and the structure of inclusion in higher education, which could often be seen through compañeras' association of getting a college degree because it was a nonnegotiable, a must, and an output hailing from parental struggle. Studying familial expectation is important because these factors can be shown to impact a student's educational path, identity formation, and self-stability. I dissected this experience in this subtheme, via compañera voice, to recognize the stories, people, and motivations that ultimately informed compañeras' construction of a self-determined being amid parental and institutional expectation.

Although incomplete, this subtheme attempts to cover integral parts constructing the term *motivation*. In this context, motivation is replete with two primary thought-processes and emotions: (a) motivation connected to pride and (b) motivation connected to pressure. Motivation due to pride is associated with compañeras' will and determination to attain a college degree, the presumed social and economic mobilization it comes with, and how that college degree is representative of their families' sacrifices. Contrastingly, motivation associated with pressure is interlaced with the multifactorial layers of making those same sacrifices worth familial trajectories. The duality of both experiences exists within the EMFGL student and

graduate, and, as such, those narratives are in constant flux. Existence of fluidity between motivation as pride and motivation as pressure requires a nuanced examination, for familial expectations as a mode of encouragement for postgraduate success is a crucial branch of the first-generation student narrative that can disclose an opening to a realm of career education that can include filial participation.

Shifting the focus from career development as an individualized procedure to a social-emotional and community-based practice entails highlighting the core reasons why family is a distinct marker for postgraduate success—markers that are deeply intertwined and driven by memory. The memories compañeras hold are distinct and repeatedly linked to individuals outside of themselves. For the majority of compañeras, thinking about the "whys" of college—thinking about what college would personally signify—was not automatic but, instead, a personal goal that came as second thought. As Gina said:

> [I personally] didn't think much about why I wanted to go to college. So I mean, I wanted to do it for my parents. . . . I saw how much my my parents struggled, my mom struggled, like she worked so much. And it took a toll on like, her body and she was always tired.

Like Gina, Jimena attributed her desire to pursue a higher education that would lead to a different postgraduate outcome because she witnessed—and has continued to witness—how hard her parents worked, how that manual strife affected their bodies, and how their daily effort to provide was considered, through a parental lens, as a cautionary tale. It was a tale that said, "Get an education so that you do not have to work as hard as I do," but a tale that has often not been reframed or recognized for the gifts filial contributions bring—gifts that paved the way toward purpose and the very criticality that has allowed EMFGL students to expect more from systems around them. Jimena explained:

> You know, we were not very well off, you know, like, we shared a small apartment with my aunt, and so I think [coming to college meant] making sure that I had a job that I

enjoyed doing. Specifically because, you know, my mom, cleans houses and like, you know, their like, "I'm so tired" or, you know, she'll like give me her hand and it'll [feel] so hard you know, because of all of like, the chemicals that she uses for cleaning and same thing with my dad. So they knew how hard their jobs were and I think they just wanted me to do better. And really do something, do something that I enjoyed; . . . they just wanted me to go farther in life, I guess, because they didn't have that opportunity.

The mental-emotional borders that contributors must converge to hold the tensions that are surmised with the responsibility of advancing *la familia* [the family] are parallel to this motivation to succeed in honor of others. Motivation as pressure, under this light, re-inscribes a new meaning to college, one that has the EMFGL in a constant state of multiple negotiations between what must be done and what they desire to be done. Elaborating on this sentiment, Bella felt her career self-authorship was diminished due to the hierarchy of familial responsibility she had to address. For Bella, even exploring her career path brought forth ambiguity and conflict between her and her mother—her mother being both the source of her encouragement and contention. Bella explained:

> [When] it came to even like choosing the career path, it was always like, well, you can't be a marine biologist, because you don't make money and we didn't send you to school, so that you can just choose marine biology and and not make money. So that idea of college and career [meant] . . . you have to make money and you have to make sure my sacrifices are worth it. . . . It was very much, this is how you should do it. And I think I always felt like this need to kind of fight it, . . . [but] I remember even in college I tried to minor in finance because my mom was like, "Do business, it's gonna be safe." And I took one class and I was like, "I cannot do this." But I felt like a failure because it was like, how am I gonna make money? Like, you start thinking of all these things. Because [to my mom] it was always like, "What are you doing?" And even when I majored in English, it was like, "What are you going to do with that? And how are you going to pay for your bills," and, you know, they kind of put those fears on you. . . . My mom would live vicariously through me to the point where it was just . . . very controlling. And then this, like, guilt would come up if you try a different avenue, you know? So, yeah, it just comes back to this is what you have to do because we've come all this way for you to do this. Side note, actually, so my mom used to clean a house and be a nanny for a family. And she got that job right when she came to the United States, in like the 80s. This woman was a lawyer and partner so she made good money. And because they had this good relationship with my mom, they offered to pay for my private school. So again, that's the second layer of like, "Bella, I'm doing all of these things, I'm cleaning this house, I'm

doing all these jobs, you know, working as a custodian working three, four jobs, so this is how it's gonna go, because I'm doing all of this so that you can go to college."

As pressure meets guilt, the borderlands between academia and the home intensifies. Choice, in these spaces, becomes relegated to obligatory decisions about what to pursue because seeing one's mother's hands callused, seeing her body exhausted by the toll of the three jobs she works, seeing how much their ambitions for more exist in the EMFGL body becomes the engine. This engine becomes central to one's entire existence and the principal narrative, a narrative held vigorously by migrant and refugee families. College, in this view, becomes a must. Liseth explained this concept well, stating:

> [I knew] there was never an option not to attend college. So, I mean, as early as I can remember, it was, like, "Oh, one day you're gonna go to, like, universidad." I mean, ever since I was five, I was like, I'm going to be a doctor. And, I mean, I love science, I really do, and I always have, but I don't know how much it was the projecting my parents were doing and how much it was me thinking about it. So, I mean . . . there was never in my head a different option than going to college after high school . . . and it led to a lot of perfectionist tendencies…

Paz also had a similar experience with her father's expectations about going to college, and, when those expectations came to fruition, the weight of them was heavier than expected. She said:

> With my dad, I felt like [college] was like, for sure and automatic. There was never a question of like, "You're not going to do this." And then, what I didn't realize was like the difficulty of that actually happening.

Significantly, the multiple years and layers of expectations deriving from parental narratives led EMFGL graduates to view the college-going process as an end to many means. For these students, their internalization of these processes took the image of college and fused it with a sense of finality to address the decades' worth of familial aspiration they had abstractly envisioned up until they actually went to college. College was a notion, an unknown and uncharacterized experience that equated to success. But success for whom? And success in what

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form? Inasmuch as compañeras were embraced by crucial motivations to pursue a university education, they, too, were tracked into embodying a filial dream that riddled compañeras with heavy-set emotions viewing college as the only way out and the only way to tangibly represent their familial pride.

Bella described her point of view, stating:

College is success. That's the only way. If I don't do it, I'm not successful. So, I think that was really what was ingrained in me from a young age. I guess, it also became a layer of guilt, right? Like, how dare I question [going to college] or try something different? It was never a thought that maybe I could take, I don't know, a year off after high school to figure out what I wanted. It was never a thought of like, "What if I don't want to go to college at all?" There was simply . . . no option, even if I'm kicking and screaming, like, there's no point because this is all that it could be. And how dare I question it? So I remember one time I had brought that up to my mom, like, I don't know what I want to do. And she's like, "We're gonna figure it out. There's no way you're not going to go to school after that, there's no way you're gonna take a break."

What Bella expressed was also Dora's reality, and these realities were intensified when Dora became the very first member in her immediate and extended family to attend college after her eldest brother did not complete his own journey. Although not fully conveyed in Dora's words, her brother's experience with college exacerbated the intensity and set of responsibilities that would one day come to form Dora's perspective. She was called on to be the results-driven daughter, the good daughter, and the daughter who would achieve what was not yet possible. As Dora recalled:

[My] older brother [was] the first person to go to college. He didn't finish. I think he only completed a semester. But, again, even with him not completing, it became. . . once I got to high school . . . even before that, probably eighth grade, . . . [It was], "You need to go to college. You're going to go to college, and you're going to finish, and you're going to like become an astronaut/doctor/lawyer/president one day. But you're going to go to college," and then I got to high school, and that's all I thought about. That's all. I needed to get good grades, I'm going to do all the extracurriculars, so that I seemed . . . I need to make myself seem like I am worthy to go to college.

The effect of the college-going experience, and the beliefs behind them, was something

the compañeras had only begun to process even years after the journey had ended. For Ailina, the

magnitude of her parents' messaging was a pervasive thought process, as she said:

> [It is something I am currently] unpacking in therapy, because sometimes I wonder if the decision [to go to college] was ever fully mine to begin with, or if I just ended up internalizing the "oldest daughter . . . mentality" of an immigrant household. [A mentality that] that wants you to prove . . . you want to make your parents' sacrifices worth it, especially because you hear it all the time, "I sacrificed so much. This is what I did. I'm working hard so that you don't have to work hard," even though I'm still working hard too. My hard work just looks very different. It's not as physical as yours. It's a lot more mental, and, ultimately, that becomes physical, too. So I don't know. I think part of me always wonders. Was it ever truly intrinsic? Or did I just internalize it to the point where my parents' hopes and dreams became my own?

Home meant "overhearing conversations about expectation" that doubled as a constant

reminder of the primordial EMFGL obligation—the honoring of sacrifices. This duty develops

the moment EMFGLs come to understand their respective parents, guardians, and/or relatives

migrated from their homelands with the sole purpose of creating and providing an opportunity

for an education. This filial sacrifice creates a culture that integrates itself as a part of a regular

thought process—one that says, "These people left everything to give me more. Make 'this'

count. Do 'this' right." This omnipresent "this" translates and introduces itself into every

decision and action as enacting parental sacrifice means always acknowledging those sacrifices.

Every personal accomplishment and/or failure is accompanied by what built the initial EMFGL

foundation—a never-abandoning sense of heroism—the kind that asks the EMFGL to "save" her

family and to become the protector when one else can take the role as provider. Complexity,

however, arrives when one "upset[s] the whole system of [that] place" (Moraga, 1983, p. 17).

This happens when one challenges and/or contributes to the identity of the *good daughter*. What

would it mean to build for oneself *and* one's family?

Expectation, under the context of parental sacrifice, mirrors absolutes. From a young age, as Gina explained, the dogma becomes: "Since [you were] born here [the United States], . . . of course you are going to go to college." According to Gina, if you were born here, you are "to go and to make a career. To start working . . . to make money. To be someone, someone more than [family members] were." As *good daughters*—individuals who must "manage the multiple demands of school and family relationships" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 319) successfully—there is no challenge for refuting the opportunity to convert sacrifices into gains is to betray the efforts of one's family. It signifies disregard, disrespect, and, above all, ingratitude. This experience represents a unique juxtaposition between the honor of parent–child retribution and the hegemonic identity of this position. The charge of success mirrors the often unrecognized fact that this responsibility creates "an expectation that the 'good [EMFGL] woman' will always prioritize family needs above her own individual needs, . . . [an action that pits] time dedicated to school [against] time available for family" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 319).

The intersection between expectation and the multiplicity of identity arrives at an unspoken crossroad where the two meet. This crossroad remains barred and sidelined because revealing the feeling and the emotion behind it would be misunderstood in EMFGL family culture. Despite the length of time it goes unlabeled or unnamed, this crossroad is present and has been fostered for longer than many first-generation EMFGLs realize. Realizing it becomes acknowledgement, and acknowledgment becomes the site of rupture, the disruption of "the whole system of this place" (Moraga, 1983, p. 17). Yet, these double-edged motivations—the crossroad—become a part of a seemingly juxtaposed love, a love that can no longer "save [itself] from what [its] learned" of its host, its focus—the EMFGL woman. Thus, expectation becomes "a bridge of connection, legitimacy, and true experience" (Rushin, 2015, p. xxxii).

Chaos of the Question Mark: Perceptions About Career Outcomes

The culture of academia is limiting if students have been taught and conditioned to follow

its norms. It is a power-defined sphere with wires that are programmed by those with access—

everyone else who is *norm-deviant* must traipse to avoid getting shocked. Lessons in academia

are forgotten by the dominant and remembered by those who need it for survival.

