ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: NEGOTIATING VALUES: A NARRATIVE
                              STUDY OF CAREER INDECISION FOR
                              FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS
                              OF COLOR

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The prevailing narrative surrounding higher education in the United States is that completion of a

bachelor's degree leads to socioeconomic mobility through the attainment of a well-paying job.

First-generation college (FGC) students of color are particularly attuned to this "promise of

higher education," but little is known about how they make career decisions during college and

how they navigate challenges in career decision-making. This study sought to understand how

FGC students of color experienced the phenomenon of career indecision under the broader

scheme of their career development.

Using a tripartite conceptual framework composed of social cognitive career theory, the four-

factor model of career indecision, and community cultural wealth, this study was guided by the

following research questions: (1) how, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate

career indecision? (2) In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape

how they make meaning of their career indecision? Using narrative inquiry, this study adopted an asset-based lens to portray the stories of six undergraduate FGC students of color from a variety of racial and career backgrounds and their experiences with career indecision. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis revealed the racialized nature of occupational decision-making for participants. Furthermore, they needed to balance familial expectations for socioeconomic mobility through career success with their own personal occupational interests.

This study's findings provide implications for future interdisciplinary research that further investigates the roles intrapersonal and environmental factors play in the career indecision of FGC students of color during college and as they transition into the workforce. The findings also suggest ways in which colleges and universities can better support these students during their career development in ways that align with the latter's cultural values.

Key words: first-generation college student, students of color, first-generation college students of color, career development, career indecision, racial cultural values

NEGOTATING VALUES: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF CAREER INDECISION
FOR FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR

by

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Chapter I: Introduction

I came into college as a mathematics major, my initial career goal fully set on becoming a math professor. It was only my second semester as a math major when I decided that what I was learning was nothing like what I experienced in high school. All of the praise that I earned from my high school math teachers meant nothing as I toiled to complete problem sets and earn high scores on exams. I realized that I could not continue studying mathematics when it no longer brought me joy. If this was how difficult the content was at the undergraduate level, I wondered how I would succeed in doctoral level coursework. More importantly, I feared what my family would say if I told them I was going to forgo my dream of becoming a math professor with no alternative job in clear sight. As a Korean American first-generation, low-income college student, a child of immigrants, I felt the pressure to succeed in my career for multiple reasons. I did not want to leave college without a job in hand because I knew how hard it was for my single mother to raise both me and my brother. Additionally, I would feel ashamed if my mom's friends knew that I went to such a prestigious university only to have my diploma but no promising career that would validate the effort my mother invested into my success. I struggled to identify jobs that would have made me as happy as being a professor and that would also pay well. I was trapped between a false dichotomy of finding a fulfilling career and one that would I thought would make my family proud.

I ultimately decided to switch my major to linguistics during my sophomore year because my brother had studied it during college. It was a subject that fascinated me after I took my first general education class on sociolinguistics. This did not initially resolve my career indecision because I still was stuck on what I could do with solely a linguistics degree. The thought of becoming a linguistics professor entered my mind, but my brother swiftly discouraged

me because of how difficult it would be to enter the academic job market. This did not completely dissuade me from entering education as I found a mentor in my on-campus job who informed me about working in higher education as an administrator. I was an involved student who worked in admissions and multicultural services while also holding various roles in student government, so this seemed like a natural fit to me. As I picked up a minor in education and became socialized to the profession of student affairs through taking on internships on different college campuses, I found myself applying to master's programs in this field during my senior year.

My story illustrates that career development and career indecision is a multi-faceted process that is shaped by both personal and environmental factors. For many college students, there exists the notion that simply receiving a four-year college degree ensures socioeconomic mobility (Gable, 2021). In some ways, there is truth to this claim. On average, workers with college degrees, particularly a minimum of a four-year degree, are less likely to be unemployed and have higher median wages compared to those who stopped their formal education at high school or below (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). It is understandable then that first-generation college (FGC) students, who often come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008), stake their chances at a more financially comfortable life through higher education. Without having intentional collegiate experiences that aid in the formation of career goals, however, many students may find themselves struggling to identify what they are passionate about and what jobs suit their skills (Park et al., 2017).

Educational institutions are often defined as a key source of social and cultural reproduction, transmitting social and cultural capital that reflect dominant ways of knowing (Bourdieu, 1986). In almost all areas of schooling in the United States, the capital one needs to

be successful reflects White, patriarchal, middle-class values (Yosso, 2005). If someone came from a family background that did not have these forms of capital, education would be the way to access them and achieve social mobility. This ideology frames students who hold marginalized identities as inherently at a disadvantage in their educational pathways.

Higher education is a site in which the cultural and social capital needed to be successful is often obscured unless one holds generational knowledge passed down from family members or is able to seek information on their own. Often referred to as the "hidden curriculum" (Gable, 2021; Semper & Blasco, 2018), these tacit norms include knowledge such as how to speak with faculty during office hours, engage in small conversation with strangers, and present oneself in different social situations. Students who are unable to learn the hidden curriculum may sometimes find themselves struggling in their academics and finding community on campus (Gable, 2021; Semper & Blasco, 2018). They may also remain unaware of professional development opportunities that could assist in their career development, which could then combat feelings of career indecision (Park et al., 2017). One subpopulation of current college attendees who have been found to experience difficulties with the hidden curriculum of higher education is first-generation college (FGC) students (Gable, 2021; Jehangir, 2010; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

The following study investigated how FGC students, particularly FGC students of color, attempt to navigate feelings of career indecision and the role that their racial cultural values play in this phenomenon. In doing so, I critiqued how United States higher education is designed to marginalize FGC students of color during their career development. In this chapter, I establish the problem and research questions that undergird the study, explain the study's significance, and provide definitions for relevant key terms.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

FGC students, students who come from families where no parents or guardians completed a bachelor's degree[1], are a significant population of current undergraduate college attendees that rely on higher education to improve their life circumstances. As of 2012, 33% of students enrolled in all forms of postsecondary education identify as FGC students (Cataldi et al., 2018). Despite the number of FGC students in higher education, there is evidence that they are typically less prepared for the rigor of college coursework and are less likely to enroll in college at the same rate as their continuing-generation peers. FGC students are less likely to take classes in high school that prepare them for college classes and score lower on standardized college entrance exams (Cataldi et al., 2018; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). They are also less likely to enroll in postsecondary education of any type (Cataldi et al., 2018; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). Even for FGC students who do enroll in college, students whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree are overrepresented in community colleges (Cataldi et al., 2018; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). Considering the salary and employment discrepancies between those who do and do not have a four-year degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), these findings on college preparation and enrollment signal the need to increase participation in postsecondary education for FGC students.

Becoming enrolled at a bachelor's degree-granting institution is only a part of the picture of how FGC students compare to their continuing-generation counterparts. Once FGC students are officially at a four-year institution, they are more likely to experience academic and

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[1] This is a preliminary classification of FGC students based on one of the most common definitions used by higher education researchers. I provide my own definition of FGC students later in this chapter. See Toutkoushian et al. (2018) for more classifications on who may qualify as a FGC student.

psychosocial difficulties in adjusting to their new environments. For instance, FGC students are less likely to live on campus, engage with faculty members, and participate in co-curricular activities, behaviors that are associated with greater intellectual and social development and retention (Lundberg et al., 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). They may also be less familiar with how to navigate college culture and find supportive communities (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Jehangir 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017).

One potential explanation for these outcomes is the intersecting identities that FGC students hold. This population of college attendees are more likely to be older, ethnic and racial minorities, low-income[2], disabled, attend school part-time, and have dependents (Engle & Tinto, 2008). This perspective, however, views FGC students through a deficit lens that ignores the assets and strengths they bring with them to college. It centers young, White, middle-class, able-bodied individuals as those most deserving of higher education and who have the resources necessary to be successful (Yosso, 2005). Unfortunately, much of the extant literature on FGC students assumes this viewpoint and emphasizes the difficulties they experience in higher education, pinning the source of their issues to who they are as individuals (e.g., Almeida et al., 2019; Gibbons et al., 2019; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). While it is important to enumerate the differential impact of college for FGC students, this scholarship fails to provide an adequate critique of how higher education systematically fails to support FGC students, particularly those who lie at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities (Garriott, 2020; Yosso, 2005). These outcomes can also help explain how colleges and universities do not adequately prepare FGC students for life after college. Since colleges and universities are not

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[2] Engle and Tinto (2008) defined low-income as having a household annual income of less than $25,000. That said, wealth encompasses more than the income a household generates, including financial assets such as real estate, investments, and retirement accounts. For simplicity, future references to socioeconomic status in this study will only refer to annual household income unless otherwise stated.

catered to those holding marginalized identities, minoritized students may feel lost as they attempt to identify resources that can aid their career development, contributing to feelings of career indecision.

Despite these implications, prior research on FGC students emphasized their academic and social experiences during their undergraduate career (e.g., Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996) while less is known about their career development. One potential reason for why scholars may not choose to investigate this area further is because of the data on post-college occupational outcomes for FGC students. For 2007-2008 bachelor's degree recipients, there was no statistically significant difference in the employment rates and median salary four years after graduation between FGC students and continuing-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018). Despite the barriers that FGC students face before and during college, these data imply that they are not impeded in terms of their ability to succeed in their careers. Evaluating initial salary offers for FGC students and continuing-generation students, however, portrays a contrasting reality. The National Association of Colleges and Employers conducted a survey of 2016 college graduates and found that FGC students had significantly lower average starting salary offers compared to continuing-generation students (Eismann, 2016). Furthermore, the success rate of the initial job search for FGC students was 24.9 percent compared to 33.4 percent for continuing-generation students (Eismann, 2016).

Although it is unclear where these discrepancies come from, it is evident that longer-term occupational outcomes between FGC students and continuing-generation students obscures some of the potential difficulties that the former face as they transition from college into the workforce. It is not unreasonable to hypothesize that much of what members of this population

experience that impede their academic and social adjustment during college may impact their ability to identify careers they are interested in and engage in professional opportunities to develop skills that would make them employable. Considering the link between academic majors and occupational choice (Altonji et al., 2012; Ma, 2011; Roksa, 2005), it is vital to explore how the educational experiences of FGC students can be connected to their professional goals.

In contrast to literature on the career development of FGC students, there is more scholarship on the career development of college students of color. Researchers have used a variety of theories and conceptual frameworks to explore how students of color make career decisions (e.g., Dickinson et al., 2017; Fouad & Byers-Winston, 2005; Gushue, 2006; Hui & Lent, 2017). Many of these studies primarily focused on the impact of one's racial identity without examining the intersection of race with other social identity groups such as social class, gender, or disability. There have been only a handful of studies that specifically examine the intersection of race and first-generation status on career development (e.g., Parks-Yancy, 2012; Storlie et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2013). All of these studies found that family played an essential role in the career development of FGC students of color, highlighting the need for colleges and universities to be more intentional in how they involve a student's community into their educational and career planning.

I chose to focus my study on the intersection of first-generation status and race, centering the experiences of FGC students of color[3]. This subgroup of FGC students is interesting to examine in higher education contexts due to how certain cultural values can be amplified

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[3] The term "students of color" represents individuals from many racial backgrounds. Generally speaking, students of color encompass students who identify as Black, African American, Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Chicanx, Native American, and multiracial. For the purposes of this study, I limit the definition of students of color to Black, African American, Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Latinx, and Chicanx individuals. I provide justification of this choice at the end of this chapter. Discussions about identification with and the development of specific racial identities are beyond the scope of this study.

because of their intersecting identities. As a result, they may experience interlocking forms of oppression that are different than what a White FGC student or continuing-generation student of color may experience (Garriott, 2020). One primary way in which this appears is through the culture of individualism U.S. higher education espouses that conflicts with the value of communalism that FGC students of color often hold (Parks-Yancy, 2012; Storlie et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2013). For the most part, U.S. colleges and universities lean towards an individualistic cultural orientation (Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Stephens et al., 2012), which can contribute to a cultural mismatch for students coming from a more communal background. This cultural mismatch can lead to acculturative stress, impacting a student's ability to be successful academically and socially (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2013).

This tension can also manifest when students are experiencing career indecision. For instance, a student having trouble identifying a career may feel invalidated by a career counselor who neglects to factor in how their parents expect them to choose a job that makes a lot of money and solely focuses on the student's personal interests. While a deficit perspective would assume that FGC students of color lack the cultural and social capital necessary to navigate the institutional culture of the campus they attend, I view this through a critical lens to interrogate how those in power, such as the often White, male, upper-class senior administrators and university trustees, uphold an environment that harms minoritized students through its policies and practices. My viewpoint places the onus on campus leaders to acknowledge how their institution is not meeting the needs of historically excluded students and take proactive measures to address any gaps in how they support these communities. For example, universities historically have made the most visible impact through initiatives geared towards the retention of

FGC students and students of color, but they tend to neglect their career development and post-graduate outcomes (Wildhagen, 2015).

On the other hand, communal values can be an asset for FGC students of color when they experience career indecision. Moemeka (1998) defined communalism[4] as the supremacy of the community above the individual. A communalistic culture is one in which "community welfare undergirds actions" (Moemeka, 1998, p. 124). For FGC students of color, this means that what they do in pursuit of their education has meaning beyond what they are able to do for themselves. Their aspirations often align with bettering their families and communities (Jehangir et al., 2020; Luedke, 2020). When such a student experiences career indecision, they may leverage their strong social connection with their families to have a conversation with them about how to balance communal career expectations with their personal interests. Career counselors who are sensitive to this dynamic could help students devise strategies for how to broach this conversation and identify alternative career paths that can satisfy both themselves and their family. Leveraging the strength of the student-community relationship could then contribute to students feeling more confident about making career choices and engaging in career development activities.

Despite the scenarios illustrated, however, there is a dearth of literature on FGC students of color that focuses on periods during which members of this population experience career indecision. This aspect of career development warrants further investigation because it is directly connected to a student's ability to engage in activities that will assist their professional growth,

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[4] Collectivism, while often used interchangeably with communalism, is slightly different in that the larger social order exists to protect individual rights and facilitate self-actualization (Moemeka, 1998). For some FGC students of color, it may be the case that they align more closely with a collectivist orientation than a communal one. However, I utilize communalism because the countries that many of these individuals' ancestors emigrated from have been described in the literature as being more communal as opposed to collectivistic (Moemeka, 1998; Tyler et al., 2008). Examples of these countries include Nigeria, Brazil, South Korea, and Jamaica (Moemeka, 1998).

such as holding internships and identifying mentors. Helping students navigate their career indecision earlier during their undergraduate education may expedite the process in which they begin to engage in experiential learning opportunities related to their desired career, which further mitigates indecision (Park et al., 2017). Without understanding how FGC students of color undergo career indecision, college career counselors and higher education administrators may remain unaware of specific resources that benefit this population during their initial job search. They may also continue forcing an individualistic cultural orientation that harms FGC students of color during their career decision-making by disconnecting them from their home communities (Storlie et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to examine how FGC students of color process their career development specifically at the junctures during which they experience career indecision. I also sought to understand the role that racial cultural values, such as communalism, have in their career decision-making. Given that family and community are significant in the holistic career development of FGC students and students of color, it is reasonable that they hold substantial meaning for FGC students of color when they experience career indecision. My research is guided by the following questions:

1. How, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate career indecision?
2. In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape how they make meaning of their career indecision?

Overview of the Study

I used narrative inquiry as my methodological approach to understand and analyze the lived experiences of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By utilizing purposeful and criterion sampling, I recruited six students who have within one year remaining of their

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undergraduate studies to participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Participants also shared their updated resumes with me for document analysis (Bowen, 2009). I selected students who represent a diverse range of academic, career, and ethnoracial backgrounds. Through these interviews, participants reflected on how they developed their career aspirations throughout their educational journeys and contextual influences that shaped their pursuit of these goals. They also identified the sources of their career indecision during college and what, if anything, helped them resolve these feelings. By asking questions geared towards their racial and first-generation identities, I gained insight into how their lived experiences shed light on the ways in which higher education supports and perpetuates inequities against FGC students of color.

I related my participant's descriptions of their career development and indecision to social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) and the four-factor model of career indecision (Brown et al., 2012), which form a portion of my conceptual framework. Taken together, these career theories provided an explanation for how external influences can shape one's career development. Lent et al. (1994) investigated how career traits, such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations, influenced actions an individual would take to reach their career goals. Their model also considered the impact of personal characteristics, prior educational experiences, and the environment on the different career traits. Similarly, Brown et al. (2012) described a combination of both personal (neuroticism/negative affect and commitment/choice anxiety) and environmental (lack of readiness and interpersonal conflict) attributes as significant to the likelihood that someone may experience career indecision. My study lent itself to a deeper investigation of how personal background and environmental contexts influence the career indecision of FGC students of color. Furthermore, I provided potential revisions to these models

that allow for more thorough consideration of the cultural values that individuals may rely on during their career development.

Beyond career theories, I also relied on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model to add a critical perspective to my study. Uplifting the different forms of capital that communities of color have in contrast to the dominant forms of social and cultural capital in the United States, Yosso (2005) extended critical race theory to challenge deficit models of thinking that are pervasive in U.S. society towards people of color. In educational settings, community cultural wealth can be used to empower students of color and provide educators an asset-based lens through which to view their development. I extended this model to my study of FGC students of color, emphasizing the capital that their first-generation status affords them during their undergraduate education. In the context of career indecision, community cultural wealth challenges the assumed traits one needs to successfully resolve their indecision and proceed with their career development. On an institutional level, I illuminated the ways in which the culture of United States higher education is both supportive and unsupportive of FGC students of color. This allowed me to provide recommendations for how administrators can improve their support of this population.

Significance of the Study

By highlighting the lived experiences of FGC students of color through narrative inquiry, this study contributed to an enhanced understanding of how career development and indecision is more nuanced for undergraduate students holding multiple marginalized identities. The extant literature on career development for FGC students and students of color generally does not consider how these identities intersect to create a unique pathway for career development. Considering FGC students are more likely to be students of color (Engle & Tinto, 2008), it is

crucial to uncover how their intersecting identities shapes their occupational aspirations and outcomes. Career indecision is also a phenomenon that has not undergone empirical investigation for FGC students of color. Although it is normal for college students to experience some level of career undecidedness, indecision that leads to career anxiety can be detrimental to one's wellbeing (Pisarik et al., 2017; Walker & Peterson, 2012). Not knowing how to best address career indecision for FGC students of color is problematic especially considering how U.S. college culture continues to oppress this population (Stephens et al., 2012). As United States higher education continues to undergo public scrutiny for its return on investment and ability to prepare the future workforce, this study provided new insights into how colleges can better serve minoritized students professionally.

Using narrative inquiry as my methodological approach diversified the scholarship on career development and career indecision. As the career counseling literature typically relies on empirical approaches from psychology, many studies tend to use quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allow for more rich description that can highlight specific experiences that are not captured in statistical analyses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). This study can serve as a foundation to conduct future quantitative research that evaluates the impact of different cognitive or social variables and further refine career development and career indecision models.

Key Terms

I provide definitions for the following terms to be more explicit about the students and phenomena I examined in this study. These definitions may also serve as delimitations for what was and was not addressed in the study.

- *FGC students* are college students who come from families in which neither parent or guardian completed a four-year college degree in the United States. A consequence of this definition is that I include students who have caregivers who completed the equivalent of a four-year college degree outside of the United States. Feliciano and Lanuza (2017) argued that parental contextual attainment, the historical and geographic contexts in which parents complete their education, are relevant for the transmission of intergenerational advantage and disadvantage. For FGC students whose family immigrated to the United States, the cultural capital they hold may not be valued in U.S. higher education while it may have been useful navigating educational systems in their home countries. Many studies on FGC students, however, use the more common definition of students whose parents or guardians have not completed a four-year college degree with no specification as to the country a degree was obtained. Unless mentioned otherwise, references to other studies will use this common definition.

- *Continuing-generation students* are college students who come from families in which at least one parent or guardian has completed a four-year college degree in the United States (Cataldi et al., 2018).

- *Students of color* broadly refers to students who identify as Black, Asian, Latinx, or multiracial with at least one of the aforementioned identities (Morrison, 2010). I acknowledge that this term also includes individuals who identify as Middle Eastern, Native American, Pacific Islander, and multiracial with at least one of these racial identities. Compared to studies for Black, Asian, and Latinx students, there is less literature on the career development for Middle Eastern, Native American, and Pacific Islander college students. There are also substantially fewer Native American and Pacific

Islander students attending college in the United States than students from other racial groups (de Brey et al., 2019), affecting the ability to recruit participants from this demographic. That said, I advocate for future research to focus specifically on the career development needs of Middle Eastern, Native American, and Pacific Islander college students.

- *African American* refers to the racial identity of individuals who have ancestral ties to Africa. *Black* refers to people who have ancestral ties to Africa as well as other parts of the world, such as Latin America and the Caribbean Islands, as a result of the African Diaspora. I use Black instead of African American to be more inclusive of individuals who may not identify as strongly with their African cultural heritage as a consequence of the African Diaspora (Fries-Britt et al., 2014). I reference studies that use these terms interchangeably or choose to use one term over the other.