Lorde (1984/2007) stated, "Education is not a luxury" (p. 36). Education, if accessible

and integrative of multiple experiences, can be a "light, [a medium, one can use to] give name to

those ideas which are . . . nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but [are] already felt"

(Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 36). Yet, this privilege—not luxury—has been tightly packed under a

pseudo-image of inclusivity. Universities and sites of higher education throughout the nation

have called for multiculturalism and diversity, but the "presence of . . . women of color . . . still

remains scarce in academia" (Rodriguez et al., 2012, p. 105). This scarcity, however, is met by

the immensity of EMFGL aspirational capital. This aspirational capital leans into the EMFGL

ability to sustain and nourish hope amid and despite obstacles (Yosso, 2005) and, as such, enters

academia with closely held beliefs about what a university degree could yield. When asked what

they believed their college degrees would result in, compañeras—across all interviews—

mentioned they had little knowledge of what was possible after college, but they did anticipate

their degrees leading them to jobs after graduation. Bella described this concept by saying:

> [I did not] know what to expect of college, during or even after. I had no idea what
> college would really do, how it would change my life or really anything. So I feel like I
> went into it blindsided a little bit. . . . I feel now that I'm looking back at it. [I thought]
> college was going to give me a job in the most simple of terms because my parents would
> always tell me, "[College will] get you a good job. And you won't be struggling like we
> do." . . . My dad was a truck driver and he would work some days like 15–16 hours, and
> he'd come back home so exhausted because he would go in like around four or five, and
> sometimes he would not come back home until like, maybe eight or nine. And he would
> come back tired. And I think he would tell me in a way that would kind of make him feel
> better for being tired, he would be like, "This is why you need to go to school; this is why

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you need to go to college to graduate so you don't come home tired like me." Like it was always kind of like that. So college was going to be that safe haven of knowledge, but also security after. And that's really all [my parents] need, even to this day. Security is such a big deal for them. . . . It's always tied to some type of fear of not having enough security financially. . . . So, college, they believed, was going to be the end of all of my problems. [My parents] didn't know that that was not the case. Because, if anything, it brings on more problems, and more gray hairs. But here we are.

The epistemological influences surrounding Bella revealed her parents used their own physical and emotional exhaustion as a source of fortitude and reassurance, but the effects of doing so had intricate ramifications for Bella, whose existence was conditioned to pursue financial security, a matter that led to more ambiguity and concern. Considering these emotion-laden ties to careers, Bella's experiences carved out room to identify and focalize a comparison between perception and reality. The belief that a college education could transform into a lucrative and stable outcome was starkly met by the other half of career conversations that are often sidelined—career exploration pathways are replete with additional unknowns, unknowns that would, ultimately, be characterized by first-generation professional identity and its nuanced truths. Moreover, compañeras also held specific visions of what success could come to be, and, despite those visions being purpose-driven and connected to furthering familial goals, those visions were met with a lack of significant direction and thorough guidance. Jimena illustrated this observation via her own past visualizations of what a college education would evolve into for her. Back then, Jimena used to consider success this way:

> [I thought success was] getting a job in some corporate office and doing the work. Whether it was, like I said, in architecture and creating homes for other people, think I was focused more on . . . [giving] back, I guess. I've always kind of had that in me, like giving back to people or helping my community. But I think I was thinking, "Oh, I'm going to be that person, you know, that's going to make a big difference. And I'm going to have that amazing job. And I'm going to be able to provide for my parents." I think that's what I had thought at the beginning of college before I was like, "Oh, I got a big, reality check. Like, I need to figure this out on my own actually." And, yeah, so in some way I always knew I wanted to give back to my community . . . and be that person that's going to have it together . . . , but I didn't know how to get there. I didn't realize that there

was even more beyond that. Like, career wise, like having a network and, and so I wasn't prepared for that, you know, when I was actually there. And realizing [that] I kind of felt alone a little bit, which is why I . . . think as first gen, we just seek answers, and we do things to get those answers. And so, I started asking questions, because I think we think what our parents think about college, that once you go to college, you're gonna get a job in whatever area you study, but they don't understand that it takes more than just getting that degree.

Jimena's thoughts lead to the synergy present in this theme: The Chaos of the Question Mark. In commencing an internal question building practice, Jimena purposefully acknowledged and unearthed the discrepancies between the perception of postgraduate outcomes and their reality. The questioning in this case discloses the values-turned-practices the compañeras of this study deemed as crucial in the career education formation trajectory: (a) family-community integration in college-to-career dialogues; (b) community-centric approaches to processing the realities associated to career-seeking cultures; and (c) the availability of information, models, and guidance that can assist EMFGLs in seeking vocations that allow them to catalyze their personal mission and service-based purpose.

As a constant companion, aspirational capital is the core for both the EMFGL and the waves of filial and community relationships that trail them. This capital transforms into a mental drive, an emotional connection, an instinctive reaction, and an almost spiritual reservoir from which to draw, because aspiration is not an individualized hope but a collective consciousness that bridges the filial space to the arenas the EMFGL traverses in honor of that dreamed upon possibility and future. As the EMFGL continues to construct those bridges and mediate the in-flux passages between them, higher education leaders must come to recognize and make visible—in both conversation and action—the misalignment between perceptions of postgraduate success students enter with and the encounters that come to define their lives after college. Explicitly, in withholding these dialogues, institutions further an already strenuous

marginality that produces additional isolation for the EMFGL and a heightened sense of apprehension toward the aim and objective of a college education.

Social-Emotional Experiences

As mentioned previously, the compañeras of this study spoke to the social-emotional trajectories of their experiences. The subtheme representing the aforementioned experiences is titled Living in Systemic Juxtapositions. Straddling in-betweenness, a state of *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 1987) allows EMFGLs to transition from survival to redefinition. Constantly negotiating and adapting to hostile environments that depict their identities as deficit and as lacking, EMFGLs live in systemic juxtapositions that require them to assess the privilege of their higher education while being pitted to address and cope with the dominant cultures around them. Leaning on the multiplicity of perspectives they hone from navigating different worlds, EMFGLs are enabled to use their in-betweenness to sense-make realities, build bridges, and expand opportunities in the midst of cyclical struggles. Fusing Anzaldúa's (1987) *nepantlerismo* and W. E. B. Du Bois' (1903/2014) double consciousness, the balancing of identities and the acknowledgement of their informative power and relation to intergenerational lessons can come to inform activist strategies and catalyze advocacy.

The presence of consciousness in the construction of justice-based initiatives that surpass superficiality is essential to epistemological influences comprising EMFGLs' needs for culturally affirming and sustaining career education. The concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and belonging continue to be manipulated by a rhetoric of control that deliberately deludes the impact of these praxis models; thus, EMFGLs are positioned to continue subverting their liminality. Considering career settings propagate overtly biased structures—but transmit covert oppressive systems in hidden ways—the responsibility of balancing various spheres that hold their own contextual modes of oppression falls on EMFGL professionals and other identity-

intersectional populations. As such, the social-emotional strain of experiencing, addressing, and healing from repeated and power-ridden transgressions becomes a hegemonic practice and additional labyrinth to decipher for the EMFGL. Just as Garriott (2020) presented campus cultural fit, normative capital, and school-family integration as a crossover in dimensions that heighten social-emotional crossroads in the academic dimension, the following testimonios aim to posit how a likeness to Garriott's elements manifests in their career-based trajectories.

The emotions compañeras explored and traversed throughout their interviews are palpable in this section as living in systemic juxtapositions mimicked an "internal storm," as Liseth described, that has had compañeras building ships in midst of turbulent waters, patching up the brokenness of their sails, and ensuring all passengers make it through—a conglomeration of simultaneous actions that has cost EMFGLs and their personhoods far too much. Dora embraced and described the magnitude of this reality by disassociating herself from her sense of self and, instead, comparing herself to a robotic machination. She said, "I'm a cog in the machine. Right, like I need to provide [results]. Yeah, I need to provide. Point. Period. Blank." This internally motivated and externally demanded need to provide while in this cog-like machine led Dora to conclude:

> [I find myself] in this really weird like, binary, where I'm a target of sorts, right, because of the identities that I hold, but I also find myself being an agent, because of the privileges that I've gained too, you know, what I mean, like, like looking back . . . even the role that I play in this clusterfuck is also really interesting, like how that's kind of transformed.

Pointedly, compañeras like Dora have had to juggle systemic dualities that have intensified feelings of in-betweenness that find little access to reconciliation or understanding. What is more, the state of in-flux states of oppression has created an internal struggle. Bella described this struggle by saying:

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[It's like a] war in my mind [when in the workplace] because [I felt like I could not] get it wrong. Because then [my mostly white leadership were] going to think less of me, like, I need to prove myself. And looking at it now, there were so many people that were leaders that didn't know what I knew, but I've I held myself back.

This constant play-by-play of managing conflicting identities with unlearning race and class-based aggressions that have resulted in an imposed imposterism has led to deep exhaustion. It is an exhaustion stemming from living through work-related offenses—offenses they already experienced during their undergraduate tenures—and exhaustion from operating within a dominant culture of hyper-production and hyper-success that has pitted compañeras from having entryway to the very concepts challenging dominant career cultures. Dora demonstrated the latter by explaining how the notion of "antiambition" has permeated many career conversations in popular media. She said:

> I think we're in this age of antiambition. I don't know if you've heard of that phrase, but it continues to come up and I'm still trying to figure out what the hell they're talking about. It's something that has continued to kind of like resurface because people are quitting their jobs, right? People are like "No, I am not going to allow myself to be unhappy in a space because my work is not my life." I think that is like the era that we're entering and are supposed to be entering especially with, you know, working from home has allowed people to pay attention to their mental health, social life, and personal life, and say that that is more important than work life. And I think that's right, and I think that we should also call out the fact that even the privilege to quit your job is a privilege. I mean, we need to talk about circumstance. You know, I don't know maybe going on a tangent, but I think that there is yeah, there it just needs to be uprooted from the inside because . . . again [it] just comes back to holding multiple thoughts at the same time, while also being really hyper aware of other people's circumstances and how they got there. And also feeling the guilt and ambition, but also being in a space of un-ambition and how privileged it is to be in a state to say,"I'm going to be not ambitious." Correct? When everything in our lives up to this point has been a regurgitation of "You need to be ambitious so we can make all of this worth it." To even get to this space and then for people to start saying shit like ["antiambition"], it drives me insane, but . . . we do need to disrupt this idea that the only way that you'll be successful is if you fucking work your ass off. . . . Like yeah, I'm tired, you know, and we just started, but at the same time, the contrary is just so unreasonable, because I cannot afford [to be "antiambitious,"] but I deserve it. I should be prioritizing everything else but work, of course. Of course, that makes sense. Like, we are not robots, not animatronics, like we are human beings who are dynamic and are layered and are messy and raggedy, but I can't be anti-ambitious. I don't, I don't, I don't know how to do that.

When these clashes with career and career cultures meet with other personal worlds—like

the filial space—these systemic juxtapositions elicit feelings that feel foreign to the EMFGL but

come alive when their everyday life boldly places them in circumstances where they are

positioned to assess what they have against what others have access to in their life. When faced

to realize what privileged individuals may have versus the magnitude of their own

responsibilities and the heaviness they create, compañeras have stated feeling envy—envy

toward not having the level of freedom and self-assertion that compañeras have fought for but

self-deny due to the roles they play—roles that emerged because of interplays of economic

injustice. Dora expanded on this concept by saying:

> I think sometimes, when I'm frustrated and I feel tired and exhausted, I can feel a little bit
> of kind of envy. I see all these people, even through social media, you see people who are
> like, traveling and like, they've got their own places, right. And like, they're like living,
> they're living for themselves. At that point, they graduated college. They've got their
> full-time jobs; they're living for themselves. They are advancing themselves, which is, I
> mean, I would hope that's the goal of their parents, right? Like the goal of their parents
> was, "I birthed you, I raised you, but now it's up to you to continue, like, taking care of
> yourself," like you push them out of the nest. I feel like for me, I never got to leave, you
> know, but I [also] don't think it was against my own will, like, like [my family] never
> forced me, [but] it was just kind of like I always knew I had to be here, you know? And
> so, there is a layer of like, "Wow, like, how different would my life be if some of these
> responsibilities that I own were not mine?" And then I feel guilty. And then I feel like
> "Damn, what an asshole. How could you think that way after everything?"

Dora's contributions continued to reinforce the ties between career and family. Although

Garriott (2020) attempted to build a bridge to this fusion via his school–family integration theme

falling under the dimension of Social-Emotional Crossroads, there still exists a gap examining

the postgraduate trajectories that involve filial influence and career confidence.