- *Asian* refers to the racial identity of individuals who have familial ties to communities in East Asia, South Asian, and/or Southeast Asia (Museus, 2014). These regions include countries including, but not limited to, China, Japan, Korea, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

- *Latinx* refers to the ethnoracial identity of individuals who have familial ties to communities in Latin America, including Central America and South America, and/or other regions with Spanish origin. I use Latinx instead of other terms such as Chicanx or Hispanic as it is the most inclusive, but I acknowledge that some individuals may identify more strongly with these other terms (Rinderle & Montoya, 2008).

- *Career development* is the dynamic process through which an individual learns about different careers, decides on a career, and engages in actions to obtain that career.

Beyond one's personal interests and aptitudes, contextual and environmental factors can shape what careers one may choose to pursue or are even available to them (Lent et al., 1994). Career development is not necessarily linear. In fact, individuals will go through multiple iterations of career development as they experience life events.

- *Career indecision* is a phenomenon in which an individual experiences any difficulty making a choice about what career to pursue (Amir et al., 2008).

- *Communalism* is a cultural value that privileges commitment to one's community over self-interest (Moemeka, 1998). Someone who identifies with communalism often considers how their decisions not only impact themselves, but people who they consider important in their lives. Communalism is typically present in communities of color (Tyler et al., 2008). In contrast, *individualism* prioritizes the individual over the collective and considers each human being as a distinct, separate entity (Moemeka, 1998). Furthermore, individualism emphasizes self-interest and self-reliance but not at the expense of other people's rights and freedoms.

Summary

One of the main functions of United States higher education is to equip graduates with the skills necessary to enter the workforce. Colleges and universities, however, often maintain systems of oppression that make it difficult for FGC students and students of color to obtain similar academic and professional outcomes to their more privileged peers (Eismann, 2016; Jehangir, 2010; Wildhagen, 2015). By espousing cultural values that do not align with these populations' values, U.S. higher education continues to marginalize students who do not have desirable forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). FGC students of color lie at the intersection of two minoritized identities that deserve further investigation into how they contribute to a unique

experience with career indecision. Through this study, I provide a platform for FGC students of color to reflect on and share their stories related to their career development. Using a combination of social cognitive career theory, the four-factor model of career indecision, and community cultural wealth, I adopt an innovative and advocacy-based lens to how higher education can be more intentional in supporting the professional growth of students holding marginalized identities. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into the existing research and theories on FGC students of color and their career development.

Chapter II: Literature Review

My study primarily draws upon the career development literature that examines both the personal and external constructs that influence this process. I begin with the current scholarship on the career development of FGC students organized by the most relevant constructs. Next, I provide an overview of the career development for students of color based on their racial and ethnic background. Within the sections for FGC students and students of color, I make special note of studies that have a specific emphasis on career indecision. I then follow these sections with a discussion of the few studies on the career development of FGC students of color, highlighting any consistencies and inconsistencies from observing these identities individually. This provides the foundation for the importance of examining first-generation status and race concurrently during career development. I conclude with my conceptual framework that explains the significance of the capital of FGC students of color in relation to their career indecision and holistic career development.

First-Generation College Student Career Development

Although the literature on the career development on FGC students is sparse, scholars identified some trends in the academic experience of members of this population that are relevant to their professional growth. For instance, researchers described numerous barriers that FGC students may encounter as they navigate life in college, such as financial issues (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibbons et al., 2019; Means & Pyne, 2017; Toyokawa & DeWald, 2020) and relationships with family (Capannola & Johnson, 2020; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Gibbons et al., 2019; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). These barriers are not only relevant for measures such as retention rates and sense of belonging, but also career-related constructs such as career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). Despite the utility of the extant

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scholarship on the academic and career development of FGC students, many studies paint these individuals through a deficit lens. More specifically, early researchers noted that FGC students often lack the social and cultural capital necessary to successfully navigate higher education (e.g., Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). There is general movement towards more asset-based approaches to interpreting the experiences of FGC students. As such, I hope to contribute to this momentum by highlighting how this population brings with them forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that benefit them during their career development. In this section, I review the literature on three key career topics that scholars identified as especially relevant for FGC students. Although I organize these topics into distinct sections, they play interlocking roles in the career development of FGC students.

Deficit-Based Interpretations of Career Barriers

The barriers that FGC students face during college have impacts on both their academic and professional growth. Among the most salient barriers that impact these individuals are lack of career knowledge, feeling unsupported on campus, and financial strains (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Toyokawa & DeWald, 2020). These barriers are often framed in terms of FGC students lacking the social and cultural capital needed to be successful in higher education (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Although FGC students face these obstacles at higher rates compared to continuing-generation peers (Pike & Kuh, 2005), they are able tap into a variety of resources to help them persevere. One prominent trend is how these individuals exhibit communalism through reaching out to others for support when they encounter a challenge they are unable to overcome on their own (Gibbons et al., 2019; Ma & Shea, 2021; Tate et al., 2015). In light of this, it is beneficial to consider how to promote career problem-solving and decision-making that involves more than just the individual.

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One area of conflict for FGC students is how they can assert independence in their career development while also feeling empowered to reach out to different resources for career information to which they may not have immediate access. In their qualitative study of FGC students and their adjustment to college, Gibbons et al. (2019) found that their participants viewed independence as critical for self-growth and developing their personal and professional identity. At the same time, they found it difficult to find information on their own about essential services on campus. For these students, there is a tension between wanting to adopt a more independent mindset and needing to get information that they need to obtain from others. Furthermore, Ma and Shea (2021) found that FGC students who have a low or average connection to campus were more likely to report experiencing barriers that negatively impacted their career outcome expectations. While having some level of independence is essential for professional growth, it is evident that colleges and universities are not providing sufficient support for FGC students that would help them feel a greater sense of belonging. Through fostering a more inclusive campus environment, FGC students would be able to navigate a space that emphasizes communalism, a value that they tend to endorse (Capannola & Johnson, 2020; Wildhagen, 2015).

FGC students also tend to face external barriers that inhibit their ability to devote time to meaningful career development. Toyokawa and DeWald (2020) noted that FGC students were more likely to report time and finances as barriers compared to continuing-generation students. This result is not surprising considering prior studies that specified how FGC students, due to being more likely to be low-income, spend more time working while attending school (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2005). As it relates to career indecision, the authors also found that FGC status moderated the relationship between perception of lack of resources and career

decidedness. Although the Toyokawa and DeWald (2020) study is the only one reviewed that specifically examined career indecision for FGC students, one limitation of their research is that they did not disaggregate the results of FGC students by any social identity, such as race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status. As I discuss later, the cultural values associated with one's race or ethnicity may serve as an additional factor that could influence the career indecision of FGC students. Socioeconomic status may also be particularly relevant because students may need to balance finding an occupation that they enjoy doing with an occupation that can serve as a vehicle for social mobility (Jehangir et al., 2020; Pulliam et al., 2017). An intersectional approach to the career development of FGC students is essential given that they often hold multiple marginalized identities (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Family

Among one of the most common factors that interact with the career barriers FGC students face is family. Families tend to play an important role in anyone's career development (Metheny & McWhirter, 2013; Powers & Myers, 2017), but their effects are particularly complicated for FGC students. Family of FGC students may be a "double-edged sword" in that they can provide both emotional and instrumental support but also lack the knowledge of higher education processes (Gibbons et al., 2019, p. 500). I problematize the notion that family members are detrimental to the academic and career success of FGC students because this perspective assumes that the knowledge they do hold has little to no value compared to dominant forms of capital. In fact, FGC students may carry with them forms of cultural wealth that can help them persist in face of hardship. Multiple studies found that family is an important resource for members of this population (Jehangir et al., 2020; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018, Tate et al., 2015), so to encourage them to sever ties with their community would be a disservice. Keeping family

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involved in higher education can yield career benefits for FGC students and help them feel less conflicted about what they need to do in order to be successful.

Parents of FGC students often hope that their children obtain jobs that are more prestigious than the ones they hold to support the family. Tate et al. (2015) discovered that the struggles their participants' parents experienced served as a source of motivation for them to succeed in their own careers. This motivation was particularly important for participants who had younger siblings as they often wanted to be role models for them. Furthermore, FGC students in this study described themselves as more appreciative of opportunities that they had and adaptable to changing circumstances. In highlighting these attributes, Tate et al. (2015) assumed an asset-based lens toward what would typically be considered as drawbacks for FGC students. Jehangir et al. (2020) also viewed FGC students through an asset-based perspective by highlighting how their motivations to pursue certain careers were based on making their family proud and solving issues within their own communities. In having strong support from their families, participants described how they were able to embrace ambiguity during their career journeys. These results show how FGC students utilize familial capital and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) to make meaning of their career development.

Sometimes, however, family of FGC students may exhibit behaviors that are not ideal for their career development. Instead of framing these behaviors as maladaptive, I choose to highlight how they are demonstrative of the importance of communalism for FGC students and their families. Using self-determination theory as their theoretical framework, Mitchall and Jaeger (2018) found that FGC students' self-determination was enhanced when parents served as role models and fostered a sense of career volition. In contrast, their self-determination was hindered when parents restricted choices and emphasized family obligations. Given that two

significant barriers for FGC students was seeking independence and lack of time, it makes sense that having overbearing parents would be harmful for self-determination and career development. Gibbons et al. (2019) similarly found that FGC students who had parents that did not want their children to leave home acted as barriers for their development. Instead of placing the blame on families for harming FGC students, colleges and universities could better inform family members how they can be involved appropriately in their students' education and career planning. Oftentimes institutions do not promote consistent communication with family and community members and encourage an amount of independence that can be conflicting for FGC students (Wildhagen et al., 2015). As seen previously, FGC students usually draw on family as a source of strength and motivation for their career pursuits. It would be useful for universities to guide students on how to have productive conversations with people close to them about their academic and professional plans.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy

Career barriers and family connection are critical factors that influence the career decision self-efficacy of FGC students. Career decision self-efficacy, one of the central constructs of SCCT, is the confidence that one has to engage in behaviors related to making career choices (Lent et al., 1994). FGC students have been found to have lower levels of career decision self-efficacy compared to continuing-generation students (Harlow & Bowman, 2016). Communalism emerges again as a prominent way to enhance the career decision self-efficacy of FGC students through family (Kantamneni et al., 2018) and peers (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2012). By incorporating a construct within a theoretical framework like SCCT to FGC student career development, scholars can develop more robust models that can accurately capture the

significance of community to this population. This can inform how career counselors and higher education administrators approach the career needs of FGC students.

Connecting FGC students with other first-generation peers can help these individuals foster not only greater career decision self-efficacy, but also a sense of their own identities. Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2012) created a constructivist career course for FGC students. The constructivist career course allowed students to engage in self-reflection of their own career narratives. They found that the course activities enhanced several domains of career decision self-efficacy. In particular, participants created a career genogram for their family that "foster[ed] intergenerational continuity" and shared it with others in the group (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2012, p. 465). This exercise demonstrated how FGC students can reflect on their family's career paths to further clarify their own career goals. It emphasized communalism in that FGC students were able to maintain a connection to their family and relate to others through shared experiences. Kantamneni et al. (2018) specifically identified how high levels of parental support can contribute to higher career decision self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn translated to more positive outcome expectations. They also noted that ethnic identity could be an important factor influencing self-efficacy and outcome expectations, emphasizing that an intersectional approach to FGC student career development would be beneficial.

There are some studies that present contradictory findings to how important career barriers and family are for FGC students in relation to career decision self-efficacy. Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016) found that even though FGC students faced higher perceived career barriers, their career decision self-efficacy beliefs overrode parental influences such as income and level of support. This is surprising considering how prior research emphasized how crucial family is to FGC students (Capannola & Johnson, 2020; Jehangir et al., 2020; Kantamneni et al.,

2018 Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018, Tate et al., 2015). Akin to Toyokawa and DeWald (2020), one limitation of this study is that it does not attend to racial differences in the interaction between career decision self-efficacy and parental influences. More specifically, the sample that Raque-Bogdan and Lucas (2016) gathered was primarily White and they found no statistically significant differences between the racial composition of FGC students and continuing-generation students. It would be interesting to conduct another study to see if there are disparities in the relative importance of family for White FGC students compared to FGC students of color. A qualitative methodology would be useful to uncover in-depth examples of how race and ethnicity can impact the career decision self-efficacy of FGC students. In relation to career barriers, Pulliam et al. (2017) found in their study of FGC students participating in a summer bridge program that perceived career barriers did not predict initial career choice but career decision self-efficacy did. Additionally, the relationships between career decision self-efficacy and career barriers to initial career choice were not moderated by race. Given that the majority of the participants were students of color, it is surprising that race was not a more salient variable for the participants in this study. This result highlights the need for the FGC career development literature to pay close attention to the way that race is operationalized and presented to participants. Clarifying this construct can then illuminate its impact on FGC student career development and career indecision.

Students of Color Career Development

Examining the career development of students of has been an area of interest for vocational psychologists and career counselors over the past three decades. Given the history of racism in the United States, scholars sought to understand how individuals of color may have experienced racial discrimination as they developed and worked toward their career aspirations

(e.g., Duffy & Klingaman, 2009; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005; Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006). Some studies uncovered the role that family played into this population's career decision-making process (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Lustig & Xu, 2018). One of the main issues with many of these studies is that they benchmark students of color against their White peers. This privileges the latter's experiences, reinforcing their cultural dominance in the domains of education and career readiness. It compels students of color to assimilate into the dominant culture in order to fit the ideal mold of a working professional. As I argue throughout this study, there is a need to uplift the capital of students of color so that career counselors and higher education professionals are equipped to respond to their needs in a culturally relevant manner. In this section, I review the relevant literature on Black, Latinx, and Asian student career development and advocate for an asset-based approach to their career development. I focus specifically on Black, Latinx, and Asian students due to the relative dearth of career literature for college students of other racial groups.

Black Student Career Development

For Black students, the impact of family and community on their career development cannot be understated. Multiple studies confirm that Black students draw upon their family, friends, and mentors as sources of strength and inspiration during their careers (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014; Constantine & Flores, 2006, Dickinson, 2017; Falconer & Hays, 2006; Storlie et al., 2018). The degree to which Black students draw upon their communities during their career development and are confident in engaging in career exploration are also a function of their relationship to their racial and ethnic identity (Bounds, 2017; Duffy & Klingaman, 2009; Murray et al., 2012; Rush, 2012). It is vital to understand how Black students may benefit strongly

through forms of career support that emphasize a more communal cultural orientation that aligns with their racial cultural values.

The career development of Black students has often been described through social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994). Dickinson et al. (2017) validated the use of SCCT for Black students and found that career decision self-efficacy plays a vital role in their outcome expectations, which then translate to their career interests and goals. In contrast to what has been observed in White students, they found that verbal persuasion, or encouragement from mentors and family, enhanced self-efficacy and outcome expectations more than prior learning experiences. This signifies the relative importance of community for Black students in helping them feel more confident about their careers. Storlie et al. (2018) similarly found that Black college women viewed family support as essential for their professional growth, noting that this support is often a source of greater career adaptability. Falconer and Hays (2006) also described the significance of peer influence and parental involvement for Black college students, highlighting a propensity for collaborative career decision-making. These findings demonstrate how family and community support are crucial to ensuring that Black students are successful in their career development. In relation to the current study, a reliance on these networks is indicative of a communal cultural orientation that is beneficial for Black students as they make career decisions.

The student's self-identification with their racial and ethnic identity also influences the degree to which they utilize support networks in their community. In a SCCT-grounded study of Black high school students in an Upward Bound program, Bounds (2017) found a positive relationship among career decision self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and academic self-concept. Black students who had a robust understanding of their ethnic identities felt more confident

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engaging in tasks associated with academic and professional development. In contrast, Black students who showed low identity development in the face of race-related stress had lower career aspirations (Murray et al., 2012). In fact, "African American college students who conformed to White cultural standards and values reported lower levels of vocational identity" (Murray et al., 2012, p. 256). These findings suggest that racial and ethnic identity are adaptive factors that help Black students achieve their career goals. It also suggests that forcing Black students to assimilate into the dominant cultural mold of United States higher education would harm their career development. In relation to communalism and the family, Rush (2012) cautioned against conceptualizing Black families and their relation to career development according to European American standards. Career goals for Black individuals are often shaped with a desire to help not only themselves, but also their families and other members of their community, which is in stark opposition to "European American values and assumptions including notions of rugged individualism" (Rush, 2012, p. 35). As individualism is often espoused in higher education (Stephens et al., 2012), incorporating the family into the career development of Black students better aligns with this population's racial cultural values.

There are a few studies, however, that uncovered potential career barriers for Black students who are highly involved with their families and cultural heritage. In their study of racial-ethnic socialization and parental career support of Black college students, Blackmon and Thomas (2014) found that participants who reported that their parents coped with racism well were more likely to report receiving career modeling, verbal encouragement, and emotional support from them. However, those who had a stronger connection to their African American heritage were less likely to receive verbal encouragement for their careers from their parents. This is a puzzling result considering that Black students who are more connected to their cultural

background would understandably hold on more strongly to their racial cultural values. It would then be expected that there is a higher level of communalism in the family that should entail greater support. Related to this finding, Constantine and Flores (2006) found that higher levels of perceived family conflict predicted lower levels of career aspirations. Taken together, these conclusions suggest that there are positives and negatives associated with increased family support for a Black student's career development. In light of these findings, it is crucial to not view family members as a deficit to the professional growth of Black students. This would again privilege the individualism that is prevalent in higher education.

Only one study specifically examined what influenced the career indecision of Black students. Constantine et al. (2005) found that perceived occupational barriers predicted career indecision while perceived parental support predicted career certainty. More specifically, Black students who anticipated experiencing obstacles in obtaining their career goals were more likely to feel unsure about what occupation to choose. Having parental support mitigated some of that uncertainty. Although this is contradictory to the findings of Blackmon and Thomas (2014) in relation to career support, having parental support is continuously depicted as a buffer against racial discrimination that Black students may face in the workplace (Rush, 2012: Storlie et al., 2018). This again emphasizes the importance of instilling pride in communalism for Black students so that they feel comfortable reaching out to their families as potential barriers arise in their career development.

Latinx Student Career Development

Much like Black students, Latinx students must negotiate the meaning they attribute to their racial and ethnic identities. The relationship between the racial and ethnic identities of Latinx students and their career development is complex. Latinx students often need to balance

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acculturating into the dominant Anglo culture and identifying as a proud member of their ethnic group during college (Ali & Menke, 2014; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). This has implications for the degree to which this population relies on their family and community for career support. For Latinx students who have a more communalist orientation, family has a positive impact on their ability to explore different career options and engage in career-related tasks (Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; McGee & Bentley, 2017). Observing how Latinx students navigate their own racial and ethnic identities in relation to the cultural norms of United States higher education provides the opportunity to develop career development strategies that prioritize communalism.

SCCT is the primary theoretical framework that scholars have used to identify the salience of career barriers for Latinx students. Gushue (2006) found that career decision self-efficacy mediated the relationship between vocational identity and career exploration for urban Latinx high school students, which aligns with the one of the central hypotheses of SCCT. Perception of career barriers, however, was only associated with vocational identity but not career exploration activities. These findings suggest that Latinx students may benefit from career interventions that target their perception of their own abilities and how their self-appraisal can lead to certain career paths. Ali and Menke (2014) concluded that while Latinx students may be more likely to perceive career barriers compared to their White peers, they have higher career self-efficacy skills. It appears then that Latinx students may have the skills they need to explore different careers and that potential barriers are the primary issue of concern. Having mentors or role models that can provide access to career education resources and professional development opportunities would be direct ways to mitigate potential career barriers (Parks-Yancy, 2012). One limitation to note in Ali and Menke's (2014) findings is that they focused on high school

students in communities where there was a significant Latinx cultural presence. The composition of the community may have played a major role in Latinx students feeling more confident in making career decisions. These students may not have experienced the same challenges of those in predominantly White educational environments.

For Latinx college students, their career development becomes much more dependent on their ability to negotiate the meaning of their marginalized identities in the context of higher education. Those who are proficient in both Anglo and Latinx cultures tend to be more comfortable in their college environment and have greater expectations for their potential occupational opportunities (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). Notably, Holloway-Friesen (2018) found that Latinx students who reported a stronger connection to Anglo culture were less concerned about anticipated workplace discrimination regardless of the degree to which they identified with their Latinx background. Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) also found that Latinx students with higher levels of acculturation reported higher career decision self-efficacy. More specifically, participants who identified as bicultural felt they could navigate Anglo culture and Latinx culture while retaining a commitment to their family. Taken together, these findings imply that acculturation has a net positive impact on the career development of Latinx college students. This is problematic due to the implication that the racial and ethnic cultural values this population brings to higher education are by themselves insufficient for professional success. While Latinx students may benefit from adopting Anglo cultural values, helping them stay connected to their own racial cultural values can promote a greater connection to their community and drive for pursuing their occupation of choice (Holloway-Friesen, 2018).