Liseth, through memory recollection, furthered these connections by bringing her mother

into the conversation, which brought forth another layer to explicate when speaking to social-

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emotional experiences. When asked to describe what shaped her perceptions about career

success, Liseth responded:

> [I] thought about this as an adult, and I think a lot of those ideas I had were also the opposite of what my mom was like. And it kind of makes me sad. Because my mom was an excellent mother, and she was a great person. And it's hard for me to think that as a little kid, I thought, like, being a successful woman was the opposite of what she was like. . . . But it's kind of a narrative that she fed too, right, that she was like, you know, "Yo me quede en casa para que ustedes no se queden" [I stayed home so you wouldn't have to], and stuff like that. So, I mean, when I told her I was pregnant, she said "Shit!," and like, not in a good way. So yeah, I think about that. I also wish I hadn't thought it was all about the money and it's hard because I feel like I can see that from a point of like, living comfortably. Like, when I was young, and my parents were struggling, it was about the money. . . . Even my dad the other day told me a story about how one time I was [my baby's] age and I was really hungry and they were waiting on someone that was going let them borrow money or something. And he was with me . . . but all he could find in the fridge was rabanos [radishes] and cebollitas [green onions] and so he said that he like gave me three rabanos and cebollitas and he just thought that was like a cute story, right, about me at like one and a half eating rabanos, but when he told me I imagined not having food for [my baby] and like the stress, like, I was like holy shit. Like, there was a point where I didn't have food. And like, you know, that's insane that I don't remember that. Right? And so like . . . so again, I am aware that I can only say I wish it wasn't all about the money. . . . Like, I wish I didn't think career was all about the money. But I can say that because I'm comfortable now. Because back then, my parents were probably seeing careers as the way to the money because they needed to know that we were going to be okay in the future.

Living in a state of nepantlerismo and double consciousness was the default setting for

the overspill of information-laden emotion indicative of the EMFGLs' social-emotional

proceedings for the compañeras participating in the cocreation of this scholarship. Wavering

between emerging first-generation professional in search of self-determination and rising

matriarchs in their own families, compañeras offered their testimonios as evidence of their stance

in this conversation about career education formation. Their experiences build their

epistemologies, and their epistemologies craft their critique. Yet, to be both privileged and

marginalized has carried its tolls, as EMFGLs do not get to solely carry their own feelings,

understanding, and perceptions; they have to make room to cultivate an abundance of awareness

that can explain their world and assess the multiplicity of worlds existing for others and in

others. In its essence, this subtheme beckons for career education, and those creating it and

facilitating it, to do the same. To underscore the importance of this duality and how it

materializes in the EMFGL thought process, Azucena posed the following information:

> *No puedo definir en sí la manera en que las demás personas nacidas en este país definen career success. Pienso que están escogiendo su definición sobre lo que . . . o la proyección de lo que debería de ser el éxito profesional por porque en realidad no sabemos cómo cada persona…es una idea general que tenemos sobre sobre alguien que escribió lo que éxito profesional debería de ser o que las sociedades americanas o western societies creen que es el éxito profesional, pero si nos ponemos a pensar . . . si hablamos en general nada mas de aquí de Estados Unidos, el país está lleno de gente de todo El Mundo, verdad? Y toda esa gente tiene Ideas. Proyecciones. Culturas. Identidades diferentes, y esta gente está creando hijos conforme a sus creencias y culturas. Entonces no puedo decir que lo que yo pienso o como yo creo que debería de ser está correcto o no, porque no es justo pensar que todas esas otras culturas que han venido a este país y que vienen de ambientes de opresión también, de Sufrimiento, y de discriminación y de violencia no tengan la razón también. Entonces, toda la mezcla que hay en este país, todas las ideas diferentes, todo lo que creemos que está bien o mal no es la última respuesta. No es la última definición de lo que el éxito profesional puede ser. El éxito profesional de sentir una plenitud y un sentido de servicio a las comunidades es lo que a mí me hace sentir que estoy llegando a ese punto. Pero, también, el éxito profesional de otra persona que está también esta struggling, que viene de otro país tercermundista o que viene de una casa de violencia que viene de una por pobreza extrema, en la cual no tienen acceso a, por ejemplo, agua potable, el éxito profesional de esa persona va a ser que al final de cada mes esa persona por ir a trabajar a lo que se dedica, recibe un pago en el cual siempre va a proveer comida a su casa. Entonces para esa persona, eso su éxito profesional. Cuando yo te digo que el éxito profesional en general es ir a un trabajo y obtener el mayor pago posible es porque vivimos en una Sociedad materialista. Y es la verdad, muchas veces ponemos necesidades absurdas como querer cambiar un carro o un teléfono nada más porque salió la nueva versión. Pero eso también se deriva de una de un sentimiento de carencia, de un sentimiento de que nunca has tenido. ¿Entonces ahora que puedes tener, por qué no vas a tener? ¿Porque no lo vas a hacer?*

> [I can't define, in itself, how other people who born in this country define career success. I think they're choosing their definition based on the projection of what professional success should be, or have a general idea about professional success based on what someone wrote, or are influenced by what American societies or Western Societies believe is professional success, but if we talk in general just here in the United States, the country is full of people from all over the world, right? And all those people have ideas. Projections. Cultures. Different identities. And these people are raising children according to their beliefs and cultures. So I cannot say that what I think or how I think [career success] should be is correct or not, because it is not fair to think that all those other cultures that have come to this country and that come from environments of

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oppression, of suffering, of discrimination and violence are not right as well. So all the mix that there is in this country, all the different ideas, everything that we think is right or wrong is not the ultimate answer. It's not the ultimate definition of what professional success can be. Professional success as a feeling of fullness and of service to communities is what makes me feel [successful,] but, also, professional success to another person who is struggling, who comes from another [developing] country, who comes from a house of violence, who comes from extreme poverty in which they do not have access to, for example, drinking water, professional success to that person will be receiving a payment that will always provide food to your home. So for that person, that's their [definition] professional success. Therefore, when I tell you that professional success, in general, is going to a job and getting the highest possible pay, it is because we live in a materialistic society. . . . Many times we have absurd needs like wanting to change our car or a phone just because the new version came out, but that also stems from a feeling of lack, from a feeling of never having. So now that you can have what you desire, why won't you? Why aren't you going to do it?]

Although EMFGLs take charge of their own feelings and rationalizations of at-large society, they are also attached to a limited timetable absorbed by their responsibilities. Resultantly, compañeras mentioned not having intentional reflection spaces that could assist them in processing the heavy lifting that has hegemonically been included in their day-to-day lives. The lack of this needed practice exacerbated their reach for social-emotional understanding and, as such, restricted them from seeing their own needs during their time in their respective in-flux and juxtaposing worlds. Gina built on this point, stating:

I don't have time to think about reflection. I don't have time to think about myself, like I have stuff to do and things to get done and tasks to get checked off. And we still work through it all? We try to do it all and then by the end of it we are tired. And by the time I look at the time, it's late into the night and I just want to sleep. I have no energy to look within, reflect, and have these circles and spaces. And . . . it's not like our jobs give us that opportunity. [At] least with my previous job, they'd be like, "Yeah, we want you guys to invest in your own professional development." But even then, it was kind of shady. We were like, "But what does that mean?" But yeah, for the most part, [some jobs] want to invest in your professional development, but only when it conveniences them. But for something where it's more like for yourself, they wouldn't really care or be like, "Okay, do this on your own time." And it's like, what "own time?" I just want to sleep or rest or, you know, I have to attend to other responsibilities. [Plus,] the people that I surround myself with, we're kind of on the same boat. So it's not like we have answers for each other because we are in each other's world. . . . We sympathize and empathize with each other, but it's not like anything comes out of it. Um, so yeah, maybe I just

haven't given myself the opportunity to reflect. . . . I feel like reflection requires a lot of energy and time. And I don't give myself that time.

Despite not having consistent reflection time, compañeras found a soundboard and mirror of who they are primarily within their own mothers—an additional Social-Emotional Crossroads subtheme that merits exploration in first-generation college and graduate scholarship. As a source of both complexity and profound love, I end the presentation of this subtheme with our *mammys*, our *madrecitas*—the source of compañeras' existence and reason for fighting and carving through many unconfigured circumstances.

Even though there is no defined route for dismantling the systemic juxtapositions that suppress EMFGLs' true embodiment of self, there does exist a love-driven bridge between the EMFGL and family where both can coexist to continue cocreating realities. In using this bridge and the possibility it brings, the EMFGL and family sphere no longer have to live in survival mode as singular units but as elements that can be coinvolved in building an alternate truth that does not alienate and separate—that sees each other as partners in changing the hyper-individualization that is lauded in Western cultures. Paz honored the immensity of this love by centering the individual who showed her what love was capable of birthing. She said:

> My mom. Yeah, my number one supporter. I'm sure if she was still alive I wouldn't be crying, but yeah, no, absolutely her. She would always see it in me, too. She would see when I no longer wanted to do something. And she was like, "No, move on to the next thing." Like, I think like, for me, she was always proud of me. She was always proud. It didn't really matter what I did or the money that I was making. What she wanted me to chase was happiness . . . . Even when my sister was living in Seattle, and she didn't want to do her job anymore, she cried and both my parents were like, "You don't have to do that job, like we can help you." So, it's funny because they pushed us so hard to get to a certain place, but their breaking point was seeing us sacrifice our happiness. So, they were both very supportive in saying, "You never have to pay a dime. You can stay here and do what's going to make you happy" kind of thing; but it's funny because we had to get through a whole hurdle to get there, you know? But it was my mom who was always like, "You're so smart. You got this. Yeah, go to that other job!" And she was always coming to interviews with me and waiting in the car, and after we'd go get coffee. . . . She was our number one in telling us to chase our happiness.

Resisting and Responding to Structural and Institutional Conditions

Titled as Resisting and Responding to Structural and Institutional Conditions, this subtheme is not one of the four dimensions featured in Garriott's (2020) CCWM of academic and career development. Yet, the spirit of insurgency and resistance is laced through each dimension present in Garriott's CCWM framework. In turn, focusing on this spirit permits this study to "take note of the [sociohistorical] understandings and practices that play such an important role in the Latina struggle for survival and liberation in the United States of America" (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. ix). Given the prevalence of this subversive undertone found in compañera contributions, and the critical origins and connections of this work and its accompanying CCWM framework, I present this subtheme as an evidence-laden transition to what Chapter 6 will present—cocreated models and approaches to career education for compañeras, by compañeras.

To highlight how a process of resisting and responding to structural and institutional conditions represents a Latina epistemology that informs practices for career development services, I present the following two subthemes: (a) Defying Deficit Narratives as a Gateway to Resistance and (b) Counter-Culturing as the Source of Community-Driven and Subversive Career Education. The junction of these subthemes points to the inclination toward community and justice that EMFGLs find central to their own journeys through academia and work cultures. Accordingly, compañera insights double as entryways to a social reality often under-recognized and stand as main dialogue partners requiring presence in emerging scholarship about the first-generation college graduate and professional experience.

Defying Deficit Narratives as a Gateway to Resistance

When prompted to discuss how they believed their academic and career trajectories defied deficit depictions of first-generation college students and graduates, compañeras'

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responses presented an affiliation between their narratives of defiance and their internal drive to

trailblaze forward for others, specifically students who share their same stories. This connection

between compañeras' subversive narratives and their sense of purpose ascertains that forms of

resistance are a gateway to understanding the self in the midst of navigating, and at times

dismantling, dominant cultures that demand norm adherence and assimilation. In

commemoration of the self and the disruption of deficit portrayals of their identity group, Ailina

began to bring the first-generation professional experience into public voice by protagonizing

herself in a reality different from the suppressive limitations she has known. Primarily, she

stated:

> I exist and I am not lacking. I defy deficit perspectives because there's always an answer. It's just a matter of how you find it. So again, I'm not lacking. I'm just growing. I think that's been one of the biggest things that I've learned and unlearned, that what I'm missing is not intrinsic. What I'm missing is the chance to water and grow.

Ailina demonstrated how an EMFGL can come to express her/their identities and how the

interpretation of those identities can come to unhinge learned messaging that has characterized

first-generation students as "lacking." In acknowledging and drawing out consciousness from the

"privilege and disprivilege [they] have experienced as well as the oppressions that have shaped

[them, they have built] a direct relationship with their [own]" (Owens, 2020, p. 3) sentiments of

their experiences and have made sense of who they are, what they have done, what they will

continue doing, and what their own trajectories mean to others.

Demonstratively, this acknowledgment is a practice Jimena now embodies and embeds in

the spaces she occupies. Jimena said:

> I didn't know I was first-gen until after college, and if I had known that I was and that I am, I would have really embraced it more, which is why every time I introduce myself to students, the community, I call out my identities because I don't remember anybody in my college stating in their introduction something along the lines of "I'm first-gen and Latina!" Like actually naming these identities make us more human, more personable.

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And now, these days, I see more of us pushing through regardless of the barriers that are in front of us. We persist, we contribute, we share our experiences in the classroom, and I think that is what really enriches the conversation because we have other perspectives, other upbringings, and by sharing our identities, our stories, we open the space that nobody opened for us. We first gen-students bring our own knowledge . . . our own network and that is a sign of community.

The naming and identification process Jimena has committed herself to is the way she risks-takes and embeds love in a higher education context—the place where she encountered isolation and the place where she now professes her vocation to create emotional and mental homes for students like herself. Jimena's visibility and presence in her work environments, and the actions she takes, upsets "the whole system of [that] place" (Moraga, 2000, p. 17) and that needed shift reminds Jimena, and those like her, that "We're all we've got" (Moraga, 2000, p. 24).