The motivations that Latinx students have for pursuing certain careers can be a source of strength that distinguishes their professional goals from those of their peers. In relation to

communalism, McGee and Bentley (2017) discovered that Latinx college students pursuing STEM careers had mixed feelings about entering these fields. Some participants felt that traditional STEM jobs did not have the potential to benefit their communities while others saw STEM as an opportunity to serve others regardless of shared background. This is indicative of a more altruistic disposition towards work that resembles communalism in Latinx communities. Leal-Muniz and Constantine (2005) specifically examined the culture-specific values on the career development of Mexican American college students, finding that perceived parental support positively predicted vocational exploration and commitment. In addition to self-perceptions of racial and ethnic identity, family and community are important sources of support and encouragement in the career development of Latinx students. Contrary to the acculturation perspective, these studies demonstrate how alternative forms of capital that extend beyond individual skills can be assets.

There is only one study that examined what impacted career indecision for Latinx students. Risco and Duffy (2011) concluded that incoming Latinx college students who are more assured of their work-related interests and have knowledge of occupations that suit their personality are more likely to commit to a distinct career trajectory. The authors noted that this vocational self-clarity was the most significant variable that accounted for the variance in career decidedness in their sample. One limitation they noted was that despite factoring in vocational self-clarity and other variables from their career decision profile instrument, an overwhelming majority of the variance in career decidedness was still left unaccounted for. Considering the role of sociocultural variables in the holistic career development of Latinx students (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017), it would be reasonable to assume that the specific phenomenon of career indecision would also be influenced

by these constructs. In the context of the current scholarship, further research should investigate how Latinx students make meaning of their career indecision through a racial and ethnic lens.

Asian Student Career Development

Much like the literature on Latinx student career development, the literature on Asian student career development primarily emphasized the roles of family and acculturation. Family approval plays a substantial role in what careers Asian students deem suitable because they tend to view their own success as a reflection of their family's reputation (Fouad et al., 2008; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Poon, 2014; Shen, 2015). However, the degree to which a student is acculturated to the dominant culture may sway them toward occupations that their family members do not necessarily approve of (Fouad et al., 2008; Hui & Lent, 2017; Kim & Choi, 2018; Poon, 2014). The interplay between an Asian student's family dynamics and racial and ethnic identity on their career development demonstrates the complexities of making career choices when it involves others, a natural result of aligning with a communal cultural orientation.

Multiple scholars used SCCT to ground their research on the career development of Asian college students. Hui and Lent (2017) adapted this theoretical model to incorporate family support and acculturation as distinct predictors of the likelihood that Asian students would pursue certain career paths. They found a significant relationship between family support and career goals that was mediated by career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Additionally, participants who had a stronger adherence to Asian values were more likely to perceive family support for fields in which Asian people are overrepresented, such as STEM (Hui & Lent, 2017). This result highlights the pressure that Asian college students may feel from their families to pursue fields that are notable for their stability and income potential. Similarly, Kim and Choi (2018) investigated the role of career curiosity and ethnic identity on the career

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decision self-efficacy of Asian students and concluded that those with high curiosity can maintain internal motivation during their career development. According to the authors, this can also help Asian students be more resilient to stereotypes and avoid early foreclosure on career choices based on familial expectations. The implication of this finding suggests that a strict adherence to Asian cultural values may be detrimental to career development and requires that the individual make their own meaning of their racial and ethnic identities.

As a result, acculturation becomes a construct of interest for Asian students because of how becoming fluent in the dominant culture can be beneficial in higher education. Kodama and Huynh (2017) described that "a common view of the college experience centers on self-actualization and 'pursuing one's passion' to carry students into postcollege career success" (p. 52). Based on the individualistic culture of colleges and universities in the United States, students may perceive family influence on their academic and professional goals as negative. Asian students, particularly those who have immigrant parents, may view college as a pathway for upward mobility and have an interdependent perspective of their careers (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). Beyond college, Fouad et al. (2008) found in their qualitative of 12 Asian Americans of diverse age ranges that most of the participants believed that they had to integrate their ethnic culture with the mainstream U.S. culture. When asked about their career development, some participants described that their cultural values made exploring different careers difficult, but their families still provided financial and emotional support when encountering obstacles. This conflict between negotiating the meaning of one's culture of origin and the mainstream culture emphasizes the need to understand how communalism as a racial cultural value influences the career motivations and decisions of Asian college students.

Two studies highlight the consequences of the previous findings on acculturation, family support, and ethnic identity on the career development of Asian students. Poon (2014) found that Asian American students juggled personal interests and familial expectations on their career choice under a "complex racialized immigrant" context (p. 510). In particular, the immigrant experience for certain Asian families, especially those who came to the United States to escape poverty, underscores the importance of obtaining a job that pays well, such as those in STEM fields. Beyond family, peers can also reinforce or refute stereotypes about what type of careers Asian students can pursue (Kim & Choi, 2018; Poon, 2014). Shen (2013) found that perceived parental pressure towards major and career choices predicted internalized stereotypes about Asian Americans and their academic and career opportunities. Internalized stereotyping in turn predicted the likelihood that a student would choose a culturally valued major, one that would be considered prestigious among family and community members. Under an asset-based perspective of Asian students and their cultural values, this result is perplexing. If an Asian student largely espouses communalism and makes career decisions out of respect for their family's desires, it may appear they are hindering their own racial and ethnic identity development. The results of Poon (2014) make a compelling case to critique the structural inequities of United States society that compels these students to value prestige and income potential in their careers.

There is only one study that focused on career indecision for Asian students. Career indecision for Asian students is also related to cultural family dynamics much like their overall career development. Keller and Brown (2014) examined the role of conflictual independence, a component of psychological separation, and adult attachment anxiety, an adulthood fear of interpersonal abandonment and rejection, in Asian college students. They found that participants

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who reported greater levels of attachment anxiety were more likely to experience career indecision. The authors were explicit about naming that adult attachment anxiety as it is conceptualized in Western literature may actually be developmentally and culturally appropriate for Asian individuals. As a result, they believe that the relationship found is "intuitive and explained by the participants' cultural norms and the lack of information needed to make an informed career decision" (Keller & Brown, 2014, p. 438). In other words, the indecision that Asian college students may experience may be attributed to external factors more tied to the career development process rather than individual characteristics. This suggests that the main career interventions for Asian college students should be sensitive to how they navigate familial dynamics and focus on building relevant career skills. Such practices can validate the feelings these students have towards negotiating conflicts in their professional development, thereby mitigating feelings of career indecision.

First-Generation Students of Color Career Development

The scholarship on the career development of FGC students and students of color that fails to consider the intersection of these identities has yielded inconsistent results on the importance of various contextual influences such as socioeconomic status and family support. Although there is sparse research exploring individuals who hold both identities, there are similarities in the cultural values of the two populations that may become amplified for FGC students of color. One note is that there are no studies that aggregate FGC students of color as the main population of interest. Regardless, being a FGC student of color may heighten the importance of communalism (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2014), causing these individuals to draw more heavily on their cultural background to navigate their career development.

For Black FGC students, the developmental tasks associated with career exploration and experiential learning may not be the top priority because of the connection they have to their communities. Parks-Yancy (2012) explored how Black, low-income FGC students managed their career development and the social capital they had to navigate this process. Participants in this study frequently had to balance their academic and family responsibilities throughout the school year, decreasing their awareness of on-campus career resources that could have helped them develop their occupational aspirations. Furthermore, the author suggested that "family commitments and/or well-intended 'advice' from family members were detrimental to students expanding their social and employment horizons" (Parks-Yancy, 2012, p. 520). This conclusion paints Black FGC students and their families through a deficit lens and implies that cutting ties with one's community would be beneficial for their growth. Colleges and universities instead should be more accommodating of the circumstances of Black FGC students such that their external responsibilities do not inhibit opportunities for professional development. To better support the career needs of Black FGC students, Owens et al. (2010) recommended that career counselors conduct proactive outreach by offering workshops in areas which Black students may congregate, such as the residence halls and meetings for Black student organizations. Additionally, career counselors should stress the importance of networking and identifying mentors in their field of study and desired profession (Owens et al., 2010). These are preliminary steps that can make career assistance more accessible for Black FGC students, but it still fails to address how the dominant culture of higher education privileges students who can afford to expend most of their energy into campus life.

Latinx FGC students approach their career development with a large consideration for how their occupations can help elevate their families and communities. Nuñez and Sansone

(2016) conducted a case study of second-year Latinx FGC students who were working during the academic year to understand their perceptions of work. Most participants identified family as a primary source of motivation to succeed academically and professionally so that they would be able to live a better life compared to their caregivers. Through their work, some participants also mentioned that they built self-confidence by role modeling to other youth and building community with their peers (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016). Based on these findings, Latinx FGC students approach work with a communal attitude, wanting to demonstrate success to uplift others beyond themselves. Their career development has its foundation in forms of capital that the dominant culture may not view as valuable. Storlie et al. (2016) explored the career development of Latina FGC students through using grounded theory, discovering that participants struggled to balance their roles as daughters in a Latinx family and college students. More specifically, these students experienced difficulties navigating their career paths in the unfamiliar setting of higher education, which caused them to become more distant from their families. The struggles that these participants faced mirror the findings from prior studies that suggested less acculturated Latinx students would have difficulties navigating college environments that espoused Anglo values (Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017). Taken together, the literature on Latinx FGC students demonstrates that family and community are a source of strength and encouragement throughout their career development.

There is only one study that examined the career development of Asian FGC students, but it highlights the duality of parental influence on career development. In their qualitative study of 13 Cambodian American FGC students, Tang et al. (2013) noted how participants experienced both support from their families regarding their educational aspirations and pressure to pursue specific career paths. Many of the parents encouraged their children to pursue a STEM

career even if they were not interested in it. However, the cultural and social capital that these students possessed helped them feel validated and belong in the campus community (Tang et al., 2013). Multiple studies found that Asian parents often pressure their children to pursue prestigious careers for the sake of the family (e.g., Hui & Lent, 2017; Poon, 2014; Shen, 2013), but Asian students who also identify as first-generation may perceive that family support as essential to their academic and professional success in college. The explicit introduction of capital to interpret these students' career development underscores how power is reproduced in higher education to perpetuate forms of capital that do not resonate with FGC students of color. For instance, colleges and universities often insist that students cut off ties from their families so that they can focus on their academic and professional goals (Wildhagen, 2015). Those who are able to adopt this individualistic mindset are less likely to experience conflicts in their personal lives and maintain focus on their aspirations. Students who do this, however, run the risk of becoming more disconnected from their home communities and creating conflict in their social support systems (Capannola & Johnson, 2020; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Storlie et al., 2016).

When examining first-generation status independently on the career development of college students, the role of family, and by extension communalism, appeared to be inconsistent. It is clear from the studies that specifically looked at FGC students of color, however, that the intersection of first-generation status and racial background makes family a more pronounced influence on this population's career development. Future quantitative studies could be conducted to specifically observe the interaction of some of the constructs used in prior studies, such as acculturation, family social class, and perceived career barriers, with career decision self-efficacy. That said, given the dearth of research exploring the career development of FGC

students of color specifically, it would still be useful to conduct further qualitative studies that can examine how this population integrates communalism into their career decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

Career development theories ground many of the studies on FGC students and students of color. Although there are a variety of career development theories, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) is particularly robust in that it captures characteristics of both the individual and their environment. Integrating environmental or contextual influences is particularly important for first-generation college (FGC) students of color who bring with them diverse experiences that influence how they navigate their career development during college. Among some of these factors include prior social and cultural capital (Pascarella et al., 2004) and racial cultural values (Tyler et al., 2008). These influences can play a significant role specifically during situations in which FGC students of color experience career indecision. As part of my conceptual framework, I also utilize community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to specifically emphasize the role of power in how higher education privileges the capital of the dominant culture. I begin this section by examining the components of SCCT and how scholars applied this framework to FGC students. I then follow with an overview of how career indecision has been theorized and introduce the four-factor model of career indecision. (Brown et al., 2012). Finally, I discuss community cultural wealth and how some of the different forms of capital can be used to interpret the career development of FGC students and students of color (Yosso, 2005).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

SCCT is a framework that examines the relationship between social cognitive personal traits and environmental contexts that influence one's career behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Based on Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory, the primary social cognitive mechanisms of

SCCT are career decision self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and career goals (Lent et al., 1994). Career decision self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of engaging in behaviors related to making career decisions (Lent et al., 1994). Career outcome expectations are what someone believes will be the result of engaging in career-related behaviors (Lent et al., 1994). Career goals are achievements that motivate individuals to pursue a particular course of action (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy has a direct influence on outcome expectations and goals, which eventually lead to specific career actions that an individual will take (Lent et al., 1994). Outcome expectations similarly has a direct influence on goals (Lent et al., 1994). Goals only have a direct influence on the individual's actions (Lent et al., 1994). In summary, these social cognitive variables form a semi-hierarchical relationship that ultimately impacts the behaviors people engage in to advance their career development.

According to Lent et al. (1994), these variables serve as a theoretical intermediary between past and future behavior. Additionally, SCCT assumes a cognitive constructivist approach to career development that highlights "the importance of anticipation, forethought, and active construction of meaning in interaction with environmental events" (Lent et al., 1994, p. 87). Based on this paradigm, career development is a dynamic process that extends beyond objective measures of a person's capability to succeed in a certain occupation and focuses on their perceived abilities and confidence. This makes SCCT an ideal model to analyze the career development of college students as they come to college with prior academic and professional experiences that can influence their future career objectives. SCCT also considers the role of demographic characteristics such as race and socioeconomic status as person-based inputs influencing career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994), making it an ideal framework to analyze the experiences of FGC students of color.

Research that explored its practical and theoretical implications of SCCT primarily focused on the cognitive-person variables without much consideration for how the environment impacts on one's career development (Lent et al., 2000). Environmental factors can be categorized as distal or proximal (Lent et al., 2000). Distal, or background, factors "affect the learning experiences through which career-relevant self-efficacy and outcome expectations develop" (Lent et al., 2000, p. 37). In other words, these background influences have a significant relationship to one's perceived ability of engaging in career-based tasks and beliefs and the consequences of engaging in such activities. Some examples of distal factors include support, or lack thereof, from family and peers and the presence of role models (Lent et al., 2000). In contrast, proximal factors are more relevant during active moments of decision-making (Lent et al., 2000). Examples of proximal influences include one's career network and the presence of discriminatory hiring practices (Lent et al., 2000). Considering that both distal and proximal environmental variables can have varying effects, their presence can either serve as career barriers or a sources of career support (Lent et al., 2000). In addition to objective measures of the presence of career barriers and supports, SCCT maintains that the individual's perception of these influences is also significant (Lent et al., 2000). For instance, although a student may qualify for federal financial aid and is classified as low-income, they may not perceive their socioeconomic status as a barrier in being able to explore different career options.

SCCT can also apply to FGC graduates as well, demonstrating its capacity as a lifespan career framework. Olson (2014) exemplified the utility of SCCT in presenting case studies of the career development of FGC student graduates. For each of the cognitive-person variables (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals), she described situations in which FGC students faced barriers during their educational and professional experiences that hampered each of these social

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cognitive factors. For self-efficacy, for instance, a student who earned an engineering degree had struggled in their computer programming classes and consequently did not apply for jobs in the technology sector because they believed they did not work well with computers. This combined with the lack of a career network, a proximal environmental influence, the student held onto their assumption that all jobs in the technology sector required computer programming skills. Although this particular example frames FGC students through a deficit lens, Olson (2014) used SCCT to highlight the interaction between one student's self-efficacy beliefs and their proximal environmental factors that influenced their career choices.

Career Indecision

Although the extant literature on the career development of FGC college students and students of color captured a more surface-level view of this process, less is known about how these students navigate career indecision. Current work on career indecision for college students focused on psychological and personality traits that influence whether individuals will have greater difficulty making career choices (e.g., Burns et al., 2013; Puffer, 2011; Udayar et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2006). Although many of these studies did not specifically focus on FGC college students or students of color, they still provide a foundation for understanding how career indecision operates.

Cognitive Factors

Scholars have primarily conceptualized career indecision as being heavily influenced by a person's innate cognitive and psychological tendencies. Penn and Lent (2018) studied the relationship among three of Big Five personality traits, specifically neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness, career decision self-efficacy, and choice/commitment anxiety (CCA), with CCA serving as a proxy for career indecision. They found that each of the three traits had

indirect links to CCA through career decision self-efficacy with neuroticism also having a direct link to career choice anxiety. In a similar vein, Braunstein-Bercovitz et al. (2012) investigated the role that insecure attachment played in career indecision and found that anxious attachment, a subtype of insecure attachment, had an indirect connection to career indecision through negative emotions. In other words, the negative emotions that can result from having an anxious attachment style can impede one's career development by "obstructing the ability to organize and analyze career thoughts and considerations and fostering a dependent and submissive coping style" (Braunstein-Bercovitz, 2012, p. 242). For FGC students of color who identify with communalism, neuroticism and insecure attachment can aggravate the difficulties of wanting to please their families while also pursuing a career that suits their interests. Given the connection between career indecision and mental health (Pisarik et al., 2017; Walker & Peterson 2012), it is imperative to investigate what factors contribute to this phenomenon for FGC students of color in the context of their family relationships.

In addition to different forms of emotionality, there are other traits that have correlations with career indecision that may be relevant for FGC students of color. White and Tracey (2010) examined the role of authenticity as a construct impacting career indecision, observing a negative relationship between the two variables. Based on this result, they concluded that living in a conscious way that aligns with one's values allows individuals to create realistic career goals and accomplish tasks needed to obtain them. Xu and Tracey (2015) looked at ambiguity tolerance as a characteristic influencing career indecision and found that incorporating this variable in their model explained some of the variability in career indecision that career decision self-efficacy could not by itself. This suggests that being comfortable with navigating unclear situations and competing choices can improve one's ability to make effective career decisions. FGC students of

color entering higher education can feel a conflict between the individualistic nature of higher education (Stephens et al., 2012) and a desire to remain true to their cultural values. It makes sense that authenticity and ambiguity tolerance could be constructs that influence whether this population experiences career indecision at higher levels compared to their peers as they adapt to an unfamiliar environment. Further exploration is needed to determine how these qualities actually manifest in their career development. A critical perspective would be particularly useful in highlighting how FGC students of color negotiate potential conflicts as it relates to being on a college or university campus that marginalizes their cultural values.

External Factors

Although it may be possible to surmise what external factors contribute to career indecision for FGC students of color based on extant literature on the career development of this population, there is little to no literature that specifically examines this phenomenon for this population specifically. There are, however, a handful of studies that explore career indecision for solely FGC students and LGB students. Toyokawa and DeWald (2020) compared the perceived career barriers and career decidedness of FGC and non-FGC students at a liberal arts university. They determined that lack of social support and lack of time and financial resources were the largest perceived obstacles for FGC students. Surprisingly, students who perceived a greater sense of responsibility of taking care of family members also had higher levels of career decidedness. Although it appears that these conclusions create conflicting demands, it is evident that a commitment to family and an orientation towards communalism has a positive influence on FGC students' career development. Extending these results to FGC students of color, this study supports prior research that emphasizes the importance of family in the career decision-making process (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Storlie et al., 2016; Tang et al.,

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2013). In their study of LGB students, Winderman et al. (2017) found that participants who had high levels of social support were less likely to experience career indecision because they would experience less conflict with close others when making career choices. This mirrors the findings of career indecision for FGC students, underscoring the need for FGC students of color to feel social support from those around them.

One of the limitations of the current career indecision literature is that they primarily used quantitative methods that inhibit a deeper understanding of how career indecision affects students. Although it is useful to have a general view of what leads to career indecision for college students, quantitative studies are unable to provide a rich description of how they make meaning of this experience. Additionally, they also limit the potential to investigate how students attempt to resolve career indecision, which may be of particular interest to career counselors. A qualitative study can provide both a comprehensive description of what obstacles are the most salient for students experiencing career indecision and what resources they may utilize to overcome their challenges. Furthermore, the dearth of literature exploring career indecision for FGC students of color makes a qualitative approach an appropriate foundation to conduct further quantitative inquiry.

Four-Factor Model of Career Indecision

The lack of qualitative studies that could inform more quantitative research on career indecision for college students may have contributed to a lack of a concrete model for career indecision. Until recently, there has not been a unified theoretical model of this process. Brown et al. (2012) validated a four-factor model of career indecision that contained the following factors: neuroticism/negative affectivity, choice/commitment anxiety (CCA), lack of readiness, and interpersonal conflicts. Neuroticism/negative affectivity is a person-specific construct that

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consists of one's tendency to dwell on the potential negative consequences of career options and "the affective concomitants of this negative cognitive/perceptual style" (Brown et al., 2012, p. 15). CCA is a dimension that also concerns the emotions surrounding a career choice but emphasizes a fear of commitment due to eliminating options that they will regret (Brown et al., 2012). Lack of readiness, as the name may imply, is marked by "a lack of planfulness and goal directedness and by low career decision-making self-efficacy beliefs" (Brown et al., 2012, p. 17). Interpersonal conflicts highlight the role of others who hold conflicting views of what the individual should do in terms of their career in their career decision making process (Brown et al., 2012).

Given that most of the extant scholarship on career indecision focused on neuroticism/negative affectivity and CCA, there is less understanding of how lack of readiness and interpersonal conflicts specifically impact career development. Based on the literature surrounding the academic experiences of FGC students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996), it makes sense to conduct further research on how FGC students experience lack of readiness and interpersonal conflicts during their career development. On a practical level, Brown et al. (2012) noted that increasing the career decision self-efficacy beliefs of students may be an important component of early career interventions, which would specifically impact the lack of readiness factor. They also noted that a comparison of the role of interpersonal conflicts between collectivist and individualist cultures and how acculturation influences these relationships should warrant further investigation. Considering that Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) found a positive relationship between levels of acculturation and career decision self-efficacy, examining the experiences of FGC students of color can further illuminate the role of racial cultural values associated with collectivism.

Community Cultural Wealth

Although SCCT and the four-factor model of career indecision make attempts at incorporating social identities, they are inadequate in addressing systemic issues that FGC students of color experience during their career development. FGC students of color bring with them forms of knowledge and skills that can help them navigate and persevere in the face of obstacles during their educational journey. Yosso (2005) introduced community cultural wealth to describe the types of capital that people of color often hold outside of dominant forms of cultural and social capital. She defined the different forms of community cultural wealth as aspirational capital (maintaining goals despite obstacles), linguistic capital (skills gained through communication in more than one language), familial capital (cultural knowledge reinforcing a commitment to community), social capital (networks of people and resources providing instrumental and emotional support), navigational capital (maneuvering through social institutions often not created for marginalized communities), and resistant capital (knowledge and skills gained through opposing and challenging inequality).

Grounded in critical race theory, community cultural wealth counters contemporary racism in United States education that frames the shortcomings of students and families from minoritized backgrounds through a deficit lens (Yosso, 2005). Indeed, this deficit thinking continues into the academy when scholars conduct research on the career development of FGC students and students of color. When evaluating the career readiness of college students using dominant forms of cultural and social capital, families of these students are perceived as detrimental (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Shen, 2013). Reinterpreting the results of these studies using community cultural wealth can instead re-envision families as essential to promoting the success of FGC students of color. This also

provides further guidance for student affairs practitioners and university leaders on how to better engage families during college, disrupting the individualism often espoused in higher education.

Based on prior studies of career development for students from minoritized backgrounds, familial capital, aspirational capital, and resistant capital are particularly salient for FGC students and students of color. Families and communities often provide different forms of emotional and instrumental support for these populations, which can be especially helpful during times of hardship (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014; Fouad et al., 2008; Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Storlie et al., 2016; Storlie et al., 2018; Tang et al., 2013; Tate et al., 2015). In particular, parents and caregivers often motivate their children to pursue education as a path toward a better future by providing narratives about the difficulties they had growing up (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014; Poon, 2014; Storlie et al., 2016). Some students may also use familial capital and aspirational capital as tools to counter stereotypes that others may have about their identities and what careers they may be able to pursue (Jehangir et al., 2020; Kim & Choi, 2018; McGee & Bentley, 2017). Linguistic capital, social capital, and navigational capital may also be important for FGC students and students of color during their career development. For instance, speaking different languages is often viewed as an asset for employment due to the capacity to interact with people from different countries. Social capital can help students gain unique professional development opportunities that they may not otherwise have access to by themselves. Through the diverse set of resources they have, FGC students and students of color can feel more confident navigating institutional resources and norms of the workplace once they finish college.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the career development literature for FGC students, students of color, and those at the intersection of these two identities. In detailing different factors that

contribute to the overall career development process for each population individually, I found that a common theme that linked FGC students and students of color is communalism. To varying degrees, family and community are critical components of how each population navigates higher education and their professional aspirations. Where possible, I discussed the few studies that specifically examined what influenced career indecision for FGC students and students of color. Furthermore, I framed much of the research through an asset-based lens that privileges the cultural wealth of FGC students and students of color. Earlier scholarship on these populations tended to view them through a deficit perspective that undermined the significance of communalism. FGC students of color hold multiple marginalized identities in higher education, so it is crucial that their cultural wealth is emphasized in the literature to promote equitable career outcomes. To this end, I concluded my chapter with my conceptual framework that combines SCCT, the four-factor model of career indecision, and community cultural wealth. My conceptual framework allowed me to both pinpoint the relevant career constructs for FGC students and students of color while also critiquing how higher education institutions foster environments that create conflict and isolation for FGC students of color. The next chapter details the methodology and methods I used to uplift the experiences of FGC students of color experiencing career indecision.

Chapter III: Methodology

Given the dearth of scholarship on the career development of FGC students of color, this study highlights their experiences. FGC student of color stories are at the center of my research. Taking into consideration my critical constructivist paradigm (Kincheloe, 2005), I view participant narratives as a powerful tool to challenge dominant narratives in the career development and higher education literature. FGC students of color bring with them a unique combination of social identities and lived experiences that necessitate paying attention to all the potential influences on their career indecision. As such, the following questions guided this study:

1. How, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate career indecision?

2. In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape how they make meaning of their career indecision?

My emphasis on participant narratives as the main source of data made narrative inquiry the most appropriate methodological approach to guide this study. As opposed to solely viewing participant stories as evidence to advance my own scholarly agenda, I created space for them to exert their agency and co-create knowledge alongside me throughout the research process. This chapter outlines the design of my study, including my positionality as a researcher, my epistemological perspective, the characteristics of narrative inquiry, and the methods I implemented for sampling, data collection, analysis, and quality.

Positionality

Effective qualitative research necessitates that researchers are transparent about their identities and attend to the power dynamics inherent between the role of the researcher and participant (Jones et al., 2014). Reflecting on one's positionality provides researchers the

opportunity to consider how their social identities influence their world views and all stages of the research (Berger, 2013). My interest in the career development of FGC students stems from my own personal background and noticing how I and those around me struggled in attempting to make career decisions. By sharing my relationship to the population I am studying and my research topic, I strive to remain transparent in how my lived experiences may influence my study.

I am a first-generation, low-income college student and a second-generation Korean American who was raised in Los Angeles, California. My father emigrated from South Korea when he was in high school while my mother emigrated from South Korea when she was in her thirties. I also have one older brother who is five years older than me. Prior to my birth, my family was fairly well off. They were definitively middle class and could afford to rent a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in the mid-Wilshire area, which borders West Hollywood and Beverly Hills. My parents came to the United States in pursuit of the American Dream as they grew up in a South Korea that was recovering from the impact of the Korean War.

About halfway through elementary school, my father lost his job, which caused my family to be classified as low-income. I recall the period when this transition happened as I noticed that my parents stopped giving me money for school lunches. Every day, they instead gave me a yellow ticket that had the date, allowing me to eat lunch for free. Around the same time, my family moved to a cheaper apartment in Koreatown that was smaller than where we were living and had less amenities. I consider the formative years of my personal and educational development to have occurred in these circumstances, so I view myself as coming from a low-income background. My current financial behaviors reflect this. Compared to my peers, I perceive myself as spending much less on things I do not immediately need, such as new clothes

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or entertainment. I am usually unwilling to spend extra money on name brand products if I feel as though a generic variant would suit my needs.

I acknowledge that I now have upper-middle social class privilege in that I am college-educated, giving me access to dominant forms of social and cultural capital that allowed me to attend graduate school with essentially all expenses covered. During college, I was able to educate myself on healthy financial habits that I hope will set me up for financial stability once I reach retirement. However, I would be remiss to dismiss the circumstances in which I was raised that formed the basis of my research interests.

Despite this shift in social class, one thing that remained constant was the pressure I received from my parents and school community to pursue higher education. In alignment with the Model Minority Myth (Museus & Kiang, 2009), I felt that I was under the unspoken expectation from my family and those around me that I immediately attend a four-year college following my graduation from high school. Since I started middle school, my mother in particular would constantly remark how I needed to be spending my free time preparing for the SAT or reading books to enrich myself. This pressure lightened a little once my brother successfully matriculated to a four-year college, but I still placed that burden on myself even if my parents would not. Going to college was not only a means to an end for a better future but an end in and of itself. My peers, teachers, and administrators throughout my compulsory education also believed that I would go to college no matter what. There was no alternative future they could see for an Asian individual like myself. Despite the negative connotations of the Model Minority Myth, I did live up to the stereotype of the studious Asian whose sole purpose was to go to college. I earned straight A's, had extracurricular activities ranging from music to journalism, and was referred to as the "poster child" for what parents wanted their own children

to become. At the time, I was not cognizant that I was embodying a harmful archetype that white supremacy created that would contribute to my difficulties during my undergraduate studies.

All of the support and perceived expectations of success that I received did not completely prepare me for how to navigate college as a FGC student. While my brother attended college before me, I could not rely on him for advice because he was not involved on campus and only attended classes. He did not take advantage of any experiential learning opportunities that would have helped him explore his professional interests. To this day, my brother is not certain of what a fulfilling job would look like or the steps he needs to take to identify a meaningful career. Similarly, I came into college with a myopic focus on succeeding in my classes so I could pursue a doctorate in mathematics. I thought I wanted to become a mathematics professor because the Model Minority Myth convinced me that I needed to study mathematics since I excelled in it prior to college. Once I began to struggle in my math classes during my first year, I began to panic. How could someone, an Asian like me, struggle in a subject in which they were once considered an expert? I saw my aspirations of joining the STEM professoriate disappear, leaving me clueless as to how to rebound and identify a new career. Although I was involved in student government and a few other small clubs, I could not visualize how these experiences would translate to a job. I felt especially compelled to decide quickly because I was afraid of not being able to gather enough co-curricular experiences during college that would help me obtain full-time employment after graduation. I did not want to return to my family who had invested so much into my education with a degree but no job.

Fortunately, through my part-time position in the graduate admissions office of the school of education at my undergraduate institution, I learned about student affairs as a path for me to pursue a career at a university. One of the assistant directors in the office oversaw our

department's higher education and student affairs master's program and offered to tell me more about what a job in this field looked like. She told me about NASPA, one of the largest professional organizations in the United States for student affairs. She also agreed to be my formal mentor for the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program, a program that gave historically underrepresented students in college an opportunity to gain exposure to student affairs through internships and other professional development opportunities. Without the mentorship of that staff member who supported me through my career indecision, I would not have been able to identify student affairs as a possibility for me.

Given my own career indecision and my identity as a FGC student of color, I see myself as an insider to the population I am studying (Berger, 2013; Chavez, 2008). I am attuned to the urgency that FGC students may place on needing to find a high-paying job after finishing their bachelor's degree. Additionally, I can directly relate to the sense of obligation that students of color may feel toward their families and community. This would be useful in helping me establish rapport with the participants, but I am wary of how I may have bias toward highlighting participant narratives that align with my own (Chavez, 2008). In contrast, I will be an outsider to participants who do not racially identify in the same way as me. This will be apparent particularly when interacting with Black and Latinx students during my study. Although this allows me to view these individuals with a fresher perspective, I may not be able to identify the subtle, nuanced ways in which their racial identities interlock with their first-generation status (Berger, 2013). This may still be the case with Asian participants because the Asian experience is not monolithic (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Lastly, I recognize that not all FGC students of color identify as low-income. Although many of the educational and career decisions I made were made with my socioeconomic status in mind, this identity may vary in salience based on an

individual's childhood upbringing and affiliation with the upper middle-class norms of navigating United States higher education.

Epistemology

My social identities and their relationship to systems of power and oppression in society are essential to my perspective of reality. I recognize that others around me, even those who may share similar identities, have a unique set of lived experiences that inform their world views. A critical constructivist interpretive paradigm (Kincheloe, 2005) informs my epistemology as I seek to understand the participants' experiences through their lens while uncovering the role power, privilege, and oppression play. Combining both a constructivist and critical paradigm ensures that I intentionally attend to the power dynamics inherent in conducting research on historically minoritized groups in higher education.

Constructivism by itself acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and that researchers and participants co-construct knowledge (Abes, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). Researchers are able to construct and interpret their participants' realities through tools often employed in qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although constructivism takes into consideration the social and historical contexts that informs the experiences of participants (Abes, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018), it fails to explicitly name power and oppression as potential influences (Perez, 2019). Critical theories, such as critical race theory and intersectionality theory, undergird critical paradigms, challenging dominant ideologies and narratives and calling for social transformation (Abes, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). Taken together, critical constructivism assumes that knowledge is constructed by individuals in specific social, historical, and political settings interlaced within systems of power and oppression (Kincheloe, 2005). By centering participant's

experiences and involving them more purposefully in the interpretation of my research, I challenge higher education institutions to serve FGC students of color more equitably in their career development.

Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry involves capturing participant stories and positions the researcher as the interpreter of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Scholars in multiple social science disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education, have used narrative inquiry as a transition from postpositivist perspectives of the relationship between the researcher and the researched to a more constructivist and relational orientation (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Although narratives have historically assumed oral and written forms, researchers continue to expand what constitutes a narrative, including visual media, embodied social performances and processes, and institutional discourse (Chase, 2018). Furthermore, the content within narratives has evolved to encompass reflections on feelings or thoughts and not solely on events (Chase, 2018). Interpreting narratives requires that the researcher attend to their context, specifically temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Temporality references continuity in experiences in the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Sociality refers to the societal and environmental contexts that impact how an individual describes their narrative (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Place describes the physical and concrete boundaries in which a narrative takes place (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This fluid definition of what constitutes a narrative was useful in understanding how FGC students of color experience career indecision and what factors contribute to it. Narrative inquiry provided participants the opportunity to reflect on periods of their life where there may have been patterns of thoughts or

feelings that contributed to their career indecision in addition to specific events. As a result, I was able to capture a more holistic depiction of the participants' career development.

What distinguishes narrative inquiry from other qualitative methodologies is the intentional collaboration between the researcher and participants in the interpretation and presentation of the narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Jones et al., 2014). Josselson (2007) asserted that narrative research "is inherently a relational endeavor", emphasizing the ethical responsibility of the researcher "to protect the privacy and dignity" of the lives they investigate (p. 537). In describing the source of the ethical issues in narrative inquiry, she noted:

> The essence of the ethical conundrum in narrative research derives from the fact that the narrative researcher is in a dual role—in an intimate relationship with the participant (normally initiated by the researcher) and in a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community. (p. 538)

Abiding by ethical practices of narrative inquiry allows for greater trust and rapport in the researcher-participant relationship, leading to greater degrees self-disclosure (Josselson, 2007). I acknowledge that in working with FGC students of color, a minoritized population in United States higher education, it was incumbent upon me as a researcher to respect the autonomy of the participants and minimize any harm that may come to them through participation in my study. Additionally, I maintained the integrity of the participants' narratives such that my own biases in relation to the research topic did not overshadow the messages that they shared through their stories. Researchers utilizing narrative inquiry may struggle to balance their interpretive authority with uplifting their participants' voices (Josselson, 2007). My critical constructivist epistemology compelled me to incorporate the participants as much as feasibly possible in how their narratives were shared in the final report. That said, I also offered my own interpretations

along with the narrative descriptions to illuminate underlying themes that were present across narratives.

Methods

Combining narrative inquiry with my critical constructivist epistemology, I sought to identify FGC students of color who would provide in-depth and diverse insights into the ways in which their social contexts impacted their career indecision and their ability to resolve it. This section details the methods I employed for participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Sample

I relied on purposeful sampling and criterion sampling to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling, commonly used in qualitative research, entails recruiting individuals who are familiar with the study's topic and can contribute an understanding of the main phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). Integrating criterion sampling ensures that potential participants meet certain requirements that ensure they represent the population of interest and have experienced what the researcher wants to investigate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants in my study met the following criteria to self-identify as: 1) an undergraduate student at Mid-Atlantic University within one year of study remaining to obtain their bachelor's degree, 2) a FGC student, which I defined as a student where neither parent/guardian have completed a college degree in the United States (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017), 3) a student of color, which I defined as a student who identifies as Black, Asian, Latinx, or multiracial with one of the aforementioned identities (Morrison, 2010), and 4) having experienced career indecision during their undergraduate career. I chose to focus my study on students who were close to completing their undergraduate studies because the final year of college can cause increased

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feelings of tension and stress (Lane, 2016; Murphy et al., 2010), which may heighten feelings of career indecision (Lipshits-Braziler et al., 2019).

To recruit participants for my study, I collaborated with student affairs practitioners at Mid-Atlantic University's multicultural centers, ethic studies departments, and career center as well as student leaders in undergraduate student organizations by asking them (Appendix A) to distribute a flyer (Appendix B) containing a link to a demographic questionnaire made on Qualtrics (Appendix C) for interested students to determine their eligibility. The items in the questionnaire asked students to describe their academic majors/minors, graduation term, race, ethnicity, first-generation status, and experiences with career indecision. The questionnaire also required students to upload the most recent copy of their resume as a PDF. I requested that staff members in these departments distribute the flyer through their newsletters and Listservs.

In reviewing the responses to the questionnaire, I sought individuals who provided detailed descriptions in the question that asked about their experiences with career indecision. These responses often contained information that discussed initial major and career choices before college or during the early years of the student's undergraduate education and experiences that led them to feeling indecision. Additionally, I wanted to ensure as much as possible that the students I recruited represented diversity in terms of their current academic major and ethnoracial background. I invited a total of 17 students who completed all items in the questionnaire and were deemed eligible for the study. In reaching out to these individuals via email, I received nine responses back. One of the participants responded indicating that they thought they were not a good fit for the study. Two of the participants did not maintain consistent communication with me as I asked them to fill out the informed consent (Appendix D) and did not participate in the study. I proceeded with six participants. Appendix E details each

participants' backgrounds and career interests. Table 1 summarizes demographic information for each participant.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Name	Gender	Major	Minor	Race	Ethnicity
Thomas	Male	Biological Sciences	Spanish	Asian	Bengali
Jessica	Female	Family Science		Black	Ivorian
Monae	Female	Communication	Business	Black, Latinx	Puerto Rican, Caribbean
AJ	Male	Nutritional Food Science		Black	Cameroonian
Hazel	Female	Marketing		Latinx	Colombian
Gabriella	Female	Information Science, Journalism		Asian	Filipino

Note. All names were pseudonyms participants selected upon completion of their semi-structured interview. Blank entries in minor indicate that the participant did not have a minor. Participants selected their race from a list of available options on the demographic questionnaire.

Although there are no strict sample size requirements in qualitative research, Cresswell and Poth (2018) found that many narrative inquiry studies utilized very few participants, often only one or two. Since I wanted to examine career indecision for FGC students from Asian, Latinx, and Black racial backgrounds, I decided it was appropriate to have two students per racial group. This allowed me to obtain a more in-depth understanding of how FGC students of a specific racial background experienced career indecision through the lens of their cultural values while also contributing to a more holistic understanding of career indecision for FGC students.

Data Collection

The first source of data that I collected from the participants was their responses to the demographic questionnaire. Given that they were asked about their field of study and experiences with career indecision, I began to develop a preliminary glimpse into their career narratives by reviewing their answers. I also gained access to participant resumes as a second data source through the questionnaire. Resumes are often the first point of contact students will have with employers, conveying pertinent information about their academic and professional experiences (Burns et al., 2014; Cole et al., 2007; Tsai et al., 2010). As resumes are near mandatory documents for individuals to secure employment, having students provide their resumes allowed me to better understand how they present their professional selves. Resumes may also contain information about the individual's social identities through their name or affiliation with identity-based organizations, which can become a source of stress for FGC students of color based on prior research that highlighted racial and ethnic discrimination during the hiring process (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Derous et al., 2017). Having their resumes available allowed me to probe into racialized experiences that factored into their career development and indecision. Each resume was either one or two pages in length.

The last method of data collection I employed was interviews. Interviews in qualitative studies allow researchers to understand the point of view of their participants through conversation, typically resulting in the construction of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews follow a loose interview protocol in which the researcher asks both open-ended and clarifying questions to probe participants about their feelings or the significance of what they shared (Jones et al., 2014). Questions in semi-structured interviews do not have to be asked in a specific order or with

precise wording (Jones et al., 2014). The questions I prepared as part of my interview protocol center around three main categories: 1) pre-college career aspirations and influences, 2) turning points in the student's undergraduate career in which they experienced career indecision, and 3) attempts to resolve career indecision (Appendix F). During the interview, I also gave participants the opportunity to discuss experiences on their resume that were relevant for their career journey. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I prioritized the safety of myself and the participants by conducting all interviews through Zoom.

All interviews were video-recorded with participant consent. Towards the end of each interview, I asked participants to select a pseudonym for their name. Each participant selected their own pseudonym with the exception of Thomas, who asked me to choose a pseudonym on his behalf. The interviews ranged from 46 minutes to 85 minutes. I took notes during the interview to note observations about each participant's verbal and non-verbal cues and to prepare follow-up questions. Following each interview, I also documented my immediate reactions and thoughts as a way for me to reflect on my own experience with the interview and assist with data analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data I collected from participants, I first transcribed the audio files of my interviews using Otter, an online, automated speech-to-text transcription service. I double-checked the accuracy of the transcripts by listening to the recording again and correcting any errors I encountered. After ensuring the transcriptions were as accurate as possible, I reviewed the video recording of each interview to note instances where participants had a significant non-verbal reaction as they described their experiences. I captured these moments with a brief annotation on the respective transcript with a timestamp. Afterward, I created codes,

"a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Narrative inquiry lends itself to a variety of coding techniques based on the needs of the researcher and how the approach can best retell the stories of the participants. As a guide, Riessman (1993) encouraged beginning with the structure of the narrative before focusing on the content. I paid special attention to the context that participants provided and connected them to Clandinin and Rosiek's (2007) interpretive frame of temporality, sociality, and place.