Change, via Jimena's testimony, is a personal mission and closely tied to what the EMFGL is willing to risk to craft new outlets that do not use the "master's tools" (Lorde, 1984/2007, pp. 110–114) to assert what being an EMFGL means and for what she/they stand. Gina shared similar sentiments as Jimena because she, too, worked in a higher education context for specific reasons. She said:

[I want to] make sure that I am able to be a source of insight for the first-generation students that I work with. So I strive to defy these deficit narratives in their lives and mine by reminding them of their assets, their strengths, their worth, and their value and the fact that they got to college and that they are there for a reason. I provide messaging that I hope they absorb and can find inspiration from.

Compañeras circumvent and dismiss deficit-laden depictions of their first-generation identity by rejecting the ideals of limitation, by contravening invasive thought processes that confine their abilities and sensibilities. By including their first-generation community in their opposition of deficit mentalities and rhetoric about their identity group, this resistance energizes epistemological approaches that beckon our educational practices to deliberately include the

broad range of knowledge and assets the first-generation community can give higher education. Moreover, compañeras remind practitioners to embed criticality in their think tanks, thought partnerships, and intuitive building procedures to challenge the preconceived notions that often nestle and remain unchallenged in committees, task forces, and scaling efforts. Notwithstanding, EMFLs entrench criticality as a bedrock of their existence out of necessity and, as such, are pitted to examine systems around them. Consequently, they examine and experience what permits them to consider alternate worlds, what fuels them to struggle for and with others, and what allows them to further connection via the nuances of storytelling and its anchor to complexity, diversity, and justice.

Counter-Culturing as the Source of Community-Driven and Subversive Career Education

Counter-culturing, the concept of challenging dominant norms and beliefs, is central to social movements. Counter-cultures spur community and foster belonging among collectives that seek support and understanding as they move through harm-ridden environments such as academia and work-place surroundings. Considering this study's aim to recognize and interpret how an EMFGL epistemology influences the formation of career education services, this section illustrates how the compañeras central to this scholarship embodied counter-culturing as a concept and instinctive action. The compañeras' testimonies affirmed EMFGL's reliance on community, their ability to create community, and the need to ensure that compañeras like them are surrounded by the same sense of community and accompliceship that cared for them as they journeyed, and have continued to journey, through dominant spheres. Significantly, this subtheme exacerbates the value of viewing education, specifically career education, as a collaborative process where the efforts of one are reinforced by a community that sees career success as a collective process and not a result of hyper-individualization.

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Intentionally, compañeras like Gina attribute their survival in college to the presence of community. Gina described the importance of community like this:

> My friends and I were all going through the struggle together. . . . Everything comes back to the people, the people that I was with, surviving in community. We thrive in community, and that is always what I look for now. As professionals, I ask, "Where is my community?" If there's no community, I know I'm not going to survive in whatever place, because doing it on your own can only get you so far.

Jimena felt similarly, stating:

> [Having a community made me] realize that I can't always do things on my own. . . . I don't think I would have survived if it weren't because of my two friends. You know, I don't think I would have. Like, we would study late together and we had each other for small talk in between here and there, and I realize how important that really was because we were navigating such a hard time in our lives, but we were going through it together. Those connections are the ones that really stick for life. Having a support system, having people who are walking alongside you is so crucial in helping you survive through a system that was not necessarily designed for you to succeed, that was not even designed for you to even be in it.

The community Gina and Jimena described, however, extended past common understandings of friendship. This notion of community was equated to love, and this collective love doubled as a protective mantle and shield from established cultures that regurgitated race, class, and gender-based aggressions. As such, this source of community-driven and subversive love "stands as a direct threat and challenge to the visions" (hooks, 2000, p. xxv) of control and dominance that white supremacist and capitalistic structures hold on higher education and career spaces.

Ailina built upon the notion of community as counterculture and a profession of love by recalling:

> [I was surrounded] by love and community; . . . every day, 24 hours around the clock, I was surrounded by love and community. And ,of course, I was scared [of my college environment,] but I always felt safe, and that's something in the real world you don't always feel because you're not surrounded by community and love at all times. We're going through spaces that are constantly against you, [and] not all spaces are safe. Not all

people are safe. My [college for instance], even if the institution itself wasn't safe, the people I was surrounded with, they represented safety.

For compañeras, college was like "loving in the war years" (Moraga, 2000, p. 24) where any volatile encounter was met with security extended by those in that shared community circle—a tool that has become a pivotal element compañeras now seek in their workplaces. Bella, for instance, mentioned she attended a predominantly white university, and upon graduating, went on to a predominantly white corporate office. She said:

> [The only difference] was that when I moved over to this predominantly white company, I was in a predominantly BIPOC department. So, I think had it not been the case, I think I would have run into the same issues, the same insecurities I did in college. But because I was predominantly in a setting where I was surrounded with people who had similar stories and backgrounds, I felt strong. I felt more secure enough to be myself when navigating through this corporate world because I had some type of support system. I seeked out those same people that I could relate to and have those connections with. And I seem to thrive in those environments when I have that community because when I don't, I feel limited and restrained, and when that happens, I make myself smaller no matter what room I go into.

The EMFGL compañeras featured in this study have been conditioned to put on several masks that have been marked and laden with expectations: (a) the expectation to comply with filial and academic norms and ways of being, (b) the expectation to produce and generate, and (c) the expectation to uphold themselves in ways that exact tolls on who they wish to be. Community, to the EMFGL, is the remedy. When the EMFGL does not "live up to the 'image' that the family or [environment] wants us to wear and when we rebel against the engraving of [those expectations and masks], we experience ostracism, alienation, isolation and shame" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xv).

In this case, being in community is how the EMFGL breaks the series of roles and demands and instead reveals inner layers that, at times, can only be seen through the lens of collective love. Pivotally, compañeras found meaning in the alliance-making their unity spurred

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and, as such, understood the dominant reality they traversed through was not, and could not, be the only way to work through their encounters and work forward. Community, through the EMFGL reality, became a way of proceeding and hoping—a counterculture that taught them that what lay ahead of them postgraduation had to include an extension of what they were surrounded by during their college tenure. As such, community as counterculture became the standard for compañeras; it became the core of their education.

Gina understood she was not always going to be in a position where she would find the sense of community to which she was accustomed, but she knew what it was like to build one and drew that knowledge from her time in college. In having experienced the protective and nurturing nature of community, Gina said:

> [I] knew that I could always come back to people, as individuals and units, and find comfort in them. I can find comfort in their stories and their struggles. In [my community,] we validated each other, we shared knowledge with each other, and, if one person found something out, we'd share it with everyone else. And together we learned from each other. And I think that in many ways, that's still how I function professionally. Like, I end up making friends with similar people who share my backgrounds in my work environments, and we talk because working in nonprofits is sometimes very stressful and frustrating. But then we share with each other like, "Oh, this is what I learned. This is what I'm hearing; this is what's happening on my end," and we're able to kind of push through and not feel too alone and not feel like we're going crazy. Instead, we feel validated through each other's experiences. So, yeah, I think that in many ways, I'm still following that structure that I did in college, where I would go back to my group, home base, and find comfort there and find strength there . . . because I was surrounded by people that I was inspired by, and that I looked up to, who were also first-generation. I was able to see my first-gen identity as empowering, as a source of wealth. I am always going to be grateful for having that community that allowed me to see that being first-generation is strength [and] . . . a refuge.

As compañeras connected the fragments of their shared experiences in college, they emotionally immersed themselves in their testimonies of survival, which became an anthology of each other's experiences. Community as counterculture addressed the omission and erasure academic institutions marked on EMFGLs and their identities and, instead, cultivated a sense of

belonging among EMFGLs and their communities that catapulted compañeras into embodying community work as their personal purpose—as what they would eventually seek as part of their career realities.

As compañeras began to break out of what Anzaldúa (1990) called selective realities of what their college cultures hegemonically considered as "successful" (p. xxi), compañeras like Ailina further critiqued the curricular programs their college offered and deemed as a crucial experience for career growth. In particular, Ailina critiqued the study abroad program her university offered in London—a program that offered an internship component in a student's career interest as part of its structure. Although a potentially impactful and well-meaning experience, Ailina was hoping to be connected to a study abroad experience and its embedded internship that related more so to the communities and justice work with whom she was driven to connect. Ailina recalled:

> I chose to study abroad in London because they had an internship opportunity. The program met a lot of my major requirements, but the biggest component was this internship opportunity, and everyone that had previously gone to London said that would be amazing and it was going to look "amazing on your resume." So, I applied and at the time I really wanted to go into publishing. So they just stuck me at a random publishing firm. It was like this really posh magazine. Not the community I would have wanted to write for, not communities I would have wanted to work for. So in a way it spoke to the opposite of my identities, you know, really rich white people in London. It made me realize that I needed to be working somewhere where I could interact with the folks that reflect my identities. So in that way, it was kind of like the reverse. It didn't speak to me, it didn't speak to my identities directly. It spoke to the opposite. But that's what pushed me further to want to work with the folks that are from my identity groups.

Repeatedly facing circumstances that perpetuated varying degrees of sidelining and race-based aggression, compañeras further propelled toward career ideals and practices that honored the communities that reminded them of their worth and wholeness. Aligning their career ambitions with the communities they call home, compañeras invite themselves and others "into a fresh intellectual and spiritual space, a way of thinking and living that entailed freedom,

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creativity, passion, and embodied feminist living" (Lerum, 2012, p. 267). Compañeras'

imaginings of what their careers can come to mean for the collective is at the backbone of their

pursuit for purpose-driven vocations. Resultantly, their connection to community becomes an

engine propelling subversive, justice-based career education. These subversive forms of career

education are closely linked to purpose. The contours of purpose, according to compañeras like

Ailina, stem from love, as she said:

> [The] purpose for me comes from love, and if I don't love something, I don't see a
> purpose. I don't find purpose in it. I don't find meaning in it. . . . For me, purpose has to
> stem from love. It has to stem from a feeling of service. I want to be someone of service.
> I want to feel like I am contributing in a valuable way, not just in a capitalist way

Career, then, must mean something more than a transactional process. Yet, EMFGLs like

the compañeras participating in this research, have continued to enter workplaces that

perpetually exercise practices that add to deeper isolation and fragmentation because they leave

little to no room for social critique and transformative praxis. Therefore, compañeras bring it

upon themselves to continue making connections between their lived realities and systemic

procedures that cause fissures within the EMFGL. Given this, the return to a sense of purpose

driven by community is a divergent act that inches compañeras to the courage needed to defy

what they will no longer tolerate. hooks (1999) emphasized the significance of community as

purpose and purpose as community when she wrote:

> When we talk about that which will sustain and nurture our spiritual growth as people, we
> must once again talk about the importance of community. For one of the most vital ways
> we can sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know
> we are not alone. (p. 213)

Explicitly, Liseth further described hooks's (1999) notion of personal/spiritual growth as

a result of community by explaining how her desire to nurture a career in service to others gets

her closer to her human-centered values. She said:

I consider myself to be very human-centered, so for me purpose feels like when I can help someone else. If I can make somebody's day better, it makes me feel like I'm meeting my purpose of bringing joy or comfort. And, I think of other jobs I've had, and I haven't felt that way necessarily. And I think that's what makes this [service-based career] feel more like a fit that I enjoy. Not only am I melding that part of being caring, but I am also merging it with my love of learning about what others need to survive or feel better.

Community as the base of counter-culturing dominant forms of career education lends a pathway for EMFGLs to view the concept and enactment of community as a driver for purpose-finding that is rooted in love. In viewing community as purpose and purpose as love, EMFGLs engage in a proactive process of subverting traditional forms of career education that consider individualized success as a goal. Epistemologically, if EMFGLs require the presence of community in their understanding of their future professions, then higher education spaces must intently pivot their career education services so they encompass sustainable services that question, analyze, and critique the ideologies surrounding dominant and Westernized forms of career success.

In extending critique to how dominant forms of career success influence career education practices, not only does this critique come to occupy the discourses held in the field of career education, but it can also lead to alternate practices—practices that can hold career education models accountable for recognizing marginalized students will face complex and ever-changing forms of oppression in the workplace. As such, dialogues and career education tools must prepare students like EMFGLs for what they may come to encounter and must challenge privileged and dominant student populations in hopes of creating cultures that are aware of oppressive dynamics, identity-intersections, and the advocacy needed to create pro-social work cultures. More so, urging an upheaval in career education models can beckon an untethering in practitioner thought processes, and can, instead, permit career education practitioners to view

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themselves as community builders capable of shifting how waves of college graduates can come to view their impact, power, and ability to evoke justice in their fields. In turn, the cumulative effect of ideology and practice shifting can guide young professionals to step into the care and essence of community, for, once a student comes to that point of arrival, the need to dedicate one of many personal purposes to justice work intrinsically becomes part of the professional formation experience.