Given that I did not identify any *a priori* themes before beginning data collection, I first relied on inductive coding to identify patterns in the words and phrases I found meaningful, which allowed me to generate larger categories (Saldaña, 2013). This aligns well with the philosophy of narrative inquiry in that the raw data serve as the primary source for the findings of the study. Based on this approach, I specifically used line-by-line coding by reading each line of the transcript to identify codes (Saldaña, 2013). As I began coding my first transcript, I maintained a codebook to record any potential codes that could have been useful as I began to code the other transcripts. I then incorporated deductive coding into my data analysis by labeling later transcripts with codes in the codebook that I determined were applicable. Using both inductive and deductive coding can lead to more nuanced and rigorous thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Williams & Moser, 2019), which was especially useful in capturing both the uniqueness and similarities in each participant narrative. I coded each narrative individually before generating categories and themes across participants. Throughout this process, I re-reviewed the audio files and transcripts of the interviews to identify information I may have missed.

I reviewed participant resumes before and after their respective interviews using document analysis. Document analysis consists of a "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" in order to "elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). In qualitative research, documents are used to corroborate information gleaned from other sources of data, such as interviews or observations (Bowen, 2009). Before each interview, I took note of several details on each participant's resume, such as length of employment, location of employment, and type of position held. I also made preliminary notes on the way students described their professional experiences. I captured this information using a document analysis protocol (Appendix G). During the interview, I probed students about their resume to see if there were any portions of their employment history that were particularly salient to them. This also provided me the opportunity to ask about other meaningful experiences they may not have included on their resume. Following the interviews, I revisited each resume and engaged in thematic analysis of the document to create themes pertinent to their career development and career indecision (Bowen, 2009). I utilized a similar combination of inductive and deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Williams & Moser, 2019) as I proceeded with each document. Upon completing the thematic analysis for all the resumes, I organized the themes I generated across the interviews and resume to create the larger themes that I used to interpret my findings.

After making my list of themes, I generated interim texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a stage of analysis that focused on my own meaning making of the themes, interpreting participant narratives under my conceptual framework. I wrote a chronological sequence of events that the participants described in their interviews and resumes to create a draft of how I understood their experiences. I shared these interim texts with participants so they could provide

additional feedback or clarification of things that were salient to their narrative. In the end, I synthesized all of the participants' stories to create a metastory (Riessman, 1993) that highlights how they made meaning of their first-generation status, racial identity, and career indecision. I do not intend for the metastory to obscure the particularities of each participant's narrative, but rather to frame their accounts in the context of my research questions, conceptual framework, and epistemological perspective.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires a different set of measures to ensure credibility as opposed to quantitative research due to the greater influence of researcher bias. As I provide my own interpretations of what the participants shared with me, I must ensure that the decisions I make during the analysis and presentation of findings are collaborative and respect the integrity of the data. Engaging in this rigorous process helped me to establish trustworthiness, or confidence that the results are of high quality (Jones et al., 2014). I strove to be authentic and transparent with my reasons for conducting this study and shared my positionality with the participants to build rapport. This along with utilizing a semi-structured interview format to encourage a more conversational exchange of information enhanced my credibility both to the participants and the audience of my research (Jones et al., 2014). Furthermore, reflective memoing is a strategy to capture initial interpretations of the data immediately following the interview while also monitoring how the researcher's subjectivity may appear throughout the data collection process (Shenton, 2004). I wrote reflective memos periodically throughout my study to bring me closer to my research and capture thoughts that I may need to examine further during data analysis.

One strategy I used to establish trustworthiness in my study was triangulation. Triangulation involves collecting multiple forms of data to confirm research findings, thereby

increasing the accuracy of a study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). I collected data from participants through their responses to the demographic questionnaire, resumes, and semi-structured interview. In particular, I compared their responses to the career indecision question on the questionnaire to how they described their experience with the phenomenon during the interview. Any work experience they discussed during the interview was corroborated with information they listed on their resume.

Another tool I employed for trustworthiness was member checking. Member checks involve researchers sharing a written copy of the initial findings with their participants and asking for their input on how accurate they are (Kornbluh, 2015). This process is crucial as another method to detect biases in the researcher's approach to the data and "support the ethical obligation of the researcher to ensure accurate presentation of participant narratives" (Kornbluh, 2015, p. 399). Member checking also aligns with my epistemological position as a critical constructivist by incorporating the participants into the retelling of their own stories, breaking down the hierarchical nature of the researcher-participant relationship. I sent all participants their respective interview transcripts, my emergent themes, and the interim text of their narratives, asking them to confirm the accuracy of my analysis. I resolved any disputes or inaccuracies in the findings with the participant by following up with them via email as necessary until we reached a mutual agreement.

The final method I used to enhance trustworthiness was peer debriefing. Peer debriefs provide an opportunity for colleagues, peers, and other academics external to the research project to provide feedback on the data analysis and "challenge assumptions made by the investigator" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). The fresh perspective that these individuals offered were invaluable because of how close in proximity I am to the population I studied. I acknowledge that as a FGC

student of color, I may have a proclivity to emphasize data that confirms my own experiences. A peer debriefer who is knowledgeable about FGC students and the racialized educational experiences of students of color in higher education helped me minimize the bias I brought to my interpretations. I enlisted a colleague who identifies as a Latina FGC student to serve as my peer debriefer. She provided feedback to me during data analysis and drafting of the final research texts. My peer debriefer also allowed me to process any emotions and thoughts that I experienced during the execution of the research.

Summary

In this chapter, I described how I used narrative inquiry under my critical constructivist paradigm to investigate how FGC students of color attempt to navigate career indecision in the context of their racial cultural values. I described how narrative inquiry was an ideal methodology given my desire to uplift the voices of students who lie at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities in higher education. Given the intimate relationship a qualitative researcher has with their studies, I shared my own story and positionality as a researcher to establish my relationship to the topic I investigated. I concluded with my procedure for obtaining and analyzing the two types of data I collected for my study. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the findings of the participants through the collaborative process of re-telling their stories.

Chapter IV: Findings

In this chapter, I share the findings from the interviews I conducted with six FGC students of color and the document analysis of their resumes. Through their interviews and resumes, I gained a better understanding of how the participants experienced career indecision under the larger narrative of their career development. I also uncovered the ways in which the participants' racial cultural values impacted the way they felt about their career indecision, illuminating the intersection of their social identities as students of color and FGC students. The findings are organized into themes based on each research question. The following are my research questions with the themes associated with each one:

1. How, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate career indecision?

   Themes: reflecting on the racial backdrop, duality of family support

2. In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape how they make meaning of their career indecision?

   Themes: taking a risk into uncertainty, establishing a reputation to pay homage

Throughout the chapter, I integrate quotations and excerpts from participant interviews and relevant descriptions of their resumes to supplement my interpretations of their narratives.

Navigating Career Indecision

The families of many of the participants influenced their career aspirations from a young age. These career paths seemed to be crystallized until they began college and had experiences that led them to question whether the occupations that they chose for themselves were a good fit. As the participants began to feel career indecision, their racial identity and family influence began impacting the choices they made in regard to pursuing their professional goals. Throughout the interviews I conducted with them, participants reflected more broadly on how

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race and family played an overarching role in their career development. This helped me learn how their socialization prior to college continued to play a substantial role in their career decision-making.

Reflecting on the Racial Backdrop

Jessica was the first participant I interviewed. Growing up, she received a lot of validation from her family, especially her mother and grandmother, that she would be a successful doctor. This encouragement inspired her to keep researching different careers in medicine. She came across the autobiography of Ben Carson, which influenced her to pursue a career as a neurosurgeon. This was especially poignant for her because she saw him as a role model who "dealt with racism and… was still breaking the boundaries that was [*sic*] institutionally set for people of color not to go anywhere." As a Black woman, Jessica thought that she would succeed in a medical career due to seeing someone who looked like her succeed and overcome racial obstacles that were in their way. This motivated her to pursue neurobiology as her first major at Mid-Atlantic University. Jessica also obtained motivation for a tangential career to medicine when she lived for a few years in the Ivory Coast when she was young, her family's home country:

> I also wanted to build hospitals and clinics and things like that because it really will help out… Looking at the healthcare system, the whole thing where people need to save you. Like, if you got hit by a car and you need instant surgery, you're gonna have to pay the people first and pay for them to do the test on you and all that. You have to pay for that before they do anything… which leaves so many people dying.

Experiencing firsthand how many Ivorians were unable to afford healthcare in even the direst of circumstances, Jessica had the idea of becoming a public health professional by managing her

own clinic in which people would be able to afford treatment at little to no cost. She also mentioned how she grew up in a low-income, immigrant household, relying on food stamps and having no insurance. Jessica demonstrated empathy for the people she encountered in Ivory Coast while integrating her own background to pursue a career that would benefit others who looked like her.

The choice between becoming a neurosurgeon and being a hospital administrator would ultimately be the root of her indecision. As a neurobiology major, Jessica encountered some challenges in scheduling her coursework. She needed to take two classes during the summer and realized that this would prevent her from graduating on time. Her academic advisor recommended that she switch into the family science major, which Jessica was initially frustrated by because she was steadfast that she would find a way to make her all of her courses fit. Furthermore, she was concerned that switching majors and not taking the neurobiology coursework would make her a less competitive candidate for medical school. While initially hesitant about the change, Jessica took one class that helped her see the connection between her academic and professional goals:

> When I was in her class and I was learning about the likeliness of which race having cancer, which race committing suicide, obviously all of those differ. And it was really important to learn that because I didn't know that. I didn't know that Black people because of like slavery, it ties to fear of medicine and fear of doctors. I'm more likely to not go to the hospital because… my mom can't afford me going to the hospital because she's an immigrant. She didn't have the means for me.

In this class, Jessica learned about how one's racial identity influenced the rates at which they experienced various health issues. She went on to explain how different social determinants of

health, such as access to healthy food and a safe neighborhood, were also influenced by someone's racial identity. By understanding how influential one's racial identity was on their health outcomes, Jessica became more comfortable with the idea of pursuing a public health career instead of being a neurosurgeon. She was drawn to the community impact that she could make by establishing her own hospital instead of helping one patient at a time. To advance her interest in providing community-based support, Jessica volunteered for an on-campus program that targeted socioeconomic inequities in the surrounding community. In her resume and the interview, she described the program's goal of "ending poverty" by providing home furnishings, clothing, and toys to families experiencing financial hardship. More directly related to public health, Jessica also volunteered with an organization that trained students in Kenya to play soccer while also teaching them about community health topics. This program would lead to certifications for the students so that they could become certified community health workers.

Much like Jessica, Thomas, the second student I interviewed, was interested in becoming a doctor when he was young. When he was playing tennis with his father, his father tripped and fractured his wrist, necessitating a hospital visit where the doctor ordered him to wear a cast. Thomas found the way his father healed through his injury fascinating, so he strived to gain experiences that would help him learn more about medicine. Prior to college, he shadowed a few doctors at the hospital he volunteered at and took an anatomy course at his high school. Since Thomas initially wanted to pursue a career as a doctor, his parents did not put a lot of pressure on him regarding his professional interests. He noted that as someone from an Indian background, "you are directed towards fields that are more lucrative that… will make a better living." Thomas felt that this was especially true because he is surrounded by a Bengali community in his hometown in which most individuals have jobs in medicine, engineering, and computer science.

Nevertheless, since his parents knew that Thomas was devoted to a reputable career with a high earning potential, they never had many conversations about his job prospects. He applied to Mid-Atlantic University as a biological science major.

Thomas maintained a stable trajectory into medicine throughout his undergraduate journey until his junior year when he learned that the majority of health outcomes for patients are determined outside of the healthcare system. Similar to how Jessica learned about the social determinants of health in her family science class, Thomas became aware of the social determinants of health that play a large role in the health of an individual through a conversation he had with a family friend. He began to feel indecisive recognizing that he would not make as large of an impact in the lives of others if he stayed on the path to become a doctor, the occupation he knew the most about. At that point, he became interested in pursuing careers in business and entrepreneurship that would allow him to work in other industries that would ultimately impact someone's health. During the second half of his undergraduate education, Thomas branched out of traditional healthcare roles to expand his professional perspective:

> This past summer, I interned with Public Health Organization.[5] And there is such a big focus on connecting with businesses, connecting with housing. Just other sectors like education to bring about these positive health outcomes. It was something really interesting, to me, at least to gain exposure to. And then through other experiences, maybe like I volunteer with tutoring youth in the area… It's not directly apparent, but this may be helping them for the future.

Based on his accomplishments, Thomas secured a full-time position as a consultant with a large consulting firm. Although he has his experience with Public Health Organization at the top of his

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[5] All companies and organizations referenced throughout findings are researcher-chosen pseudonyms.

work experience section on his resume, most of Thomas's experiences are closely aligned with pursuing a career in medicine. Among some of his most recent accomplishments, he continues to work with a mobile clinic to help patients during the COVID-19 pandemic and is a two-year member of an on-campus microbiology research lab. Thomas knew that with what he has in terms of work experience, he would be a competitive applicant for medical school. However, he tried to reassure himself that pursuing a business-related career, such as consulting, would be a logical move because there were others in his Bengali community who graduated with a STEM degree yet established themselves in consulting. He saw role models in people who looked like him and took the opportunity to diverge from his initial career choice.

AJ, the third participant I interviewed, was exposed to a variety of career options as a child. During middle school, he dreamed of becoming a professional soccer athlete and playing against top teams in Europe. AJ also showed potential in modeling and acting, enrolling in acting classes outside of school to develop his skills. Despite these options, AJ became the most interested in dentistry after an appointment in which his dentist informed him that he had a significant number of cavities. Learning that dentistry would require substantial schooling beyond college, AJ remained committed to his coursework so that he could get admitted to prestigious universities. However, he experienced some racial pressure to succeed in his academics due to the community in which he grew up:

> In my class, my high school, I think there was only 20 Black people total… And it was
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> not diverse. One Black person, zero Asian people, and one Latino, just to give you an
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> example, what it was in my graduating class… I had to be on my tiptoes, so to say. And it
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> wasn't until looking back that I realized, okay, I consciously made an effort to always try

and… know what's going on, be aware of the assignments in class. All that I think was

conducive to the work ethic that I fostered at the time.

Being in a predominantly White high school, AJ subconsciously knew that he had to be stellar in

his academic performance to keep up with his peers. Especially since he wanted to become a

dentist at the time, he felt like he needed to distinguish himself so that others would see the

potential he had to become a medical professional, a career path where Black people are

underrepresented.

AJ came to Mid-Atlantic University as a nutritional food science major on the pre-dental

track. Although he was satisfied with his coursework, he needed to make additional income to

support himself through school. He decided to create his own start-up, Healthy Foods, whose

mission is to improve people's mental health through nutritionally rich snack products. As

Healthy Foods began to gain more traction as a viable career option, AJ was not sure whether he

was passionate about dentistry anymore. The experiences on AJ's resume did not reflect a

commitment to dentistry. He held roles that would help him develop skills essential for

managing a start-up. In addition to running Healthy Foods, AJ is currently working for a media

company in which he manages social media accounts and edits videos for publication. He also

held a volunteering role that involved managing employee schedules and organization funds.

Holding these more business-oriented roles allowed AJ to manage Healthy Foods more

effectively and establish a brand for the organization. Transitioning to his senior year, AJ became

less indecisive about his career options and committed more of his time to developing Healthy

Foods. Despite the skills he gained, AJ explained that he encountered racial obstacles in trying to

advance his career in entrepreneurship:

You're not selling your business. You're kind of selling yourself when you're doing

entrepreneurship… And you just have to come off really confident and know what you're

talking about and come off as something honestly different… [My race] has hindered me

in terms of getting a loan, I can tell you that much because they take race into account.

Although he noted the challenges of being a Black entrepreneur, AJ clarified that he was not

deterred from furthering his business because of them. Once the momentum of Healthy Foods

began to accelerate, the thought of returning to dentistry did not appeal to him because of how

much energy he invested into his company and the potential to see it grow.

Monae, the only multiracial participant in my study, began our conversation by stating

that she was very passionate about being an advocate, hoping to promote diversity, equity, and

inclusion in whatever professional environment she found herself. Growing up, she did not have

many conversations with her family about what she wanted to be. Monae contrasted her

experience with those of her friends who were also people of color who did experience familial

pressure to select a high-paying career, especially if their parents were immigrants to the United

States. Despite the lack of pressure, Monae took it upon herself to gain professional experiences

when she was attending grade school to discern her interests in law:

I pretty much started working around the age of eleven, twelve and had never stopped

from there on… I worked at the state attorney… and so that definitely gave me an idea of

what I didn't want to do in regards to law school. That was not focusing on criminal law

or focusing on family law, but focusing on corporate law because it's less emotional and

it would allow me to focus on my pro bono work with helping women of color,

marginalized people, and minorities making a stake in the corporate field…

The state attorney's office where Monae grew up was a gateway for her to explore her passion for law and understanding the areas of the profession where she would like to practice in the future. She continued to explain that law resonated with her as a profession because it involved advocating for people by empowering them with information on how to approach different life situations. Monae's desire to focus on minoritized communities in her practice was essential due to her personal commitment to diversity and inclusion in her own life. In discussing where she obtained her personal values, she expressed that growing up in a community with people from different racial backgrounds compelled her to let others know they had significant contributions to make in the world even if society told them otherwise.

Unlike the other participants I had met before, Monae's experience with career indecision had less to do with deciding between multiple career paths, but instead grappling with experiences of racism in trying to get experience that would lead her to her desired career. From perceived hiring discrimination to negative interactions with colleagues, Monae questioned if getting experience in the corporate world to prepare her for corporate law was worth it:

> I had applied to be a floor manager… I had known other girls who had applied. And I could see where it was kind of going. Who got the interviews, who didn't… And so I came in kind of styled. It was like, "Oh yeah, she can do the styling thing." But being a manager was like, "Oh my gosh, no no no no."… People can see you and think that you look pretty, but people don't want to talk to you.

Fashion was an industry that Monae was interested in, so she began working at a luxury fashion company to first get customer service experience before transitioning into a managerial role. Although she had over three years of experience working at the organization, she felt like she could not receive a promotion to become a floor manager due to her race. It was especially

difficult for her to see White colleagues being promoted over her even if her qualifications were the same, if not better. Beyond fashion, Monae also had experiences working in accounting and real estate. These roles also did not help Monae get the competencies she wanted because she could not advance the corporate ladder. She felt "trapped" and wanted "to do more in the community" with what she was doing. Monae expressed wanting to maintain her drive and passion for advocacy-based work despite the racial barriers she encountered in these environments. Currently, Monae works for two separate companies and hopes that she will eventually gain clarity on how the jobs she has held will prepare her to be a competitive candidate for law school.

My fifth participant Hazel had a mother who pushed her to pursue medicine because it was her dream to have a daughter who was a doctor. She encountered multiple obstacles, however, that dissuaded her from advancing her career in this direction. During high school, she held an internship with a healthcare clinic that she did not enjoy due to the mundane nature of the tasks and feeling "like a maid" when she responded to the requests of her patients. Furthermore, Hazel felt like she would not belong in medicine because it was a profession that was dominated by White and Asian individuals. She wondered whether she would belong in an occupation where she did not feel represented. Hazel's exploration into medicine was a small precursor into what it would be like to feel career indecision during college. She started her undergraduate education by attending her local community college, which had a business program that provided participants experiential learning opportunities in different areas of business such as management, accounting, and marketing. As a part of this program, Hazel worked at a student-run café first as part of its accounting team managing invoices. She was also able to work on the marketing team by overseeing the café's social media accounts. Due to working at the café,

Hazel discovered her passion for marketing as well as her disdain for accounting. As she was wrapping up her second year at community college, she indicated her desire to transfer to Mid-Atlantic University as a marketing major.

Hazel did not feel completely confident in her decision because she was concerned about how she would be perceived in the corporate world as a marketing professional. More specifically, she was concerned that her race would be a barrier that would prevent her from obtaining jobs:

> As a marketing professional, I feel like a lot of people don't say this, but like opportunities could be closed if you're like a Hispanic or if you're a minority. Like they won't consider you. They won't take you seriously. That was just some way I felt. I don't know why.

Although Hazel was unable to discern the reasons for feeling like her race would be detrimental, she was aware of the challenges of being a Latinx marketing professional in a corporate environment that is predominantly White. This mirrors some of her feelings of why it would be challenging to be a doctor due to the lack of representation in the field. What helped Hazel resolve some of her indecision was taking advantage of internship opportunities where she could succeed in marketing. One of the corporate partners of the business program at Hazel's community college presented her with an opportunity to work as their marketing intern. Having been with the organization for a year and a half, Hazel saw the potential of her marketing degree and how it could translate into a successful career. Contrary to her expectations about the racial barriers of being a Latinx marketing professional, she felt "very welcomed" and enjoyed the "lively" environment her team created. With this renewed confidence in entering marketing,

Hazel was excited to transition into a full-time role in the marketing department of a large IT consulting company.

Gabriella, the final participant I interviewed, drew heavy inspiration about potential career paths from seeing Filipina actresses depicting bright and hardworking characters in television shows and movies. Some potential occupations that she entertained were being a teacher or lawyer, but the main driver for Gabriella's initial career choice was gaining acceptance into one of the many career programs at a competitive high school in her hometown. This high school had specialized curricula for its students depending on the program to which a student is accepted. Some offerings the school had included biotechnology, culinary arts, cosmetology, health professions, and welding. Gabriella elected to join the networking academy, which emphasized careers in computer science and information technology. When asked about the factors that went into her choosing the networking academy, she explained that there were some racial expectations that society placed on her:

> I don't want to disappoint or ruin the streak. Like everyone thinks I'm too smart and I'm top of my class so I have to continue it. So I think maybe my pressure comes from perception of others… now that I'm older and can see the stuff that Asians are expected to be very intelligent in most settings.

Gabriella felt an internal pressure to choose a STEM-based option for her high school career program as she was accustomed to the stereotype of Asians being successful in school. Interestingly, she noted a dissimilarity with the stereotypical Asian family in that her parents did not push her very hard on her academics. They placed a lot of trust in her, to which Gabriella compensated by being stricter on herself to be earn good grades and be involved in school. A

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combination of the Model Minority Myth and her specific family dynamics led to Gabriella applying to Mid-Atlantic University as an information science major.

As soon as she started her coursework, Gabriella recognized that information science was not what she expected it to be. She did not enjoy how unengaging her classes were and perceived that many of her classmates did not enjoy the major, solely pursuing it for the potential to earn a steady income. Gabriella reflected on some of her other passions and realized that writing was something she enjoyed doing in her spare time. This compelled her to add a journalism major, but she also disliked the coursework and the found the program to be "cutthroat and competitive" with "mostly White men who [were] very pretentious." As a result, Gabriella felt unwelcome in the journalism school and did not want to have a job working in traditional reporting and media. By the end of her first year, Gabriella was unsure what career to pursue given that neither of her majors were satisfying to her. Despite the unfulfilling academic experiences she had, she became involved with the campus-wide programming board that hosts largescale events for all students. Gabriella recalled one of the major events the organization hosted that propelled her toward a career in entertainment:

> I think another milestone was doing a celebrity homecoming comedy show a few years back that sold out… and I think that was a really rewarding moment just being on that team and working behind the scenes on it all. I think it was really gratifying… And I was like, oh, if I'm doing this as a student, why can't I sort of pursue the same thing as an adult and work towards it?

Exploring the entertainment industry was unknown territory for Gabriella, but she expressed commitment to this path because of how much she enjoyed the work. Nevertheless, she still felt uncertain about how successful she would be in her job search because the hiring timeline for

many entertainment companies did not align with her anticipated graduation date. Gabriella hoped to find a position with an organization starting out as an administrative assistant or social media manager and work her way up toward a more senior role.

Participants' racial backgrounds informed their perception of what careers were available to them and how they thought they would fit in with societal expectations of success. Racialized academic experiences for most of them were substantive in progressing their career development toward reaching the point of career indecision. Furthermore, racial representation, or lack thereof, in jobs participants initially sought and what they hoped to pursue shaped their attitudes toward working in each profession. Beyond what participants individually experienced that led to their career indecision, environmental factors in the form of family and other key individuals influenced their ability to navigate their indecision.

External Support and Duality of Family

The role that family members played in the career indecision of each participant varied in how comfortable the students felt reaching out to them for support when they were unsure of what to do. Monae saw a role model in her mother who worked in the federal government and "dealt with a lot of oppression" as she elevated her status within the department. Monae had similar positive views of her grandparents who each worked hard to provide for their families and still have enough money to support themselves. As family held great importance to her, she hopes to integrate their input as she makes future decisions about her career:

> I think [my family] would be supportive. While they might be like, "Oh, do you still want to go to law school? That's good to have that law degree" and things like that, they would be supportive. In everything that I do, you always go back to your roots, right? So my roots are my family.

When Monae initially shared with her family that she was interested in attending law school, they gently nudged her toward that career path because of the prestige associated with the occupation. However, she did not mind receiving that input because she valued the advice they had to give to her as she struggled with her career indecision. In particular, the guidance that her family gave her reminded Monae to be proud of her cultural background and ethnic identity no matter what environment in which she found herself.

Beyond receiving support from her family, Monae also found role models in Black women she met at the real estate firm for which she currently works. Although Monae did not find the corporate culture of the company very appealing, she was inspired by how there were women who looked like her that held law degrees but were also realtors:

> Because I see so many women of color in that, it helps me to know that I can really do those things. I can really have those things. Whether it be I become a real estate agent, or I go into law, or I go into advocacy…, I can do it and know that there's a place for me in society everywhere. You know sometimes you just got to make your mark.

Monae found it essential to see career possibilities that existed outside of what her family has done so she could envision herself in auspicious roles. She recognized that there were some limitations to the aid that her family could provide, noting that none of them could serve as a career mentor for her since they were uninformed of what she could do with a law degree. As a result, Monae saw the silver lining in an unideal work environment to take a step toward resolving her career indecision.

Family members did not always provide unconditional support for their student's career aspirations. Thomas and Gabriella had parents who put in additional effort to better understand the careers in which they wanted to gain more experience. At the same time, their parents still

held onto the hope that their children would wind up in their original career choice when they started college. When Thomas shared with his parents that he no longer was committed to medical school and accepted a full-time consulting role, they subtly attempted to persuade him to stay in medicine while remaining open to learning more about his alternative career choice:

> Especially with [my mom] and saying like, not like telling me to stay in medicine but saying all these kind of success stories like family friends who finally just made medical school. Or saying, "You're interested in medicine for so long" and just ending the text at that… But they've also been talking to people themselves and trying to be cool with it because we have people who've worked in consulting in the Bengali community and they know that I'll be fine.

For Thomas's parents, the Bengali community was a network they could access that provided information about the type of job Thomas was about to begin. In the absence of his parents' knowledge about occupations outside of medicine, Thomas had multiple conversations with members of this group to help him understand how his primarily healthcare-based experiences would translate to the corporate world. Although Thomas acknowledged that there still is some pressure to pursue medicine, he expressed gratitude at having the Bengali community as a resource to not only learn about alternative careers, but to educate his immediate family about his career decision-making.

Gabriella's parents were aware of the career difficulties she was experiencing due to the three of them having conversations about disliking information science and journalism as majors. They also knew that Gabriella was heavily involved in the campus programming board and became exposed to the entertainment industry through that organization. In seeing the difficulties that she was going through due to her career indecision, her parents made comments about how a

career in IT would make a lot of money in hopes of ameliorating her stress. However, her mother

utilized her personal network to help her daughter explore a career in entertainment:

> [My mom] ended up coming to me and telling me about some connection that her sister
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> knows in California and being like "Ooh, isn't this exciting? Do you want them to hook
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> you up?" And I was like, "What?" How'd you know that that's what I wanted to do?" So
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> I think that was like a nice experience. I realize that my family's a bit more on my side.

Gabriella expressed shock at her mother's ability to help her build a career connection in the

field she wanted when no one in her immediate family was involved in entertainment. This

gesture of support helped her realize that no matter what challenges she encountered in trying to

work in entertainment, her parents would be willing to go out of their way to help her succeed.

Beyond the connection her mother helped facilitate, Gabriella knew that she would have to put in

additional effort to gain more diverse perspectives about working in entertainment. She primarily

reached out to alumni from the programming board who obtained careers with major

entertainment companies to understand how they framed their skillset during the hiring process.

Unlike Thomas's and Hazel's families, Jessica and Hazel's families took little initiative

to better understand the career goals that Jessica and Hazel had. They were more close-minded

about the guidance they provided. More specifically, each family seemed to fixate on a single

career that did not correspond with what the students wanted to do. Throughout Jessica's

undergraduate education, her mother retained the assumption that she would immediately move

on to medical school after completing her bachelor's degree. When Jessica first went to her

family to discuss her career indecision, her mother proposed nursing as an alternative path to

being a doctor. She was reluctant to pursue this option because it did not appeal to her and

seemed like a waste of time:

If I do nursing, I'm gonna have to take classes relevant for nursing… I'm still gonna go to medical school, but then I have to take the classes for nursing and then go to medical school… I'll pay for classes that I don't even want and I don't really want to be a nurse. It would be good to have the experience like patient relations and all that, but that's not really my thing.

Jessica's mother was primarily concerned about making sure that her daughter would not end up as a "broke college student," alluding to the family's low-income background. As Jessica began considering pursuing graduate education in public health or health administration, she recognized she would not be able to rely on her mother for advice because she was unaware of career paths that could result from those degrees. Instead, she began having conversations with her academic advisor and doing independent research into organizations that primarily do public health work. Jessica retains a vision board in her room that helps her keep track of her values and information she learned from other sources.

Since Hazel's mother pressured her daughter to pursue medicine early on, it was difficult for Hazel to have conversations with her mom about pivoting to business. What made having these discussions more challenging was her older brother's career change that did not go as smoothly as he planned. Hazel's brother studied exercise science in college and initially pursued a corporate career before starting his own personal training business. When he announced this change to the family, Hazel recalled their parents showing disapproval at his choice:

My parents saw that it was, I don't want to say a waste, but he lost money. He lost a lot of his time. And time is like super important when you're at that age… As soon as I decided I was gonna do business, if I ever mentioned anything else, [my mother] would always be

like, "Oh just make sure you want to stick with that because if you change, you're gonna lose time and you're gonna lose money." She made that very clear.

Hazel reflected that given her brother decided to enter entrepreneurship and struggled, her parents may have gained a negative perception of business careers. For Hazel's decision between accounting and marketing, her parents were more accepting of the former due to its income potential. Hazel concluded that she would not be able to lean on her parents for career advice because they would not understand how her interests could turn into job opportunities. As an alternative, she mentioned that she would turn to co-workers or those holding similar positions if she ever needed any guidance about how to advance her career.

Out of all the participants, AJ was the only one who felt like he could not go to his family at all to discuss his career indecision. Although he told his parents that he started Healthy Foods during college, they remained unaware of his waning interest in dentistry. They assumed that AJ's passion for entrepreneurship was more of a hobby as opposed to his primary career goal. AJ expressed fear at the prospect of disclosing that he was likely not going to be attending dentistry school after graduating:

And then come and tell [my parents], "Hey, you know, I might not be going to dental school." That's like shooting a gun. Shooting a gun or giving them cardiac arrest, I don't know. God forbid, but I know the type of reaction to all this and I don't think I'm prepared to face that to be honest with you.

AJ had a strong preconception of how his family would react to his career decisions even though earlier in the interview, he maintained that his parents were generally supportive of what he wanted to do so long as he committed adequate energy to it. The premonition of potential conflict was enough for him to decide that it was not worth telling them about his true motives.

Intentionally keeping his family unaware of his occupational choices, AJ independently sought

financial resources that would help him sustain Healthy Foods. He mentioned that he was

entering a pitch competition that would award him funds toward his start-up if he wins. He also

began researching entrepreneurship communities that he could join to grow his network and

potentially secure angel investments.

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Impact of Racial Cultural Values

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As I explored how each participant navigated career indecision, it was evident that the

meaning they ascribed to their racial cultural values played a significant role in their motivations

for pursuing certain occupations over others. Oftentimes, their cultural values came into conflict

with their personal values and desires. This would lead to interpersonal and intrapersonal

dilemmas about the most optimal choice that balanced competing priorities. Furthermore,

participants demonstrated an unwavering commitment to their families through their professional

aspirations. Many had internalized their own career success as representative of how much their

families sacrificed to get them to where they are now. In learning about how the participants

made meaning of their career indecision through their racial cultural values, I better understood

the intersection of their identities as FGC students and students of color.

Taking a Risk into Uncertainty

Most of the participants endorsed feelings of instability as they began feeling indecisive

and had to decide on an occupation. Although they were motivated to pursue a career that may

be riskier than what they initially chose, they understood that stability was a core value that their

families prioritized. Thomas's parents emigrated from India to the United States after they

completed their bachelor's degrees in their home country in search of better job opportunities.

Despite their formal educational attainment, Thomas described his family as experiencing "lots

of challenges" and not "operating with a lot of money." As a result of these experiences, they did not want their son to go through something similar and advocated for defined career paths that would lead to socioeconomic stability and avoiding jobs that were insecure:

> With my parents having immigrated [*sic*] from India, there's a very big focus on stability in the household. And that is maybe like an indirect pressure to find a career where there's a very set track, stable development. Like you make money as you grow older… Personally, I am really interested in entrepreneurship, and the idea of building something yourself, like having that sense of risk. So that's something my parents shy away from… because they themselves have gone through so much instability…

Describing the values that his parents prioritized due to their lived experiences, Thomas understood why it was challenging for them to accept that he was going into a career in consulting that does not have as linear of a pathway compared to being a doctor. He chose to prioritize a value that ran contrary to his family's expectations. However, Thomas still maintained an openness to returning to medicine should he find that an entrepreneurial career was not enjoyable.

As a parallel to Thomas's narrative, AJ is actively involved in entrepreneurship with Healthy Foods and took that plunge into risk and uncertainty while forgoing the stability of dentistry. His parents also promoted stability even prior to them recognizing that AJ wanted to pursue dentistry. AJ noted that there "was never a pressure in terms of what to do, but there was a pressure in terms of making sure it can sustain [him] and become independent." He felt that this his family reinforced this pressure after entering Mid-Atlantic University. AJ took pre-dentistry coursework due to this pressure, but then suddenly introduced his business into the

story. Despite facing this external push for stability, AJ conceptualized success with Healthy Foods as a pathway toward the stability he wants:

> I have an amount of time to raise money for the business. Find a way to provide myself some type of stability for that year and find a way to provide growth for the business. Because if there's not growth, there's not stability. I have to find a way to live. And I think that's the biggest influence in all this is survival mode.

After graduating, AJ said he would take a gap year to focus on elevating his business further by increasing its profits. Although he and his family are aligned in terms of wanting stability, the method that he is taking to get there is riskier and not as concrete compared to dentistry. Nevertheless, AJ maintained that his confidence was at "one hundred percent" in terms of making sure that he would sustain himself through Healthy Foods. He was not dismissive of the insecurities or anxiety about the obstacles he would encounter, but he was optimistic that he will be successful if he puts in enough effort.

Jessica also expressed a desire for stability through her career and did not want to rely on her mother to provide instrumental support for her personal goals. She was motivated to pursue stability because of her family's low-income background and the fact that her mother was unable to pursue higher education in any form. Jessica's identity as a first-generation college student was especially salient to her when thinking about how to improve her socioeconomic standing compared to where she was as a child:

> If I get a career and I'm secure, I get like a house and a car and everything else. Like if I want to afford something, I can afford it myself. I don't have to resort to asking my mom or something... I understand that you need to work hard to earn things. Working hard to

earn things is important. So I guess being a first-gen, that's something I was worried

about.

Jessica viewed an occupation as a means to achieve material possessions that her family did not

have access to, internalizing the idea that merit and hard work would allow her to be successful.

She did not have a myopic focus on this goal, however, as she maintained that a career in nursing

like her mother suggested or medicine would not be her primary occupational objective. She

recognized that even if these careers might offer more stable income, she would still encounter

"trials and tribulations" and "find every excuse to hate" the demands of the work. As a result,

Jessica prioritized wanting to pursue public health as a career despite the uncertainty of how to

achieve her dream of establishing her own clinic.

As Gabriella reflected on the racial backdrop of her career decision-making, she thought

that becoming financially stable by pursuing a STEM career would be the greatest measure of

whether she was successful. Her parents, while not forcing her into any particular occupation,

were concerned about Gabriella adding a journalism major when they thought she was set on

pursuing information science. They were not as familiar with careers that she could pursue with

that degree and found the simplicity of getting an information technology job more comforting.

Much like Jessica, Gabriella ultimately wanted to pursue a career that she would enjoy even if

she did not have a clear picture of what type of job she could have:

> [Information science] seems more like a hustle and trying to get a well-paying job. And
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> for some reason, I just don't want that for myself. My goal is to be happy in life and I
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> want to love what I do… I was like, "Okay, if I can't be a journalist or work in
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> entertainment, then I'll just do the boring IT job" and that'll keep me safe and

comfortable. But I really hope it doesn't come to that because I want to prioritize being happy than being comfy.

Gabriella was actively negotiating the value of having a stable career in information technology that she could go back to with her prior work experience versus chasing her passion in entertainment. To that end, her parents still remained supportive of her aspirations and also mentioned that they wanted their daughter to be happy with whatever job she chose. Taking the plunge into uncertainty by pursuing entertainment was still scary for Gabriella, and she wished that she "could be the one who's getting handheld." In other words, she wanted to minimize the level of risk associated with her decisions by having more concreate steps she could take to advance her career.

Although Hazel knew that marketing was her main passion in business, she still felt a tug toward accounting because she perceived it as a more stable path. Akin to Gabriella's choice between information technology and entertainment, Hazel was at odds with choosing a career that was more financially stable or a career that, while less concrete, made her happy. She faced additional pressure to decide promptly because she needed to declare a major when she transferred to Mid-Atlantic University:

I take a risk with going to marketing, but I'm going to hate my life if I do accounting… It was really accounting for the money or marketing which made me happy. And so that's really where I struggled, like, which am I going to do? Because when I transferred to Maryland, I had to pick one, I had to pick a program… I was really struggling with what I was going to pick.

Despite not having an enjoyable experience working in the accounting team of the student-run café at her community college, Hazel could not discount how valuable the financial benefits of

having an accounting degree would be. When she initially brought her concerns to her mother, she replied by saying that she should do what makes her happy. Nevertheless, Hazel was still attuned to her mother's internal desire for her to pursue accounting due to its stability. Beyond attempting to balance happiness with financial security, she decided that she was entitled to make her own decisions since she found the resources to pay for her college degree on her own.

Establishing a Reputation to Pay Homage

Participants also contextualized the challenge of overcoming their career indecision as a way to build a reputation for themselves that would pay homage to the sacrifices that their families made to promote their success. Although there was variation in the degree to which they felt obligated to represent themselves and their families through their careers, each student was cognizant that their careers reflected more than just their individual merits. As a first-generation college student, AJ stated that failure was not an option for Healthy Foods. Since he felt like he could not go to his family for support during his career indecision, he needed to prove himself through success with his business. AJ compared his struggles of being an entrepreneur with what his family went through to establish life in the United States:

> Yes, this is hard. Yes, working on a venture is hard. Getting up at 5 AM to go cook bars and this and that. That's hard. But it's easier than migrating to another country. It's easier than learning a new language. It's easier than getting four kids to grow up in a house and go to school and go to college… It's easy compared to what they've done, so I just need to keep working. I just need to keep grinding. I just need to keep putting my best foot forward because I don't have a choice.

Seeing what his family has done for him and his siblings, AJ minimized the struggles he faced trying to run Healthy Foods because it paled in comparison to immigrating to a new country and

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putting children through formal education. He felt pressured to validate the effort that went into his parents raising him to be the person that he was. Beyond his family, AJ also acknowledged teachers and mentors who also contributed to his educational success. He struggled with the idea of disclosing to others in his life that he would be fully committing to Healthy Foods because he would feel "almost like a letdown" for wasting their time preparing him for dental school. In the end, AJ did not make the decision to be an entrepreneur without facing significant internal and external pressure to show results for his efforts.

Monae's goal of uplifting the confidence of people of color in their racial identity undergirded her aspirations to pursue a career that blended law, business, and advocacy. Since she saw Black women at her real estate company as role models for what she could achieve, Monae wanted to serve a similar role to her family and others in her community. She viewed herself as a byproduct of the "village" that raised her, which included not only her nuclear family, but also close friends and instructors. In particular, she had a close relationship with her little cousin and was dedicated to affirming her worth as an individual:

> And so whatever I do, whether it is the generation that came before me, the generation coming, or the generation now, I want to impact them in a way that they know that they can do that. I hoped for myself that my little cousin, who's an entrepreneur, knew that she could go to college if she wanted to, and that I would help her… It was always making sure that she knew that she was beautiful, she was gorgeous regardless of… [her] skin.

Although Monae's cousin did not end up attending college after she graduated high school, it was important for Monae to show her that it was possible to be a successful Black woman who is on the verge of completing a college degree. Beyond her cousin, she also mentored other younger girls in her community, using these experiences as a reminder that she has the potential

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to overcome obstacles in her career if she can help others. Monae's drive to be an advocate for others continues to push her toward eventually completing law school so that people could feel inspired by her.

As Gabriella was trying to decide between information technology and entertainment, trying to validate her family's choice to immigrate to the United States was a salient thought in her mind. Her family did not have much stability when they first came to the country, so she felt pressure to be financially well off and not experience the same things that they did. This combined with the racial stereotype of needing to appear successful in school and in her career, Gabriella reflected on the perceived immediacy of needing to resolve her career indecision:

> You always think about your immigrant parents [who] worked so hard to get here and worked so hard to put you through college. And so I think I feel pressure to know what I want immediately after I leave, just so that it wasn't all for nothing… I think I just want to make my parents proud. And because I have been excelling so much ever since I was a kid, no one's gonna expect me to flop and fail.