Career education cultures, however, must spearhead simultaneous projects because their deeply ingrained cultures are methodically analyzed and intentionally restructured. As career education spaces mobilize, practitioners in those spaces should also assist students like EMFGLs in locating professions that are purpose-laden and community-based. Beyond offering culturally sustaining and values-driven career counseling, a justice-influenced career education can equip EMFGLs in challenging workplaces of all kinds, especially the spaces that may externally promote being justice-aligned but that may internally be hindering the communities they serve and employees they hire.

Estrella's experiences in a grant-funded work environment dedicated to educational access led her to encounter circumstances that ran against her own community-driven mentalities and principles. However, in attempting to address and transform those circumstances, Estrella was able to find a form of healing in adopting her version of leadership that centered transparency, protection, and love. Driven by her connection to community, Estrella reintroduced the countercultures she was surrounded by in college in her workplace. She said:

> [Doing so has] allowed me to be the supervisor I wanted to be. I'm still learning, but I always tell the people I supervise, "I don't ever want you to go through [what I went through]." I'm like, "If you need to talk about something, if you feel uncomfortable, if you feel that I'm giving you too much work, please tell me how we can manage it better together." I do this because I don't want to put them in a situation that hurts them. For example, when I was teaching, the principal would privately tell the other teachers what

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they needed to improve on, but somehow she felt the need to provide her feedback in front of my students. And even though it hurt, my students would affirm me. I mean, they were my motivation. But definitely, these situations have taught me to be better, to be the supervisor I would have wanted to have because I didn't get that in my actual career.

The continuation of care and protection was pivotal to the compañeras represented in this study. The duality of maneuvering their first-generation professional status and contending with evolving variants of oppression places EMFGLs in perpetually unknown and unstable social locations. However, compañeras take these intersecting uncertainties and create alternate realities for emerging waves of first-generation scholars, soon to be graduates, who trail behind them—a symbolic representation of the counter-culturing compañeras were recipients of, and then shared forward, during their collegiate years.

Jimena described how she incorporated and exemplified how she counter-cultured in her professional space by stating the first thing she does upon entering any space as a first-generation professional. She said:

> I name my identities. You know, I think it's important that my students know, that the staff know, that I am first-gen, that I am a transfer, that I was a commuter, that I am a Latina, and that all these identities make up the person who I am today. And as a professional staff member, being able to proclaim these identities outwardly is really why I decided to go into higher education, because I wanted to make sure that students had an advisor, a counselor, a mentor who related to their experiences, who could understand where they're coming from.

In culmination, this subtheme is a testament to community, its ability to stand as a counterculture, its latch and formative connection to love, and how the merger of all three discloses and catalyzes how EMFGLs epistemologically view their experiences with career education services or lack thereof. This subtheme reveals a need to view service-rendering as a collaborative process that must include voices from EMFGL graduates in the field and, beyond that need, must primarily critique the career cultures universities are promoting and ill-equipping their graduates for.

As compañeras continue to present and employ community as counterculture sensibilities in their workplaces, they carry with them the manner they were cared for by their communities as they maneuvered oppressive aggressions and devote that same care for and with other individuals with similar identity-intersections. Although needed, the maintenance of compañera care remains an at-surface remedy that does not account or address the cyclical nature of harm in the workplace that remains protected by the ideologies of Westernized career success. Nonetheless, the presentation of this subtheme in this research merits its own investigations and further examination, for the manner graduates like EMFGLs protect and resist in their career environments can come to serve as a temporary model for others as the collective continue to redefine critical career conversations.

CHAPTER 5

CONTINUED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Living Lessons: A Compañera Handbook

This chapter serves as a career education toolkit. Composed of compañera testimonios, the chapter features suggestions and recommendations for taking career education discourses and initiative-building forward. Compañeras adding to this scholarship held significant knowledge of both the institutional history of their respective alma maters and the distinct experiences tied to identifying as economically marginalized, first-generation Latina graduates (EMFGLs) in the workforce. Resultantly, compañeras arrived to the evolving and re-emerging conversation about career education charged with an arsenal of information that can serve as a basis for continued research and can be seen as a skeleton structure for career education tools to come.

As a precursor to this compañera-led, compañera-informed toolkit, I first offer a brief overview of the impact of societal influences on first-generation professional identity and follow up with three sections that highlight (a) EMFGLs ideological and practical approaches to challenging dominant forms of career success, (b) what career success means to compañeras, and (c) suggestions for future work with and for EMFGLs.

Societal Influences on the First-Generation Professional Identity

The phrase "societal influences" mentioned in this section refers to the interplay between race, class, gender, and generational status and forms of marginalization these identity markers are subjected to in various contexts. As compañeras contemplated their histories with oppression in the workforce, a pattern of loss and yearning emerged. A looming sensation of loss was due to not fully knowing how to understand, speak to, self-define, and live out their first-generation

professional identities and the yearning for the community, self-confidence, and self-determination needed to achieve more without having to diminish or abandon who they are.

Bella comprehended how her past encounters with interlocking forms of oppression have furthered this feeling of loss, especially because she did not have the community she needed to affirm or support her steps forward. Bella discussed processing the lack of community, stating:

> [It makes me feel] emotional because you, already as a first-gen, are lost. But to not have the ones that you did it all for support you is a different type of loneliness. And so I had to kind of learn to just rely on myself. I just got to this breaking point of like, "Fuck this, I'm done. I'm going to figure it out." Like I'm over it because I feel so shitty feeling this lost. . . . I think because I felt so lost, I wanted to have something that was mine.

Relatedly, Jimena addressed how her experience in her workplace exacerbated the knowledge that her "first-gen identity will never leave [her]." Yet, Jimena did not refer to the permanence of her first-generation identity as an asset but as the source of the many unknowns she did not know how to maneuver. Despite her successes and educational accolades, Jimena reintroduced feelings of doubt and imposterism as being principal elements in her first-generation professional journey—a crucial finding because it indicates understandings around the first-generation identity and how the strengths they carry with it shift when the stakes become even higher upon applying for and landing a career.

Concretely, these societal influences on the first-generation identity demonstrate there are differences in the identity-ownership processes when transitioning from a first-generation college student to a first-generation professional. Significantly, there is a need for a re-identification process where EMFGLs can come to recognize the assets that have led them to their career and that can continue to guide them as they confront new experiences and identity-based aggressions in the workplace. Jimena reinforced this finding, stating:

> [Even though I] managed to finish my bachelor's, even though I managed to go and get my masters, I still have fear inside me. This fear takes me back to feeling like I still don't

know how to do this, or I'm not good enough for this. And so, it definitely is true, you are first-gen forever. It really is something that will always be a part of me. Even now that I meet other people, it almost seems like what I have done is still not enough. I almost feel like, "Oh, maybe I don't think I could apply for this position." When I was applying for jobs, I was having that feeling that I have to check off every single thing that was in that job description, you know, and feeling like, "Oh, no, I don't think I should apply for that, I wouldn't qualify." And so that doubt continues to follow me . . . and it has stopped me from applying to other places, applying to other positions, and has stopped me from thinking that "Oh, yeah, I'm ready to take that next step in my career." And, instead, feeling like, "No. I could only be a program coordinator. I can only do this." And sometimes I see other people in higher positions, and wonder "How did you get that job? How did you do that?" And, yeah, I think [this imposterism] still continues to be with me, because even now, I'm kind of like, "Oh, maybe I need to go back to school to get my EdD, so that I can feel confident enough to apply for a higher position," because I don't feel like I can do it.

Similarly, for Liseth, being in her respective work environment—an environment with a goal, ironically, of community empowerment—led her to feel like her efforts and academic accomplishments were unimportant and ineffective. Liseth elaborated:

I've been in nonprofit work and community work for so long. And I've been in those spaces as a Latina with a graduate degree and that really didn't mean anything, [because] there were still people that weren't qualified and made terrible decisions that were above me. And I think it had a lot to do with the fact that they were white. And I felt that a lot of times, I got hired because people were like, "Wow, she's Latina, she has a higher degree, and she speaks Spanish. So this is how we connect with the community." Because of that, I was put in positions that were not good for me as a person.

In addition to feeling like her identities were tokenized, accomplishments diminished, and potential contributions silenced, Liseth also found herself in multiple circumstances that exhausted her bandwidth and eroded her ability to hope and believe in societal shifts for the better. Repeated identity-based aggressions in her workplace that were directed toward her and the communities she served left Liseth with intricate emotional experiences that have little room for exploration. As such, the need to investigate how forms of identity(ies) battle fatigue manifest and influence an EMFGLs self-identification as a first-generation professional is

imperative, for EMFGLs deserve to know how their evolving identities add to larger narratives of justice.

Markedly, the accumulation of experiences compañeras have traversed through in their filial, academic, and professional spaces have resulted in taxing emotional strains that include sentiments of loss, yearning, doubt, fear, imposterism, inadequacy, and, ultimately, a mixture of resentment and exhaustion. The presentation of these emotions is triggered and connected to close-knit relationships compañeras hold with each of the aforementioned spaces. As those spaces take on new forms and/or are riddled by harm-causing cultures, EMFGLs continue to exist in between them, further complicating their relationships with their first-generation professional identity.

Ailina expanded on these emotions and the way she has attempted to comprehend her experiences and find meaning through the liminality. As Ailina has continued to understand the contours of her first-generation professional experience, she stated feeling "resentful." Ailina explained:

> [I feel as if my] mentors that led me down this career path . . . abandoned me. . . . It would have been nice to have someone more consistently there that I could reach out to, especially someone that I admired so much. People look down on handholding, but I think hand-holding is such a necessary thing that we need to survive these barriers. . . . Yes, I'm the one engaging the battle, but I would have liked to have had my hand held. It's like a child crossing the street. The child is still crossing the street, but they're holding onto their parent's hands because it's comfort, safety. That's the same thing I would have liked to have had. I went through these barriers without holding somebody's hand and I felt lost. So it made me really resentful of the mentors that I felt abandoned me. It made me really resentful of the fact that I constantly had to be resilient to the point where, now, I hate the word. I loved that word as an undergrad. And then I got into my career, and I grew to hate it because I am constantly breaking down barriers and sometimes I don't want to be resilient. So, I think it has all made me really tired as a first-gen professional, especially a first-gen professional in the pandemic, where I had to think about the students in the communities that were being mostly affected, and again, just in an institution that doesn't really care, because it's an institution that is ultimately built on capitalism and wants its money back. But this identity has also led me to be breaking, navigating these barriers and breaking them down, and despite the prevalence of

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consistently doing this breaking, it has also made me grateful for the fact that if I can break down a barrier, hopefully it can stay down and the people behind me can come through. So it's like a multitude of feelings. I think my first-gen identity is very tied to feeling and emotion. I don't think it's too much else. I don't know if it's probably tied to other things, but I think the things that come up most prominently are emotions, how I feel and like ultimately the hope that I still have somehow, somehow that hope is still there . . . at the end of the day, I still hope that it all amounts to something. It has to be something. I can't be stuck on this earth doing the work I'm doing if there is no hope . . . because that's my way of living. That's my way of living, and my way of surviving is through hope.

Pointedly, societal influences on the first-generation professional experience have inextricable ties to emotion and feeling. The prevalence of emotions is replete with energy and information to decipher, and the consistent sidelining of emotion in the spaces EMFGLs most often frequent can come to erase ownership over the first-generation professional identity—an identity that warrants its own comprehension process. The first-generation college identity shares significant crossroads with the first-generation professional experience, but the two manifestations of these identities cannot be consistently conflated to mean or entail the same identity development narratives. Further nuancing the first-generation professional identity requires additional EMFGL alumni voices and entails an examination of what hinders and/or benefits their understanding of what the first-generation professional identity can come to beckon in their career environments. In service of this research, however, the following sections highlight and make room for the manner in which compañeras began to concretely interact with their first-generation professional identity by (a) recognizing how their identity serves as a blueprint to challenge dominant forms of success, (b) redefining what success means to them, and (c) considering how the combination of the two can catalyze collective career authorship.

Challenging Dominant Forms of Career Success

In Lorde's (1984/2007) essay, "Notes from a Trip to Russia," Lorde shared an escalating and persistent feeling that "American standards are . . . an unspoken norm, and that whether one

resists them, or whether one adopts them, they are there to be reckoned with" (p. 20). This reckoning requires questioning and reinvention, versions of uproar that can leave women and femme-identifying individuals in environments and battles that can often take more than what it gains or gives. Yet, this reckoning becomes a primary focus because giving a name to the emotion, granting space to the processing, and permitting dissension to become the new norm allows one to tap into reservoirs of creativity and thought processes that will no longer tolerate control and dominion. The possibility of this new norm entails the birthing and welcoming of a myriad of uncalculated and imprecise processes that spur the formation of a reckoning and conocimiento state of mind, feeling, and action that double and "become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas" (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 37).

To honor possibility, reckoning, conocimiento, and the women and femme-identifying persons who sacrificed and gifted their love to ensure that scholarship of this caliber existed, I am attempting to make apparent the ways a group of compañeras can come to defy and challenge white, Western, and dominant interpretations of career success through their connection with community, emotion, and a purpose to serve with and for others. The following contributions detail and symbolize how compañeras, all who identified as EMFGLs, lived out their defiance. As such, their contributions should be interpreted as an insight into what EMFGLs, like the compañeras, may be seeking in their own career education and professional identity formation trajectory.

To outline how compañeras challenge dominant forms of career success, I present their respective contributions. When asked "If you could, how would you challenge those dominant and Westernized definitions of career success, if at all?," compañeras offered thought processes I categorized under the following practices: (a) maximizing transparency, (b) scaling and

normalizing self and collective advocacy, and (c) cultivating communities of care. Accompanying these practices are descriptions of each, their significance to this work, and compañera and research recommendations for how to implement each practice in a higher education context (see Table 1).

Table 1

Challenging Dominant Forms of Success—Practices and Recommendations

Practice and description	Significance of practice	Compañera approaches	Researcher recommendations
Practice: Maximizing transparency Description: Maximizing transparency describes the process of proactively sharing viewpoints and experiences that reveal the conditions, cultures, and processes that comprise career realities, specifically the realities of marginalized, first-generation individuals.	Maximizing transparency in practices permits educators to challenge the institutionalized career ideologies and their construction of professionalism. Barbara Smith, in their essay "Racism and Women's Studies" (1990), commented on the notion of professionalism when they say that "that word 'professionalism' covers such a multitude of sins. I always cringe when I hear *anyone* describe herself as 'professional,' because what usually follows is an excuse for inaction, an excuse for ethical responsibility. It's a word and a concept we don't need because it is ultimately a way of dividing ourselves from others and escaping from reality" (p. 26). In maximizing transparency about career identity formation, and how that identity unfolds and is affected by career cultures, practitioners can prepare EMFGLs for realities not often disclosed in a university education.	Maximizing transparency to compañeras looks like: "Walking [students] through [the career] process and being real with them" (Jimena) about the identity-based aggressions they can potentially face in their work environments. Creating opportunities to establish "clear understanding[s] of what the college experience is and its potential outcomes," because going to "college . . . doesn't mean you're going to get the job you want" (Liseth). Understanding the systemic structures, sources of privilege, and "circumstances of how people got to their careers . . . and why others can't get there" (Dora).	Hire full-time staff members with in-depth experience working with first-generation college students—as well as engage first-generation faculty members across its respective campus—to help jumpstart, maintain, innovate within, and support developmental career education initiatives that are culturally sustaining and epistemologically rooted. Engage in examinations that expose the differences in the identity-development processes of first-generation college graduates transitioning to first-generation professionals. Embed advocacy in the core functions of our vocational duties, disciplines, exchanges because "analyzing, critiquing, and summarizing issues about social change are not enough" (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 19).

Note. Adapted from "Racism and Women's Studies" by B. Smith, 1990, in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, pp. 25-28, by G. Anzaldúa (Ed.)*,* copyright 1990 by Aunt Lute Books; "Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression, and Pain" by C. O. Rodríguez, 2018, pp. x, 1, 19, copyright 2018 by Fernwood Publishing; "Something about the Subject Makes it Hard to Name" by G. Yamato, 1990, in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, pp. 20-24, by G. Anzaldúa (Ed.)*,* copyright 1990 by Aunt Lute Books; "Making Curriculum from Scratch: "Testimonio" in an Urban Classroom" by C. Cruz, 2012, in *The Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), pp. 460-471, copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Online; "Chicana/Latina "Testimonios": Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political" by D. Delgado Bernal, R. Burciaga, & J. Flores Carmona, 2012, in *The Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), pp. 363-372, copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Online.

Table 1 *(continued)*

Challenging Dominant Forms of Success—Practices and Recommendations

Practice and description	Significance of practice	Compañera approaches	Researcher recommendations
Practice: Scaling and normalizing self and collective advocacy Description: Scaling and normalizing self-advocacy describes the practice of assisting students in self-defining what career success means to them and embedding nuanced critiques of systemic oppression as it connects to their career-formation processes. Practice: Scaling and normalizing self and collective advocacy	Scaling and normalizing self and collective advocacy encourages EMFGLs to question how they bring their assets, sensibilities, and critical cultural wealth to privileged academic and career environments. In determining how to self-define what making sense, making worth of the sacrifice means to them, first-generation populations can come to proactively decide where their efforts go and why. In learning how to self-advocate for the values that are imperative to them, EMFGLs can address systemic root causes that originally barred them from their personal worth. Once in a position of consciousness, EMFGLs can contend with institutionalized marginalization in "two levels, personal and societal, emotional and institutional. It is possible—and most effective—to do both at the same time . . . Challenge oppression. Take a stand against it" (Yamato, 1990, p. 23).	Scaling and normalizing self-advocacy for compañeras looks like: Accompanying students/graduates as they process and address internalized forms of oppression. Building internal consciousness permits students/graduates to "gain [their] power back" (Jimena). Normalizing the pursuit of value-laden goals and ideas of success [that] can include "rest . . . not being consumed by [the] corporate or career world, and [maximizing] time with people [you] love" (Bella).	Train scholar-practitioners to instill pedagogical practices that center their students' social histories in the mentorship extended day-to-day [Refer to Cruz's (2012), "Making Curriculum from Scratch: Testimonios in an Urban Classroom and Delgado Bernal et al.'s (2012), "Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political."] Support student resistance and assist students in channeling forms of resistance in their vocational paths. Defy the ideological constructs supporting oppressive notions of career success and unlearn the behaviors that contribute to systemic harm. Continue nuancing the intersectional frameworks currently capturing the first-generation college student experience and involve current students and graduates to partake in the construction of these frameworks.

Table 1 *(continued)*

Challenging Dominant Forms of Success—Practices and Recommendations

Practice and description	Significance of practice	Compañera approaches	Researcher recommendations
Practice: Cultivating communities of care Description: This practice describes the act of cultivating communities of support for marginalized students/graduates by marginalized students/graduates based on narrative sharing, opportunity awareness, and mental-emotional wellness.	Cultivating communities of care makes way for a form of "kindness that transgresses academic [and career] rules" (Rodríguez, 2018, p. x). As first-generation graduates contend with their emerging first-generation professional identities, communities of care can challenge the dominant make-up of professionalism, by assisting students/ graduates in an unlearning process that can reassure students that they do not need to "adopt . . . norms and mimic behaviors to become the right fit for the future institution[s] that will [only nurture] our careers . . . [if we] do not interfere with agendas and mission statements that \$ell buzzword\$" (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 1) and bottom line\$. Communities of care can foster spaces embodied by critical thinking and radical love—a combination that can legitimize the lived and the felt as informants for the cultures EMFGLs, and related populations, can build in their respective areas.	Cultivating communities of care for compañeras looks like: Creating "platforms where [first-generation graduates are] talking about our experiences in the workforce or informing the research. How do we share that with the larger population on a national scale? How do we get other marginalized [graduates] to share their [realities] so we can [support] one another?" (Jimena). Exposing "[career aspirations] outside the common three: medicine, engineering, law. I ask my students all the time to step out of that mentality because there are so many wonderful careers out there that I wish I would have known about" (Estella). Centering student emotional and mental well-being throughout college. Rather than "pushing [students] to overexert myself into every little thing [to succeed], I always tell them my students that they come first before anything else" (Ailina).	Coalesce with identity-intersectional alumni to understand how their career education encounters prepared them to confront injustice in their workplace environments. Stories shared can help shift practice and programming. Embed opportunities for collaborative knowledge sharing, to maximize exposure to different experiences. This process contests the hyper-individualized nature of the career search process. Create a maintained interplay between career education and socio-emotional and mental well-being during vocational formation. Universities, not just career centers alone, should re-orient their efforts to assess how career counseling is conducted, and begin to work alongside students to understand what a personalized, contextualized, and de-generalized career education can come to look like.

Note. Adapted from "Racism and Women's Studies" by B. Smith, 1990, in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, pp. 25-28, by G. Anzaldúa (Ed.),copyright 1990 by Aunt Lute Books; "Decolonizing Academia: Poverty, Oppression, and Pain" by C. O. Rodríguez, 2018, pp. x, 1, 19, copyright 2018 by Fernwood Publishing; "Something about the Subject Makes it Hard to Name" by G. Yamato, 1990, in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, pp. 20-24, by G. Anzaldúa (Ed.)*,* copyright 1990 by Aunt Lute Books; "Making Curriculum from Scratch: "Testimonio" in an Urban Classroom" by C. Cruz, 2012, in *The Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), pp. 460-471; copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Online; "Chicana/Latina "Testimonios": Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political" by D. Delgado Bernal, R. Burciaga, & J. Flores Carmona, 2012, in *The Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), pp. 363-372, copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Online.

As young alumni and emerging first-generation professionals, the EMFGL compañeras participating in this study were actively participating in varying degrees of personal resistance in their workplace. As a result, the contributions reveal EMFGLs who identify as first-generation professionals may attempt to interpret how they can come to reclaim their first-generation identity in a different high-stakes environment, but much of who they understand themselves to be is in relation to others, protecting others, and ensuring alternate realities be a possibility for those who follow.

Concretely, this correlation between the individual and collective well-being serves as an implication to consider because career education discourses and practices in college access and higher education spheres can no longer be an individualized practice that dissociates an EMFGL from their community. Practically, this signifies that career education models should take on a collaborative approach that provides pathways toward career search but also prepares students to be accomplices, dissenters, and culture shifters upon arriving at a workplace. This preparation should be identity-specific but also intentional enough to educate other non-EMFGL and privileged students on how they, too, can contribute to a shift in practice and ideology.

Building Collective Career Authorship: Cocreating Career Education

Garriott's (2020) nuancing of the career authorship dimension of the critical cultural wealth model (CCWM) of academic and career development is a robust representation of compañera experiences. Under Garriott's interpretation, career authorship aligns with Baxter Magolda's (2008) definition of the term. Baxter Magolda defined career authorship as the ability to "analyze data, critique multiple perspectives, understand contexts, and negotiate competing interests to make wise decisions" (p. 269). As previously mentioned and in relation to Baxter Magolda's statement, when first-generation students can develop their career authorship, they are

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able to "(a) critically analyze structural forces and how they shape one's experience, (b) [have] a sense of control and agency, and (c) [have] confidence in one's internal capacities to solve problems and make important life decisions" (Carpenter & Peña, 2017, and Jehangir et al., 2012, as cited in Garriott, 2020, p. 87).

Further, Garriott (2020) added that first-generation and economically marginalized (FGEM) students can also channel a sense of work volition and career adaptability that can assist them in assessing how career choices are made in consideration of and despite structural conditions (i.e., work volition) and how to maintain a sense of care, command, inquiry, and assurance over the elements that affect their career development, growth, and follow through (i.e., career adaptability).

When prompted to respond to the question, "What do you believe specific career education for students with your similar identities looks like?," compañeras revealed five elements that reinforce Garriott's (2020) position on career authorship: (a) understanding and resisting structural and institutional oppression, (b) workplace survival skills, (c) programming and discourse practices, (d) emotion as information, and (e) community-based learning. These five elements take on a dual purpose because they confirm Garriott's portrayal of career authorship via an "on-the-ground" look of how career authorship can play out for FGEMs, and specifically for EMFGLs. More so, these five elements expand Garriott's work by serving as an outline for future scholarship, career education discourses, and initiative-building.

Additionally, the contributions are organized into a concept map (see Figure 2) that is replete with collective energy, meaning the EMFGL compañeras who served as the backbone of this project have used their experiences to build a bridge for culturally relevant and sustaining recommendations and implications for people in the career education field to consider and adopt.

The collectivity of the EMFGL experience, demonstrated via their desire for community care and success, indicates the career education process must have a space for individual processing, but also community knowledge-sharing.

In the concept map in Figure 2, scholar–practitioners can locate each of the five elements. Considerations for practice and an outline of potential discourses, research points, programming ideas, and initiative-building springboards accompany these elements. The intention is to offer scholar–practitioners a compañera-informed exoskeleton for courses, curriculum designs, workshops, research topics, and/or dialogue points for both career advising and mentorship. These points were derived and interpreted from compañera histories and can be considered a collective gift from compañeras to EMFGL first-generation professionals in the making.