Gabriella felt like she had to meet high expectations of career success to prove to others that her family made the correct decision to establish life in the United States. Since she was not finding many entertainment positions she could apply to because of incongruent hiring timelines, her career indecision was even more accentuated without confirmation that switching industries would pay off. In addition to the stress Gabriella felt on behalf of her parents, she also wanted to be a confident role model for her younger brother for whom she was "setting expectations" of how to determine what one wants to do in life. The external influences on Gabriella's career decision-making felt like a burden she could not eliminate until she could establish her footing with a job offer in hand.

Like Gabriella's family, Thomas's family experienced hardships when they first came to the United States. When Thomas expressed an interest in medicine, his family felt confident that he would have a concrete trajectory into financial stability even if it would take time to achieve. Although Thomas was certain that his parents would continue to support his career aspirations outside of that field, he could not deny that it would be a hard transition for them:

> They probably would be disappointed for a bit. It'd be at the back of their mind like, "Dang, you wanted to be a doctor for this long," and that'd be it. They always say it's good to have a doctor in the family. We don't have a doctor in the family. They'd definitely be disappointed for a bit, but they're gonna keep supporting me. I don't think it would change our relationship too much.

When Thomas shared that his Bengali community had many individuals who pursued medicine, it was evident that having a doctor in his immediate family would be a status marker to show that his family was successful. Medicine was a highly respected career field, and for Thomas's parents having a child who pursued this path would be a symbol that they were successful in immigrating to the United States. In relation to his connection to the Bengali community, Thomas hoped that his parents could see the success that others had by pursuing careers in entrepreneurship and consulting, convincing them that he could still be a reputable member of the family.

As Hazel was deciding between accounting and marketing during her time in community college, she understood that as a Latina FGC student, her career success would be a measure of how well her family established life in the United States. Referencing the American Dream, she felt the pressure of needing to have a stable occupation so that she could be comfortable and not

face financial hardship. Hazel summarized the balance between competing values of happiness and stability as it related to her family's decision to leave their home country:

> The Hispanic part of me wanted to do accounting just because I knew that my parents brought me to this country for a reason. And it was like to make a better life for myself. Although a lot of making a better life for yourself is happiness, a lot of it is money. And I knew accounting was like, when my parents… they go, "My daughter's an accountant." I think that there's a pressure to choose a safe field, which is accounting.

Hazel noted that her reputation as a working professional would be something that her parents would want to share with others so they could feel reassured that they raised their daughter well. This expectation placed her into a situation where she needed to balance her true career aspirations while reassuring her family that she would become someone of whom they could be proud. Nevertheless, Hazel would be making career decisions independently of her family and would not go to them for advice. She prioritized her own happiness for now and hoped that along her professional journey, her family would recognize her as a successful individual.

Unlike the other participants, Jessica's career goal of building a clinic in the Ivory Coast had less to do with paying homage to her family immigrating to the United States and more about being a reputable member of her community as she uplifted others through healthcare. She had a strong tie to her home country and thought that pursuing advanced degrees in public health or medicine would allow others to see that she could be a valuable contribution. This desire to be useful to others undergirded how she felt about her indecision in terms of what her postbaccalaureate educational plans looked like:

> I still want that medical component for me to not just have this public health knowledge but also be knowledgeable in both so that people don't play with me like, "Yeah, she

doesn't know this." So I feel like it's important for me to have both. But neurosurgery was so precise, so distinctive that it won't serve as many people.

Jessica's main concern was that her initial goal of becoming a neurosurgeon would not have as great of an impact compared to public health. She is also worried, however, that people in the Ivory Coast would not take her credentials seriously unless she had a medical degree and had experience as a physician. Perceived communal expectations of who they would trust to provide treatment to them was a major influence for Jessica to consider how to leverage future educational training to achieve her goals. Furthermore, she was invigorated to show those around her that as an Ivorian American, she "can connect [her] Black experience in America and [her] Black experience in Africa" together to provide culturally competent care to whoever she came across.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the four themes I uncovered through the document analysis of the participants' resumes and the semi-structured interviews I conducted with them. Each narrative demonstrated how race and racial cultural values were significant influences on the career development and career indecision of each student. Participants considered how their racial identities shaped their initial career choice from a young age and eventually toward their desire to change paths that better aligned with their own interests. The role that their families played varied from providing instrumental and emotional support during their children's indecision to promoting a foreclosure on career opportunities for the sake of financial security. In the end, participants recognized that their career choices could not be disentangled from their family's desire for stability, which was especially salient for families who immigrated to the United States. In the next chapter, I situate the findings within the context of my conceptual

framework and present implications for future research and practice for career counselors, higher

education institutions, student affairs professionals.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore how FGC students of color experienced career indecision and how they interpreted this phenomenon through the lens of their racial cultural values. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate career indecision?

2. In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape how they make meaning of their career indecision?

I used a conceptual framework consisting of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994, 2000), the four-factor model of career indecision (Brown et al., 2012), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to ground my research. I intentionally incorporated a mix of both career theories with community cultural wealth to depict FGC students of color using an asset-based perspective, countering the deficit-based perspectives researchers held in earlier research on FGC students and students of color (e.g., (e.g., Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). This tripartite framework added nuance to my findings, highlighting how FGC students of color saw both opportunities and challenges in their career development through the support systems they perceived available. I chose narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as my methodology to retell the stories of six FGC students of color by presenting data I collected through semi-structured interviews and their resumes. My approach made for a thorough, collaborative research process that preserved the integrity of participant voices. In the following sections, I framed my findings within the context of the three theories that comprised my conceptual framework. I then discussed implications for future research and practice for the field higher education, student affairs, and other relevant

disciplines. I concluded with limitations of my study and final reflections of my learning from engaging in this inquiry.

Discussion of Findings

The themes I uncovered in my participant narratives highlight the theoretical complexity of career development and career indecision for FGC students of color. To see the interplay between the interpersonal and societal contexts in which this population makes career decisions requires the combination of both career development theories and critical theories. In this section, I discuss in more detail how the participants' narratives align with each component of my conceptual framework.

Career Indecision as a Cumulative Process

By investigating the career development of the participants starting from their pre-college experiences to envisioning the future under SCCT, I understood how initial occupational interests and influences on those interests contributed to feelings of career indecision. Furthermore, the contextual factors and personal traits that affected early stages of career development had differential impacts on how each participant navigated and eventually made meaning of their career indecision.

All of the participants were acutely aware of how their racial identities impacted what jobs they wanted to pursue and the beliefs they held about how successful they would be. Jessica and Hazel acknowledged that entering the medical profession as racially minoritized individuals would be challenging since they did not see themselves represented in the field. Whereas Jessica had the opportunity to live in the Ivory Coast and develop a dream of opening an accessible clinic, Hazel instead veered toward business careers that garnered more interest from her. AJ and Monae knew that as Black-presenting individuals, they would need to work harder to receive the

same recognition in the classroom and the workplace compared to their white peers. This encouraged AJ to devote more time to his studies and forgo pursuing athletics in favor of dentistry while Monae recognized that traditional corporate roles would not be sustainable for her growth. As two Asian individuals, Thomas and Gabriella felt the pressure of the Model Minority Myth (Museus & Kiang, 2009) compelling them to pursue medicine and information technology respectively, two fields in which Asian people are highly represented (McGee & Bentley, 2017). These two ultimately decided to pursue alternate career paths that they found more inherently rewarding. These experiences are consistent with how Lent et al. (1994) described race and ethnicity as social identities that can either enhance or limit expectations of career achievement, which changes the occupations that someone may perceive available to them.

In addition to their intrapersonal qualities, the environment of each student introduced opportunities for career development and reinforced beliefs about what occupations were deemed acceptable (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Lent et al., 1994; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018; Shen, 2013). Jessica witnessing healthcare disparities between the Ivory Coast and the United States was a learning experience linked to her family's background that compelled her to pursue healthcare from a young age. Additionally, she received verbal support from her family that affirmed her intellectual capability to succeed in medicine. AJ gained valuable experience in shadowing a dentist, which was something that his mom helped facilitate so that he could have a concrete and stable career aspiration to pursue. His father was also an ally in his professional development as he exposed AJ to many different career paths at a young age and pushed him to "hit a homerun" when advancing his career. Thomas demonstrated an early interest in medicine that prompted his parents to show support for him engaging in activities to develop this career

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goal. He also saw role models in his Bengali community who showed possibilities of what he could do in the field of medicine and beyond. Similarly, Monae found role models in her mother and the Black women in her real estate company. Her community instilled in her a pride for her racial identity and a desire to pursue a career prioritizing advocacy. Gabriella attended a prestigious high school that presented many opportunities for her to cultivate skills necessary to enter information technology. Hazel was also able to participate in a business program at her community college that started her exploration into marketing and accounting. Although both Gabriella and Hazel's family did not have a substantial influence on their exposure to career paths, they still communicated values of stability that would later be one source contributing to their career indecision. The availability of resources like familial support and professional development opportunities serve as distal influences that fuel a feedback loop of career decision-making behavior (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). In other words, these external factors were the impetus for each participant to engage in activities that advanced their career development.

Interestingly, only two participants mentioned how the proximal factor of career network availability supported them in their career development. Hazel found her current full-time position by networking with a representative from a company that was affiliated with the business program at her community college. Gabriella's mother worked with her sister to find Gabriella a connection to the entertainment industry in Los Angeles. This led Gabriella to connect with more alumni from the campus programming board to enhance her network. According to Lent et al. (1994, 2000), the presence of career networks like the ones available to Hazel and Gabriella facilitate the relationship between career goals and actions. Although they described career networks as a proximal due to having a more direct influence on career decision-making, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that these same networks could serve as

role models for individuals. Hazel may continue her relationship with the individual who helped her with her first job search and seek further guidance on how to succeed professionally. Likewise, Gabriella may remain close to the programming board alumni due to being able to learn more about translating her experiences in the organization to careers in entertainment. This would classify career networks as a distal factor as well and pave the way for more career-relevant learning experiences (Lent et al., 2000).

Despite the presence of support systems and access to experiential learning, career barriers in the form of environmental obstacles presented challenges to participants that led to their career indecision. Jessica and Hazel perceived an external racial barrier via lack of representation in their initial occupational interest prior to deciding about which career path to choose. This served as a proximal career barrier that had a significant impact on shaping the career goals of these participants (Lent et al., 2000). Racial barriers were not limited to the interest formation stage of the participants' career development. AJ detailed the struggles of trying to obtain a loan for Healthy Foods due to his racial identity. Monae acknowledged the presence of racial hiring discrimination in who could become a floor manager at the fashion company for which she worked. Gabriella felt uncomfortable and unwelcome in the predominantly White, male classes for her journalism major that exacerbated her declining interest in that occupation. Contrary to how Lent et al. (2000) hypothesized a unidirectional pathway between proximal barriers and career decision-making, these narratives show how proximal barriers also had an impact on self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. To summarize, participants felt that the level of confidence they had to execute their career goals wavered as a result of the racial barriers they encountered.

I acknowledge that lack of family and community support are also significant career barriers according to Lent et al. (2000). Indeed, all of the participants discussed how their families influenced their career decision-making for better or for worse, particularly as it related to striving for stability. Given that the four-factor model of career indecision has as specific factor for interpersonal conflict, I discuss the role of family in career indecision in the following section. Overall, conceptualizing how FGC students of color come to experience career indecision requires exploring their initial career experiences and what environmental factors influenced the acquisition of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. It also requires an understanding of how these variables shape the relationship between goal formation and career action. Although SCCT provides a robust framework to conceptualize this process, classifying specific contextual affordances and hypothesizing their impact on the theory's constructs may be different for FGC students of color based on my findings.

Compounding Career Conflicts

Examining participants' career indecision more closely, the primary sources for their indecision primarily came from what Brown et al. (2012) described as choice/commitment anxiety (CCA) and interpersonal conflict. To reiterate, CCA encompasses hesitance or reluctance to making a single career choice often due to fear of regret or lack of information (Brown et al., 2012). Interpersonal conflict arises due to disagreement or discouragement of career decisions from important others (Brown et al., 2012). In addition to experiencing these factors independently, participants also demonstrated how they could influence each other to fuel their indecision.

Parents and other family members were the primary source of interpersonal conflict for participants. As Thomas began pivoting away from medical school toward consulting, his

parents constantly reminded him of the stability associated with being a doctor. Thomas's mother in particular sent implicit messages communicating her own desires for his career, signaling to him that she was not fully tolerant of him switching to business. In a different vein, AJ anticipated that his parents would react poorly to him sharing that he was forgoing dentistry school in favor of entrepreneurship. Even though he did not share any stories of discussing his career indecision with his family, the perception of potential interpersonal conflict was enough for AJ to feel uncertain that he was making the best choice. Brown et al. (2012) suggested that future research explore the validity of the interpersonal conflict factor in collectivist and communal cultures, and these findings point toward this factor being relevant for how FGC students of color experience career indecision.

In addition to expectations from participants' families, choosing a career when students did not have sufficient knowledge to make an informed choice was daunting. The domains of information that participants felt uncertain of included how to pursue their desired career path or the outcomes associated with committing to an occupation. As Monae entered the corporate environment to advance her career, she became unsure of how she could pursue advocacy in settings where she felt unsupported. Prior to seeing possibilities of how she could explore other occupations after completing law school through other Black women, Monae was uncertain of how to blend her multiple interests. Gabriella also exhibited difficulties in integrating her passion for entertainment into her future occupational goals when all she was exposed to in her academic coursework was information technology and journalism. As her parents gently pushed for information technology due to the field's stability, Gabriella struggled to reconcile pursuing her own career happiness if it meant forgoing guaranteed socioeconomic mobility. Additionally, she needed to obtain more information about what types of jobs existed in entertainment through

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connecting with alumni from the programming board before she committed to the field. In each scenario, participants attempted to resolve their career indecision by connecting with others who knew more about potential career paths. This aligns with how Brown et al. (2012) summarized CCA as the relationship between perceiving multiple viable opportunities and seeking information to mitigate uncertainty.

CCA and interpersonal conflict can work in tandem to contribute to career indecision. When Hazel was deciding between marketing or accounting, she received substantial pressure from her family to pursue the latter due to the income potential and stability. This generated interpersonal conflict as she believed that her parents would see marketing as less desirable. Although she found marketing more satisfying, Hazel still experienced CCA when attempting to balance her own professional interests with ensuring she could validate her family's sacrifice in coming to the United States. In other words, the uncertainty associated with marketing made it less appealing compared to the perceived guarantees of socioeconomic mobility with accounting. Likewise, Jessica found herself at a crossroad when planning for continuing education after her bachelor's degree. Without the knowledge of how a medical degree compared to a master's in health administration or public health would contribute to her Ivory Coast clinic dream, Jessica did not want to make the wrong decision with how she spent her time and money. Her mother suggesting that she take additional coursework in nursing as a path to stability demonstrated to Jessica that attempting to educate her on what she is interested in may result in unnecessary interpersonal conflict. A rigid focus on stability is contrary to Jessica's expectations of her ideal career, so trying to convince her mother otherwise would seem like a futile effort. For Hazel and Jessica, juggling both familial expectations for careers and being unsure of the most optimal path led to a heightened sense of career anxiety (Pisarik et al., 2017).

Considering these narratives, it may be tempting for scholars, career counselors, and student affairs practitioners to view FGC students of color through a deficit lens. They may believe that these individuals are incapable of resolving their own career indecision and shift the blame to their circumstances as opposed to more systemic issues related to the university and socioeconomic mobility. I argue that contextualizing the challenges FGC students of color encounter as they make career decisions is essential to provide culturally relevant services that honor how they navigate the hidden curriculum of higher education and the workforce (Gable, 2021). The following section on community cultural wealth in the participants' career indecision highlights the ways in which they already have valuable knowledge and experiences that facilitate their professional growth.

Persisting with Cultural Wealth

As participants navigated their career indecision, they all demonstrated various forms of community cultural wealth that allowed them to persevere in the face of obstacles they encountered (Yosso, 2005). Not every form of cultural wealth was salient in the findings of the study nor did every participant demonstrate the same cultural wealth. Each individual's unique context informed how they accessed their cultural wealth to make meaning of their career indecision and take appropriate actions to resolve it.

I first discuss familial capital to segue from how interpersonal conflict often arose due to family expectations of what participants should choose for their career. I acknowledge that families may not always be supportive of their student's goals, but this does not nullify the care they show in trying to ensure that the student is successful. Although Gabriella's parents primarily wanted Gabriella to go into information technology for stability, her mother tried to connect her with extended family who knew an individual in the entertainment industry.

Thomas's parents similarly pushed Thomas to go into medicine, but they maintained an openness to learning about consulting through other families in the Bengali community of their hometown. Monae drew heavy inspiration from her mother and grandparents about being proud of her skin color, which informed her desire to incorporate advocacy into her future career. For Gabriella and Thomas, their parents "maintained a healthy connection" to their respective communities by connecting with others outside of the nuclear family to support their student's career aspirations (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Monae's family instilled a "commitment to community well being" in Monae as indicated by her passion for social justice and uplifting those around her (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

In addition to receiving support from family members, the motivation to obtain career success for most participants was also driven by familial capital. This was particularly true for students who discussed the significance of their parents emigrating to the United States to establish a better life for the family. Jessica, Thomas, AJ, Hazel, and Gabriella understood that their success would represent how well their families took care of them so that they could pursue their career goals. AJ and Hazel were especially concerned about making sure that they could finance their own education so that their families would not have to contribute to tuition. This highlights how they are considerate of the wellbeing of their community so as to not put additional pressure on them when they have already invested so much into their futures (Jehangir et al., 2020; Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016; Tang et al., 2013).

Participants also developed their social capital to gain clarity around their career indecision, supplementing any support they received from their family. Hazel used a direct network from her community college's business program to obtain her first full-time job. Gabriella also used her network through the programming board alumni to learn more about how

they obtained their jobs in the entertainment industry. Jessica began speaking to her academic advisor so she could understand how her academic program could translate to a career in public health. These non-family connections provided participants with instrumental support on how to maneuver through social institutions (Yosso, 2005). Embedded within these interactions is also a demonstration of participant's navigational capital. The hidden curriculum of higher education emphasizes the importance of networking for individuals to be successful in the job search once they are about to graduate (Gable, 2021). Regardless of whether Hazel, Gabriella, and Jessica were conscious of the value of networking, being able to glean information about careers and job opportunities is a skill that they needed to acquire to advance their professional development (Brown et al., 2012; Keller & Brown, 2014; Owens et al., 2010).

In face of real and perceived obstacles when experiencing career indecision, aspirational capital was important for some participants to not lose sight of their ultimate goals. AJ encountered many hardships as he tried to get Healthy Foods started, such as being denied loans due to his race and not feeling like he could talk to his parents about not going into dentistry. Nevertheless, he remained committed to growing the company and detailed the hours he spent preparing and delivering food. Jessica held onto her dream of opening a healthcare clinic in the Ivory Coast even when she needed to switch her major to family science. She sought involvement in a student organization that trained African children in public health skills to gain relevant experience that she believed would benefit her in preparation for graduate school. Despite Monae feeling stifled in her corporate roles, she saw potential in eventually being able to blend law and real estate by witnessing Black women in her firm accomplish this. By persisting regardless of the challenges they encountered, participants established "a culture of possibility" for themselves that would elevate their status (Yosso, 2005, p. 78).

The assets FGC students of color bring with them through their community cultural wealth should be an indication that they are capable of career success without them needing to forfeit what brought them to higher education in the first place (Jehangir et al., 2020; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018, Tate et al., 2015). Although there is nuance to how different forms of cultural wealth provide utility to this population during their career development compared to their academic achievement, neglecting to consider how this knowledge can be applied unnecessarily limits resources that FGC students of color already have available to them. The implications for research and practice provide initial suggestions on ways researchers and university staff members can integrate cultural wealth in their work.

Implications for Research

My study's robust conceptual framework incorporating SCCT (Lent et al., 1994, 2000), the four-factor model of career indecision (Brown et al., 2012), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) opens numerous areas for additional research. Given the interdisciplinary nature of research on career indecision for FGC students of color, scholars in fields such as counseling psychology and higher education may take findings from this research to pursue new lines of inquiry. I provide some recommendations for future scholarship that span multiple disciplines and encourage collaboration to answer complex research questions.

Career indecision can induce stress and anxiety for any individual who experiences it. FGC students of color like AJ who did not think they could approach their family with their career concerns can have a crucial support system become unavailable, impacting their ability to cope with their indecision. AJ, Hazel, and Gabriella also prioritized how important it was to be successful in their careers to validate the sacrifices their families made to come to the United States. This pressure can cause high levels of stress that may become overwhelming in addition

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to what already comes with needing to make important life choices. Given the link between career decision-making and mental health for undergraduate college students (Pisarik et al., 2017; Walker & Peterson, 2012), further clinical psychology research should investigate how FGC students of color experiencing career indecision correlates with clinical mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. The four-factor model of career indecision (Brown et al., 2012) would be useful as part of a conceptual framework to capture both the cognitive and environmental factors contributing to specific symptoms.