In its entirety, the concept map can be viewed as a subversive, community-gathered approach to career authorship. As the content of these recommendations elevate Garriott's (2020) findings and work—and the work of those who informed his scholarship—they also take the normalization of career authorship as an individualized process to that of a collective inventory from which to expand further research. The compañeras' offer originates from the need to make sense and to make worth of the many sacrifices their ancestors and filial relationships enacted to see a new generation—their generation—take on new legacies and new opportunities.

Figure 2

Concept Map: Career Education Elements for First-Generation Students

Understanding and Resisting Structural and Institutional Oppression
• Comprehending internalized and external forms of identity-based aggressions and biases (Dora).
• Heightening knowledge about political and power dynamics in the workplace (Dora).
• Equipping for and confronting workplace oppression (Bella).
Community-Based Learning
• Normalizing professional transparency about processes and challenges (Estrella).
• Building learning collaboratives with and for specific student populations (Azucena).
• Finding, building, and maintaining communities of support in the workplace (Dora).
Emotion as Information
• Talking about failure and dismantling how failure is predominantly perceived (Paz).
• Learning to talk about personal values to effectively present one's true self through the career search and in the workforce (Jimena).
• Navigating and normalizing career uncertainty (Gina).
• Dismantling hegemonic humility, gratitude, and "go at it alone" cultures hindering self-advocacy (Dora, Bella, Jimena).
• Building career self-confidence, self-validation, and self-advocacy skills (Bella).
Workplace Survival Skills

• Teaching about promotion and compensation/raise request conversations when being undervalued and overworked (Estrella).
     o Pay equity and pay negotiations (Dora).
     o Financial education and literacy (Liseth).
 • Building strategic and beneficial work relationships (Bella, Jimena).
 • Spotting toxic work environments and supervisors (Ailina).
     o How to maneuver toxic workplaces but cannot quit or move on due to economic need? (Ailina).
     o How and when to use Human Resources, and how to create and recognize work boundaries (Estrella).
 • Understanding when to let go, when to keep going and when to be okay to move on to something different (Estrella, Paz).

Programming and Discourse Practices
• Personalizing and individualizing career education (Gina).
• Creating accessible, identity-based career courses (Estrella, Paz).
• Examining sociocultural and political life histories and their effects on career choice (Azucena).
• Encouraging mindset shifts when approaching career procedures, i.e. interviews, networking (Jimena).
• Exposing opportunities and exploring value-based vocations from a strengths-based, assets-based standpoint (Gina), and centering conversations about differing sources of capital (Paz).

However, this deep well of information also comes from an unrecognized and unexplored source: themselves. As compañeras conveyed and expressed their desire for collective hope for others, they were also beginning to share that same care for the young EMFGL they once were—the same EMFGL whose sacrifices often run unnoticed because of the opportunity they were gifted but which they had to defy, transform, question, struggle through, and transform to address layers of systemic inequities and barriers. The narratives of sacrifice connected to each compañera can be felt with each word, and, because they decided more was possible beyond

their individualized story, they were able foster collective love in a dominant field that is on the brink of its own mobilization. The concept map in Figure 2 is a testament to that collective love in action.

CHAPTER 6

A DISCUSSION WITH COMPAÑERAS

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. "Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race. "Your allegiance is to the Third World," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings. . . . Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.
—Gloria E. Anzaldúa, La Prieta, *Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (3rd ed.), (2002, p. 228)

Empiezos, Beginnings

My examination of economically marginalized first-generation Latinas (EMFGL) graduates and former students is dedicated to an internal, collective search with systemic roots, unstable pasts, undefined presents, and futures on balance beams. This search is a call for the compañera—for her/their creative-chaotic sway of being at all places and no place at once—and can translate into an *empiezo* [a beginning]—an opening to create and collect the thoughts that can match the heart-space rhythm depicting the collective struggle. Glaringly, however, those empiezos are fleeting and far too rare—those moments of touching nepantla, of reaching concimiento, of wild tongues disobeying the constructs of language. Those moments are rare when purpose is severed from the essence and nurture of community.

These rare trajectories—the in-between moments of loss and gain, of purpose and defiance—are those instances I have sought to see through this work. This work was meant to uncover how the EMFGL trajectory serves as a faculty and a sensibility to (re)define the spaces that constrain, define, and fuel her/them. In illuminating these trajectories and in carefully piecing together the emotion-filled, social memories that constitute the EMFGL journey to herself/themselves, the EMFGL is enabled to take this self-defined self-knowledge to

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accompany, fight, and, ultimately, heal a global citizenry severely afraid of raw, unfiltered collective love—a praxis of the heart world that can come to revolutionize the corners we inhabit and introduce a new definition of success.

While in the Field: An Embodied Us

Much like the concepts I examined in this research project, *Making Sense, Making Worth of the Sacrifice,* the words one reads here are carried on shoulders not solely my own. Because these qualitative data come from personal, introspective experiences and the loaded world of these interviews, the pull of theory and emotion permitted compañeras and I to create *un vínculo* [a bond] that unhides us from each other and those to come. The webs knitted to create safety nets and care cultures for the young EMFGL justice seekers to come unleashed internal battles— hard fights. It is a storm—a chaos—that was always armored with love but a love that faded with every space that asked, demanded, and forced a bend within us to keep survival in its loop.

As academia wanted portions of us and chose to sideline the rest, it also felt the entitlement—an entitlement held by centuries of dominion and decades of dominion's industrialization—to hegemonically indoctrinate ideologies of postgraduate success aligned to the agendas of capitalist expansion and hyper-individualization. These ideologies fed manipulative promises of success that only came by way of a university education, a promise contained by the boundaries of higher education that had its own armor in the shape of procedural boundaries that successfully and purposefully kept many like us outside its "promise."

Standing in union to daydream, mobilize in imagination, and propel dreams outside of their third spaces, this scholarship has come to make known every moment and every opportunity carved out of loved ones' calloused hands and weathered backs. It has come to be

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because of fervent hope—one that slowly starts to step into tangibility by mere feeling and the recognition of the EMFGL resistant nature—a resistant nature learned from the Black and Brown women and femme-identifying ancestors and way-makers who also shared their love for us without ever having, or needing, to peer into our faces; through their work, they held on tight so that we could become. For them and for us, this research has come to be so emerging EMFGL professionals can see themselves beyond the constraints of that professional title and identity and instead view themselves as catapults propelling the world of career to heal and step into the justice-seeking, justice-creating identity it has been systemically transfixed to suppress.

For this reason, I induced an internal analysis of the encounters and epistemologies that have furthered emerging first-generation professionals from vocational impact to bring closer the intangible worlds we manage. After months in this introspective field—and more interpreting the words and worlds encountered in these interviews—I have come to encounter the synergy of pushback. This pushback—what I consider as compañera testimonios and visions—has been subconsciously hidden beneath layers and layers of forced disguises. Now that I have taken time to unearth this pushback, I have come to see how alive anger, love, loss, fear, doubt, care, and hope has become—how alive emotion is. I have come to see that compañeras and I were full of conversations and memories that we have purposely swallowed to neglect the very experiences that laid out the blueprints for our shifting worlds and cultures. These conversations and memories were and are rebels, and they roused questions that, in one past, I told myself were unworthy of asking because, if I produced output, titles, and economic gain to prove personal significance, then I—through much structural and self-induced dehumanization—would have "made it." Community, though, thought otherwise.

Through the testimonios of nine compañeras—companions, accomplices—I was permitted the privilege of documenting a "chorus of voices" (De Leon, 2014, p. 4) that neared us to the Anzaldúan belief about the intimate gift of anthologizing stories: "Making anthologies is also activism. In the process of creating the composition, the work of art, you're creating the culture. You're rewriting the culture, which is very much an activist kind of thing" (Lunsford, 1998, p. 25).

With an accumulation of truths in one hand and the desire to continue wondering about, theorizing with, and imagining alongside compañeras in the other, I arrive at the end of this scholarship with a tone of inconclusivity that I believe may be the closest I get to the practice of love. Wanting to reach an alignment with *Zapatismo* who asks for the construction of "*Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* [A world where many worlds fit]," (Global Social Theory, n.d.) I hope, through this work, to enact a sense of belonging, a living rebellion that centralizes dignity and permits a crossing of worlds. In attempts to near this alignment, I asked the following question: What are the experiences of economically marginalized first-generation Latinas (EMFGL) as they pursue their career aspirations during their college tenures? In support of this inquiry and to further its nuance, I offered these additional two questions:

1. What are the understandings of EMFGL graduates on the effects of career education services on their career development?

2. How can economically marginalized, first-generation Latina epistemology inform practices for career development services?

In response to these examinations, compañeras offered their histories and insights to propose a storyline of themes that, together, aim to challenge dominant constructions of career success with roots ungirded in capitalistic principles sustained by white supremacy. When asked

how they defined career success, compañeras were able to name capitalistic, individualized, and hyper-meritocratic influences as central to their understandings of dominant forms of career success. Simultaneously, compañeras presented a complex relationship with wanting and yearning economic stability but clashing with their consciousness/conocimiento of systemic aggression. This internal clash intensified when compañeras processed that much worth is attributed to career and career, in turn, is seen as an identifier that erases other facets of an individual. Compañeras demonstrated a keen understanding of the capitalistic root sources and causes driving the pervasiveness of dominant career success ideologies and shared critiques behind the white supremacist notions supporting those capitalistic ties.

Contributing to the formation of this critical conocimiento, compañeras disclosed a multifaceted disconnection to their respective career units and centers due to the sense of alienation and otherness they felt at the hands of staff members in their career centers. Furthermore, compañeras perceived current forms of career education as nonspecific and inconsiderate of their sociocultural histories and sensibilities. These limitations were further propelled by the lack of population-specific outreach on behalf of their career centers and, as such, compañeras felt career education efforts were out of their reach. Compañeras also described the multitude of occasions they sought out support for their career development trajectories but were often faced with another layer of hidden curricula that added to the level of unknowns already scaled in their direction.

Unsurprisingly, compañeras simultaneously held their observations with an at-large analysis of the structures upholding limitations to career education. Principally, compañeras placed into question the intentions of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and justice (DEIBJ) work, and several compañeras questioned the integrity of DEIBJ intentions and whether the

concepts themselves were being manipulated and/or controlled to sustain the restrictive conditions they aim to disassemble. The drawbacks associated with career education, ultimately, adds to a larger narrative of disillusionment for EMFGL students, and students with shared identities who continue to permeate higher education institutions for the opportunities of mobility it can channel into. Yet, upon closer examination, those opportunities are difficult to obtain because their existence is slim.

Institutionally, compañeras had to manage expectations associated with collegiate culture, but they were also expected to understand how to prepare for their career after college. The merger between needing to know how college worked and how to equip oneself for career growth exacerbated the number of expectations EMFGLs already entered with and learned from their homes. Not only were compañeras expected to manage institutional expectations, but they also had to assume the role of educating faculty, staff, and administrators about their own experiences and the importance of them. Resultantly, EMFGLS and other first-generation students do not simply get to journey through college as any other student; they oftentimes must become their own educators and their universities' informants. In turn, EMFGLs become the recipients and containers for higher education's ineffective procedures and its diminishing impact.

In their totality, compañeras said their universities rarely, if at all, addressed or staged conversations about workforce environments and how those career interactions could personally affect them. Compañeras reported having wanted nuanced guidance that combined the practical knowledge of the career search with identity-intersectional, culturally sustaining knowledge building. The merger of these elements could have equipped EMFGLs for the encounters of workplace oppression with which they were eventually going to come face-to-face. Not being

privy to identity-intersectional career education led many compañeras to doubt their capacity and sense of self-confidence in a high-stakes environments like their workplaces. Because they did not have a previous conversation, program, and/or point of reference to which to turn, compañeras felt ill-prepared to self-advocate and/or locate positions and work surroundings that would echo their own values and community-driven objectives.

In terms of confronting workplace oppression, compañeras felt their campuses did not prepare them to confront systemic forms of workplace oppression. Compañeras recalled instances of their undergraduate education that narrowed in on social-justice learnings and outcomes, but the substance of this material was primarily theoretical and did not venture or translate into practice-based dialogues. Lack of antiracist, antioppressive career education led compañeras to internalize insecurity and fear that limited their potential responses to injustice in the workplace. On the occasion compañeras did receive guidance, compañeras received fragmented support that did not demonstrate how one's personal, cultural, and ideological contributions can be viewed as an asset that encourages and informs how to address oppression. Inaccessibility to specific career education that comprehends and underscores the granular experiences of identity-intersectional students remains an ambiguous undertaking that results in a "one-size-fits-all" career education culture that magnifies forms of educational inequity. These cultures, as they stand, are further upheld by university administrator-ships that often do not represent marginalized student populations and, as such, cannot speak to and/or choose not to prioritize educational models that are responsive to student realities.

Epistemologically, family is a core element and distinct marker for EMFGL postgraduate success. For the EMFGL, family is a representation of two simultaneous truths: (a) family is a driver—the "why"—and the source for college persistence and personal ideological values, and

(b) family is also the epitome of tremendous pressure that elicits emotional and mental trajectories that are often undertheorized and undervalued. The EMFGL exists in a constant state of multiple negotiations between what must be done to make sense and make worth of familial sacrifices and the outcomes they would have like to explore for themselves. Therefore, the EMFGL is often in a state of internal conflict that tends to acquiesce to the needs of their families—that, too, includes how they pursue a career and what they pursue it in.

Given EMFGLs' exposure to college messaging from a young age, EMFGLs internalized the belief that college could be the end to multiple means and necessities. For compañeras, college carries a sense of finality that was going to respond to—and finally attend to—decades' worth of familial aspiration, an aspiration that was characterized by desires for mobility but that, in its entirety, did not include what going to college could come to be or what it could result in reaping. As a result, college equated to career, and career equated to fulfilled familial expectations; upon realizing the latter are shrouded by legacies of interlocking systems of oppression, the fulfillment of this expectation becomes a site of rupture and wound.

Prominently, EMFGLs house multiple crossroads. Each crossroad carries a fleet of emotions that EMFGL repetitiously sideline to satisfy what is asked of their roles, often having to ensure the hopes of their loved ones before centralizing themselves. An exploration between expectation and reality is regularly nonexistent for EMFGLs, and, as they travel through their collegiate journeys, universities become additional perpetrators of this internal conflict because these spaces are capable of intentionally creating pathways for EMFGLs to critically assess and prepare themselves for the realities they will eventually encounter.

Significantly, many compañeras found difficulty conceptualizing what career success could personally mean, feel, and look like. Tying much of who they are to family and

community—questioning what of the career success process could solely belong to their person—was a finding in itself. As EMFGLs encounter continuous hidden curricula and cultures in the new spaces they journey through, they attribute their internal motivation to persist and resist to the individuals for whom they take on sacrifices, newness, and unknowns. Yet, when they were able to assess how career growth can be drawn back to their own wants and hopes, the responses carried a deep desire for personal fulfillment, value-driven and community-driven vocations, and economic stability as a pathway to peace. For a specific compañera, there exists a need to sever the tie between career and fulfillment because self-determination and worth should exist outside the rigidity of career paradigms. These responses allude to a consistent tug and pull with which EMFGLs are already familiar; the only difference lies in the importance of the new career contexts they have been navigating. The tools EMFGLs once used to navigate and reject certain experiences in prior environments like college require reevaluation and recreation because the resistance tools once employed to understand and dismantle that past may not be as effective in the career world.

Yet, the frequency coding map featured in Figure 3 indicates there is a possibility to define career success outside predominant understandings of what success should entail, and those definitions require importance, consideration, and enough room to be explored. When prompted to respond to the question "How do you define career success?," compañeras' contributions translated into the frequency coding map shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Frequency Coding Map: Career Success–Feel, Think, Know

When compañera contributions were inserted in a world cloud generator, the three most prevalent words were feel, think, and know. In alignment with the findings of this research, the presence and iteration of emotion as a fuel for analysis and analysis as fodder for knowledge expansion serves as an additional confirmation that the backbone behind the EMFGL career identity formation experience is profoundly based on the interplay of emotions. Emotion tied to career decision-making, then, must move from being viewed as irrational and illegitimate and must instead be seen as the informant it can become. The suppression of emotion in the realm of career and its pervasive cultures has led EMFGLs to wage internal battles that often pit them between who dominant career society requires them to be and who they wish they could internally nourish.

Simultaneously, although career success entails a degree of economic stability for compañeras, this tie to financial health is not driven by a desire for economic power. Instead, EMFGLs' struggle for economic stability is partially due to their familial histories that were often defined by a lack of instability that deprived compañeras from obtaining a sense of personal peace that could have led them to explore more of who they were outside the many roles they assume in the home, the academy, and now, the workforce. Beyond this exploration, however, there also exists a degree of dissociation that EMFGLs are on the precipice of exploring.

Ailina introduced this dissociation between career as a gateway to personal fulfillment. Although not outrightly mentioned in the content of this section, the other compañeras expressed a growing alignment to this resistance when asked how they perceived and defined dominant career success. Ultimately, compañera contributions and critique provided a pathway to explore what artist and influencer Yumi Sakugawa (@yumisakugawa) shared on their Instagram (www.instagram.com) timeline on January 20th, 2023: "What if you replace the binary of success/failure with a more compassionate, nonhierarchical view that is less about the outcome and more about the pleasure of process?"

In cochanneling emotion as a platform to understanding what career success can concretely mean to them, EMFGLs cocreate a different portal from which other identity-intersectional students can come to treat and view their vocational pathways. Instead of propagating and redrawing the restrictive lines that boundary career success, EMFGLs hold the possibility of cobuilding a different career knowledge and experiential-learning culture that can spur collective career authorship in the name of justice.

As EMFGLs navigate their worlds, they also meet those worlds via their sense-making processes that use critical questioning and reflection. EMFGLs demonstrate what a compañera, Estrella, named as "The Chaos of the Question Mark." This chaos is an internal question building process that asks EMFGLs to purposefully acknowledge and unearth the discrepancies between their perceived postgraduate outcomes and their reality. In turn, this act of questioning becomes a revelatory experience that discloses their belief systems and values, characters that construct their epistemological view of their interactions with society—an ideological construction that further deepens as EMFGLs entrance to higher education grants them a level of educational privilege not previously obtained by those before them.

By entering collegiate cultures, EMFGLs must come to assume and recognize a level of complicity. Because compañeras live in systemic juxtapositions that require the EMFGL to assess the privilege of their higher education while being pitted to address and cope with the dominant cultures around them, they are enabled to tap into and use their in-betweenness to build bridges of advocacy and accomplice-ship. This access to third-space creativity and double consciousness can inform and lay the groundwork for resistance and become an additional asset that grounds EMFGL epistemology.

The epistemological influences comprising EMFGLs' needs for culturally affirming and sustaining career education become essential because the presence of consciousness in the construction of justice-based initiatives that surpass superficiality becomes a metric colleges and universities can come to follow. Considering how career settings propagate overtly biased structures but transmit covert oppressive systems in hidden ways, the responsibility of sense-making modes of oppression falls on EMFGL professionals and other identity-intersectional populations. Consequently, the social-emotional strain of experiencing, addressing, and healing

from repeated and power-ridden transgressions becomes a hegemonic practice and additional labyrinth to decipher for the EMFGL. This constant play-by-play of managing conflicting identities with unlearning race and class-based aggressions that have resulted in an imposed imposterism has led to personal burnout and disassociation. This version of exhaustion stems from living through work-related offenses—offenses they had already experienced during their undergraduate tenures—and exhaustion from operating within a dominant culture of hyper-production and hyper-success that has pitted compañeras' own values against those they are demanded to conform to "make it."

Feeding their connections to community work, compañeras delineated an in-depth connection between their personal histories of defiance to the desire to carve out new realities for emerging first-generation graduates. This heightened affiliation between personal history and community success fuels a sense of purpose, and this purpose permits EMFGLs to create a gateway to understanding how they play a role in dismantling dominant cultures and norms. With purpose as an internal drive, compañeras exhibited actions that ran counter to the oppressive agendas their academies normalized.

Compañeras expressed a desire to commit themselves to shifting circumstances, shedding insight, and sharing messaging that would circumvent and dismantle deficit-laden perspectives of the first-generation identity to which others are exposed. Defiance, under an EMFGL perspective, is communal business and their criticality a bedrock they maintain despite not knowing how to share that same defiance for their own aspirations.

Ultimately, this scholarship solidifies and reinforces is EMFGLs' ability to view community as an operating lens, and compañera testimonies affirm EMFGL's reliance on the presence of community, their inclination to create community, and the need to ensure that

compañeras like them are enveloped by the same sense of community that fostered and nourished them. Due to this value, community-based learning must imbue approaches to career education because the collaborative nature that characterizes EMFGLs can add to larger accountability and recreation of Western individualization.

In centering community and channeling its communal force, the act of counter-culturing becomes an act of love. This collective love doubles as a protective mantle and is a direct threat to the structures of control defining who and what career success looks like. Making community the standard, the essence of community is, and continues to be, at the core of what EMFGLs consider an education, for community was what took their fragmented states into wholeness. As such, community—and the presence and creation of it—has become a part of a radical imagining of what could be as EMFGLs continue to defy the boundaries of what is considered success. The contours of community derive from love, and love is purpose to compañeras willing to walk with and for first-generation graduates.

Recognizing this form of love means upending career as the transactional process it is, because EMFGLs will continue to make connections between their lived realities and systemic procedures that continuously cause internal and external fissures. As EMFGLs continue entering the career world, they will reimagine space with collective criticality and will incite communities of resistance, places where no other will confront othering on their own. The call, then, is to create the thought tanks and thought partnerships that will prime emerging change agents to confront what will become an eventual reality.

Indisputably, societal influences and their legacies have caused unexplored consequences in the formation of compañeras' first-generation professional identities. Significantly, compañeras identified emotions such as loss and yearning. These emotions corresponded to

personally feeling lost, a sensation compañeras once endured in their collegiate years. This sensation of loss was a result of not knowing how to fully define and embody their first-generation professional identities. This loss was also magnified by a yearning for community in their professional spaces, a yearning for the self-confidence to achieve more without abandoning their values and the reasons for why they pursued a career.

Principally, however, there was a notable shift in the manner compañeras referred to and described their newly minted first-generation professional identity. Resembling the early stages of an identity development process, compañeras seemed to see their evolving first-generation professional identity as an unknown, a reason for miscomprehension of their experiences, and a source of doubt and imposterism. The way compañeras spoke about their first-generation professional identity marked stark differences between the latter and how compañeras described their first-generation college student identity. When prompted to respond how they defied deficit narratives depicting the first-generation identity, compañeras were able to showcase how their work with and for others was indicative of how they approached their first-generation professional identity.

Yet, when asked how they internally connected with their first-generational professional identity, responses implied compañeras encountered difficulties positively relating to their first-generation professional identity. Difficulties, however, were latched to their complex, multifold interactions with workplace oppression and how those interactions emotionally eroded their bandwidth and sense of self. These points of comparison reveal the prevalence of an under-supported transition between the first-generation college student identity and the first-generation professional identity, a transition that should consider the economic, racial, and gendered nuances detailing EMFGL graduates. Significantly, then, compañera contributions reinforced the

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prevalence of strong differences in the identity-ownership processes when transitioning from student to professional, and that the identity recognition and affinity journey carries a different meaning and, perhaps, a different approach than what may have elicited pride and identity understanding in college.

Como Quedarse, How to Stay

Compañeras' capacities for seeing possibility in systemically broken fields served and doubled as a reminder of why individuals like me continue to believe in what education can come to be. As accomplices and companions in this work, compañeras—through their testimonios—beckoned me to question how we, as educators and individuals who are affected by education's constructs, stay in the fight. The answer to this question is multifold and requires multiple ever-changing components. Central to "staying," to "fighting," is comprehending how ideology and history builds our reality. Furthermore, this practice means comprehending how the roots and ills of capitalism, privatization of knowledge and knowledge access, and the denial of our collectivity are our microscopic, purposefully constructed illnesses—illnesses whose binds are hegemonic and constantly appropriating our tools of resistance and revolt.

As a pillar to my development, love is a praxis that cannot be kept in a box and that cannot be kept for the self. Love, as an act and experience, must be paired with a curious and critical consciousness—a consciousness that is saturated with emotions we are told to silence and deceive for the sake of neoliberalism and individualism. As such, this scholarship became a practice of recentering, of regrouping, and of regrounding. It brought me back to my craving of imagination and transgression, a type of imagination and transgression that must operate relationally because I—because we—cannot exist without witnessing our inherent divinity (Darder, 2022)—a divinity we need not ignore if we are to use education as a potential love-

filled cure to the systemic maladies that have warped our essence as siblings who belong to each

other and for each other. To do this work entails going through the muck of our pain,

misidentifying with ideological practices that self- and collectively harm, and, instead, relishing

in the sweetness of our resistance and commitment to the other. This is our only option, the only

way we can "feed esperanza" (Darder, 2022), the only way to trailblaze and heal—the elements

that feed's an educator's promise and commitment. As we hold *esperanza* [hope]*, imaginación*

[imagination]*,* the conviction must be this: Above all, radical love.

> *It is the act of loving radically the spirit of the person whose ruling continues to colonize*
> *me, while still resisting their violence. It is radiating light when fear strikes,*
> *just like Berta Cáceres teaches us:*
> *"They are afraid of us because we are not afraid of them."*
> —Clelia O. Rodríguez, *Decolonizing Academia: Poverty Oppression, and Pain* (2018, p. 23)

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