Since the presence or lack of family support is likely to have a nontrivial impact on how well FGC students of color navigate their professional journey (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Jehangir et al., 2020; Lustig & Xu, 2018; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018; Tate et al., 2015), their families may have perspectives to share about how they observe this process. Participants spoke at length about how their families were involved in their career development and career indecision. From taking action to support their children's professional aspirations to voicing disapproval for switching paths, there exists diversity in how families of FGC students of color engage with the career development process. Future studies that incorporate SCCT in their conceptual framework and investigate environmental components of career development could include family members as subjects to investigate their attitudes and beliefs toward their student's career development. This would allow for researchers to generate comparisons between how the student perceives their circumstances and how those around them perceive the same situation. If there is a mismatch between how students and their families would like for the latter's career development to proceed, then career counselors and student affairs practitioners could strategize how to mitigate this gap and establish common goals (Owens et al., 2010).

Given that my study was cross-sectional in nature, I was only able to gain retrospective accounts of how the participants experienced their career indecision throughout their undergraduate education. Each student shared milestones in their career development that played a role in how they felt about pursuing a certain occupation. For instance, it would have been interesting to hear more immediate reflections to how Gabriella was struggling to decide whether it would be appropriate to add a journalism major. Another phase of such a study could then investigate how she felt upon realizing that journalism was also not suitable for her due to her disinterest in the coursework and feeling like she did not belong. Incorporating constructs from SCCT, Grier-Reed and Ganuza (2012) were able to evaluate the career decision self-efficacy of FGC students before and after participating in a constructivist career course. Future longitudinal studies should also incorporate instruments measuring career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations to supplement participants' discussion of how events influenced their career indecision.

Lastly, another consideration for a longitudinal study on the career indecision of FGC students of color is to learn about their experiences once they transitioned into the workplace. All participants were in their final semester of study with some having job offers already in hand. It would be interesting to continue investigating how they feel about their post-graduation plans and whether they feel reassured in their decision to deviate from their original occupational choice. Although the majority of the participants seemed committed to deviating from their initial career goals, I recognize that not all FGC students of color experiencing career indecision will be comfortable or successful in making such a decision by the time they graduate. They may find themselves working in an occupation that they do not enjoy but feel pressured to stay in due to expectations from important others or socioeconomic circumstances (Hui & Lent, 2017;

Toyokawa & DeWald, 2020). Obtaining diversity in graduates' experiences with career indecision and where they first work as it relates to their goals would contribute to a more complete understanding of how FGC students of color experience this phenomenon.

Implications for Practice

Complementing avenues for future research, the findings of this study also present recommendations for career counselors, higher education leaders, and student affairs practitioners to better support FGC students of color during their career development and when they experience career indecision. Participants alluded to resources and support systems that they had that colleges and universities could further enhance through collaborative decision-making with this population. The primary goal would be to establish a campus culture that prioritizes communal cultural values and racial equity.

All of the participants discussed the roles that their families played in their early career development and as they navigated career indecision. Although Monae had family members who were generally supportive of what she wanted to do, the other participants needed to negotiate their commitment to their own passions with the expectations that others had of them. Unfortunately, instead of integrating families into students' undergraduate journeys, many institutions promote detachment from their home communities in the name of individualism (Stephens et al., 2012; Wildhagen, 2015). This can be detrimental for FGC students of color who internalize their own success as a testament to the village that raised them, leading to confusion and uneasiness when they arrive on campus (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Jehangir et al., 2020; Wildhagen, 2015). Families of FGC students understandably may have questions or concerns about how their child's university will support their career development, so campus career centers can offer information sessions together for students and families to explain how career

services can support career development. I suggest hosting sessions open to both students and

their families for institutions to honor the familial capital that FGC students of color bring with

them (Yosso, 2005). Given the linguistic and socioeconomic diversity of families of FGC

students of color (Cataldi et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005), it is imperative institutions offer events in

different languages and at times that are convenient for working individuals.

Beyond a top-down commitment to incorporating families into their students' career

development, individual interactions that career counselors have with FGC students of color are

a space for campus staff to demonstrate their cultural competency in working with this

population. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned ever using Mid-Atlantic

University's career center for services, whether it was one-on-one appointments or center events.

Although there may be multiple reasons for this, prior literature indicated that FGC students and

students of color are less likely to use campus career services (Gibbons et al., 2019; Parks-

Yancy, 2012). Beyond the career center advertising its benefits independently, collaborating with

other campus entities such as academic departments, cultural centers, and student organizations

can maximize their outreach toward spaces where FGC students of color spend their time (Parks-

Yancy, 2012). When FGC students of color do come to meet with a career counselor, particularly

to discuss career indecision, the counselor should ask about contextual affordances (Lent et al.,

1994) that influence their decision to pursue a career path. This can uncover information such as

the presence of career barriers (Lent et al., 2000), CCA (Brown et al., 2012), and interpersonal

conflict (Brown et al., 2012). Taking the time to learn more about a student's background can

demonstrate the counselor's desire to build rapport with them and open the opportunity to

collaboratively devise solutions for the student's career questions, concerns, and opportunities. In

reference to FGC students of color and their families, I recognize the challenge of directly

bringing other individuals into appointments due to legal and ethical obligations for student privacy. This should not, however, limit the counselor's ability to ask respectfully challenging questions about how students may feel about integrating important others into their career decision-making (Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007).

Outside of receiving guidance from a career counselor, FGC students of color may also benefit from role modeling and mentorship from individuals who have succeeded in occupations they would like to have. Thomas, Monae, and Gabriella were able to network with and gain information from individuals who helped them learn about their desired fields. For Thomas and Monae, it was also beneficial that these people shared the same racial identity. Jessica, AJ, and Hazel would also have benefitted from seeing themselves represented in what they wanted to do professionally, especially when they experienced career indecision and were uncertain of the consequences of their choices. Multiple studies demonstrated that mentorship had numerous professional benefits for students holding marginalized identities, such as greater confidence in their ability to obtain their goals and learning how to navigate complex organizations and systems (e.g., Constantine & Flores, 2006; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018; Owens et al., 2010; Parks-Yancy, 2012). University departments can sponsor mentorship programs in which students of higher academic standing, staff, faculty, and alumni can provide instrumental and emotional support to FGC students of color as they progress through their undergraduate education. Mentors to this population should undergo training to ensure they are capable of providing guidance on a variety of academic and career-related topics. Staff members who are responsible for administering such programs should also consider ways that they can build community for participants, creating a more communal campus environment.

The complexity of career development and career indecision for FGC students of color requires colleges and universities to adopt a multi-pronged approach to adopting strategies to improve outcomes (Capannola & Johnson, 2020; Wildhagen, 2015). Although career centers are an obvious starting point to plan career initiatives, other areas of campus should collaborate cross-functionally in order to create a unified front for establishing a communal campus environment. In addition to this, the voices of FGC students of color must also be present when determining best practices for enhancing their career development. I encourage student affairs directors and university leadership to be proactive in their outreach to this population to demonstrate a genuine interest in having students be co-constructors of their college experience.

Limitations

Despite the innovations of my study in terms of its conceptual framework and methodological approach, there are several limitations to note that impact the transferability of my findings. Using narrative inquiry entailed that I dedicate my research to portraying the uniqueness of the participants' stories and avoid essentializing their experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that reductionism in narrative research is a genuine risk when attempting to generate themes across individuals. Since FGC students of color and their experiences with career indecision has not been explored in-depth in the extant literature, I needed to balance the traditions of my methodological approach with my desire to establish a theoretical foundation for future scholarship. Nevertheless, there was still the potential for me to omit certain details in an individual's narrative if my interpretive lens guided by my conceptual framework deemed it not significant. In terms of the study design, I was not able to incorporate any specific measures of career variables such as career decision self-efficacy or outcome expectations in my protocols. This would have allowed for a more complete analysis of how the participants' experiences

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influenced their ability to resolve their career indecision. As such, the conclusions I drew from my findings should be seen as additional hypotheses to investigate in future studies using more robust techniques.

One of my goals in participant selection was to identify students who I thought represented a broad range of academic majors and career interests. Despite this, four out of six participants discussed medicine or dentistry as part of their career narrative. All participants mentioned at some point in their career development a desire to pursue what would typically be considered a lucrative career, such as medicine, business, or law. Although this is not surprising given how FGC students of color are likely to make economic decisions with their major choice and career path (Manzoni & Streib, 2018), this limits the transferability of my findings when considering FGC students of color majoring in disciplines such as the arts, humanities, and social sciences and are interested in jobs related to these fields. Future research should explore how career indecision and contributors to it may look different for individuals pursuing less lucrative occupations.

Finally, another limitation in terms of my participant selection was that I did not incorporate any measures indicating the degree to which participants affiliated themselves with their racial cultural values. Although I asked questions that alluded to significant values such as communalism and stability, it was not possible for me to substantiate whether students subscribed to them in their own lives outside of a career development context. Mejia-Smith and Gushue (2017) found that acculturation was positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy. For participants like Hazel who felt that they could assert more agency in their career decisions, it would have been useful to understand whether acculturation played a role in her developing this belief. A more complex methodology that allows for a comparison of

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experiences with career indecision based on acculturation levels could uncover any potential relationships.

Conclusion

I engaged in this research project as an extension of my desire to conceptualize my own career indecision as an undergraduate student. Little did I anticipate that during my time as a graduate student, being a scholar and a career services professional would further convince me that empowering others during their professional development is my calling. It was an interesting experience being able to read over the participants' resumes and hear them talk about their career development without having to adopt a problem-solving mindset like I would during a career advising appointment. Nevertheless, the stories and circumstances they shared with me are ones that I anticipate encountering again once I transition into the workplace. I believe that the competencies and knowledge I gained as a scholar will benefit students I serve in the future as an advisor and mentor.

I also recognize that as a FGC student of color myself, there is immense privilege I hold in being able to engage in scholarship about my own community. I am fortunate to have entered a graduate program that provided full tuition remission and a living stipend so I can comfortably focus on my academics. This was a selling point as I engaged in the graduate school search coming from a low-income household. I know, however, that many others who share these identities are doing what they need to do to just make ends meet, potentially not being fulfilled by the work they do. There is something to be said about the capitalist society we live in that makes it difficult for marginalized individuals to have their basic needs met, but I reserve that discussion for another space or another study. By completing this research, I feel obligated to incorporate my findings into my own practice and share this knowledge with others who serve

FGC students of color. This is the least I can do to ensure that my work is accessible beyond the walls of academia and can benefit people's lives through affirmations of their experiences.

My hope with this scholarship is that colleges and universities critically reflect on the ways in which they can uplift FGC students of color and their communities and deliver on the outcomes they promise in their mission statements. Idealism aside, this would entail FGC students of color being able to freely explore their academic and professional interests through experiential learning opportunities that provide moments to reflect on how they are growing as individuals. As one participant mentioned, it takes a village to nurture potential in each individual. In addition to families and communities, faculty and staff of universities should aspire to be a part of villages for FGC students of color so that they feel unconditionally supported wherever they find themselves on campus.

Appendix A

Dear [NAME],

My name is Jeffrey Cho, and I am a second-year master's student in the College of Education at the University of Maryland. I am conducting a study to better understand how first-generation college students of color experience career indecision.

I am reaching out to you because of your involvement with students who may be eligible to participate in my study. I would appreciate if you could distribute the attached recruitment flyer that has the link for students to fill out a demographic questionnaire to determine their eligibility for the study. Participation in this study consists of filling out the demographic questionnaire (10 minutes), a virtual interview (60-90 minutes), and a review of research themes (20 minutes). There are no known risks involved in this research.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey Cho
jdcho@umd.edu
323-536-6705

Appendix B

RECRUITING STUDENT PARTICIPANTS FOR A
RESEARCH STUDY ON

CAREER INDECISION OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS OF COLOR

We are looking for first-generation college students of color approaching the end of their undergraduate studies to better understand their experiences with career indecision

Participants will be asked to complete an online interview (60-90 minutes) and review themes generated from the research (20 minutes).

Students who complete the interview and review themes from the research will receive a $20 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their participation.

INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS SHOULD SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE A DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY.

ALTERNATIVELY, VISIT THIS LINK: HTTPS://BIT.LY/FGINDECISION

This research is being conducted by Jeffrey Cho at the University of Maryland (IRB #1826766-1). Any questions should be directed to Jeffrey at jdcho@umd.edu

Default Question Block

Thank you for your interest in participating in a study on the career indecision of first-generation college students of color. This demographic questionnaire will determine your eligibility to participate in this study. As a reminder, here are the eligibility requirements:

- A current undergraduate student at the University of Maryland who is within one year of finishing their bachelor's degree
- Self-identify as a first-generation college student, defined as a student whose parents/guardians have not completed a four-year college degree in the United States
- Self-identify as a student of color
- Have experienced or are currently experiencing career indecision

Select participants who qualify for the study will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview for the first phase of the study. If you are determined to be ineligible for the study or are not chosen to participate in an interview, your information collected by this survey will be destroyed.

By choosing to complete this survey, you are providing implied consent to participate in this portion of the study.

Any questions regarding this study should be directed to Jeffrey Cho at jdcho@umd.edu

Student Demographics

First Name

Last Name

UID#

Email

Major(s)

Minor(s)

When will you finish your degree requirements for your bachelor's?

○ May 2022
○ August 2022
○ December 2022
○ Other

Are you a first-generation college student, i.e. neither of your parents/guardians completed a four-year college degree in the United States?

○ Yes
○ No

Race (please select all that apply)

☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
☐ East Asian
☐ South Asian
☐ Southeast Asian
☐ Black or African American

- [ ] Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish
- [ ] Middle Eastern or North African
- [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] Other [_____]

What is your ethnicity?

[_____]

Career Indecision

Career indecision is defined as any difficulty associated with career decision making. Please describe your past and/or current experiences with career indecision.

[_____]

Please upload a PDF of the most recent version of your resume.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Career Indecision of First-Generation College Students of Color Study*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Jeffrey Cho** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a current undergraduate first-generation college student of color who has experienced or is currently experiencing career indecision. The purpose of this research project is to understand how first-generation college students of color navigate career indecision.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve completing a demographic questionnaire (10 minutes), participating in one online interview conducted over Zoom (60-90 minutes), and providing written feedback on the themes generated from the research (20 minutes). Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission or notes will be taken by hand. The interview will be transcribed using the transcription service Otter. Examples of questions in the interview include, "How do you believe your race and ethnicity played a factor in your career indecision?" and "How confident do you feel in your ability to resolve your career indecision?" You will also be asked to share a copy of your resume with the researcher. Individuals who complete all tasks related to the study will receive a $20 Amazon gift card.*
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There may be some risks from participating in this research study. You may experience some discomfort in sharing personal stories during the interviews but may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or skip questions you are uncomfortable answering.*
Potential Benefits	*There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how first-generation college students of color navigate career indecision.*

Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer, which is only accessible to the researcher. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and your institution to further enhance confidentiality.* *Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you are a current student employee at UMD, your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no positive or negative effect on your employability or relationship with the University of Maryland, College Park.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Jeffrey Cho*** ***3115 Benjamin Building, 3942 Campus Drive, University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742*** ***jdcho@umd.edu*** ***323-536-6705***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving*

	human subjects.
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*

Signature and Date	**I CONSENT TO BEING RECORDED**	☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**
	NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix E

Thomas

      From childhood, Thomas was heavily invested in pursuing a career in medicine as he was motivated by forming personal human connections in his job. He did not feel immense pressure from his family about his career choice because his parents approved of becoming a doctor due to its clear trajectory and high income potential. His parents went so far as to help him find opportunities that would advance his professional development, such as clinical shadowing and research with federal organizations. Furthermore, Thomas was well connected to other families in the Bengali community where he grew up, so becoming a doctor would be something that many around him would approve of.

      As Thomas progressed through his undergraduate degree at Mid-Atlantic University, conversations he had with friends and networks shook his commitment to becoming a doctor because of how limited the scope of impact the occupation has. More specifically, he did not want to save patients one at a time in a clinical setting. He would prefer to have a larger impact in healthcare by working for an organization that impacted social determinants of health such as education or housing. Consequently, he interned for public health organizations and became involved on campus to better understand the ways in which he might be able to expand his career options. Thomas was able to land a full-time role working for a large consulting company post-graduation. He hopes that working for such an organization will build his reputation to be successful for future endeavors impacting healthcare outside the hospital. His family remains invested in having him pursue a career in medicine due to the stability of the career, but his parents are attempting to learn more about careers in business. While Thomas continues to receive support from his family, he will make further strides in clarifying his ultimate career goal, whether that involves medical school or not.

Jessica

Growing up, Jessica received constant validation from her family that pursuing a career as a doctor would be suitable for her. Her main interest in medicine was becoming a neurosurgeon, which she received inspiration to pursue after seeing a role model in Ben Carson. She was especially influenced to pursue this career at a young age after a trip to the Ivory Coast where she witnessed firsthand the inequities in the healthcare system of her family's home country. However, Jessica felt that becoming a doctor would be too individualized. She strived for making a larger community impact in healthcare. In particular, Jessica wants to establish her own medical clinic in Ivory Coast so that she can provide more affordable healthcare to people in need. This was the beginning of her career indecision.

At Mid-Atlantic University, Jessica's career indecision was exacerbated once she realized she would not be able to take some core classes for her neurobiology major during the summer. Her academic advisor encouraged her to switch to the family science major to continue exploring her interest in public health. While hesitant at first, Jessica enjoyed her classes in the family science major and began to think about her post-baccalaureate plans. She was unsure whether she should apply for medical school or pursue a professional degree like an MPH or MHA. Jessica's mother encouraged her to pursue nursing as it was a stable career path, but Jessica was not interested in taking additional classes for a profession she would not enjoy. However, her desire to help others is reflected in her collegiate involvement in organizations that involve mentoring and serving others. Although she is still uncertain about how she will pursue her long-term plans, Jessica remains committed to pursuing a career that will uplift her community through healthcare.

Monae

From a young age, Monae was driven to pursue a career in which she would be able to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion for people of color, especially women of color. Being heavily influenced by the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, she saw corporate law as an ideal avenue to pursue her professional goals. Her family and community did not push her toward any particular occupation and just wanted her to succeed wherever she found fulfillment. Monae's professional experience prior to college included working for an aftercare program and under two state attorneys in the county where she lived. She found these positions independently as an opportunity to expand her perspective of the world around her. Her racial identity was especially salient as she navigated interactions with her peers who were applying for jobs alongside her and her family members who were not college educated and wanted to learn what she was learning in school. Monae needed to persevere through standards of whiteness that made her feel that her blackness was inferior.

She continued to experience some challenges with her racial identity as she worked in other professional settings such as accounting, retail, and real estate. Monae found these corporate environments undesirable due to the interactions she had with colleagues where she did not feel like she fit in due to her race or age. She also felt like she would be unable to grow working in a corporate role where she would not be able to make a substantial impact on communities that matter to her. However, Monae was inspired by Black role models in her real estate company who were simultaneously attorneys and agents. As she continues to navigate potential career options involving a blend of law and advocacy, she feels comfortable relying on her family, even if they may push for a traditional law career, and best friend for support.

AJ

AJ was exposed to many career options as a child, such as being a soccer player or professional model. However, he was most drawn to dentistry after informally shadowing his own dentist with some support from his mother. Regardless of what he wanted to do, AJ's father was particularly vocal in his support for his career exploration so long as he found an occupation that would be sustainable and allow him to become independent. During school, AJ, as one of the few students of color, felt like he needed to adopt a certain level of confidence and professionalism in order to keep up with his White peers. As he began applying to college, AJ was adamant about making sure that he would be able to finance his own education and anything else he needed with limited aid from his family. The realization that he would be in significant debt after finishing his bachelor's and dental school, however, caused him to reconsider whether dentistry was a suitable option for him.

During college, AJ started his own business called Healthy Food to provide supplemental income for himself. Upon recognizing that his business had potential to expand larger and generate more profits, he was drawn to the high risk, high reward nature of entrepreneurship that would fulfill him, even if there may be some obstacles in his path as a result of his race. AJ began to dislike dentistry due to how finite and certain it was compared to the limitless potential associated with his business. He knew, however, that his parents, especially his mother, were a big proponent of stability. Although they are aware of the career options that are available, AJ would not have the courage to break the news that he would be fully investing in Healthy Food instead of dentistry. The future may seem uncertain for AJ, but he remains committed to growing his company for years to come.

Hazel

Hazel's initial career aspirations were in healthcare and medicine, which she received avid support for through her mother. However, she felt hesitant about becoming a doctor due to the lack of Hispanic healthcare professionals and feeling like she may not belong in such an industry. Upon beginning her postsecondary educational journey by attending her local community college, Hazel was drawn towards corporate careers through a special program the college had that allowed participants to gain hands-on experience in multiple areas of business. The switch to business still presented challenges for Hazel as she remained uncertain about whether to specialize in accounting or marketing. Although she valued the stability that accounting would provide, she knew that marketing would bring her more fulfillment in the long run. Hazel felt especially shaken after having a conversation with a marketing director that presented the latter option as potentially unstable.

Continuing to reflect on whether accounting or marketing would be a better fit, Hazel recognized that she wanted to make her parents immigration to the United States worth it by establishing a better life for herself. She knew that they would be proud if they could say that their daughter was an accountant who made a stable income. Furthermore, Hazel did not feel confident she would be taken seriously as a marketing professional due to her racial background. The connections she established at her local community college, however, allowed her to secure a marketing internship that persuaded her that marketing was what she truly wanted to do. Although her family wants to ensure that Hazel is making the right choice so that she isn't wasting her time and energy, she is confident that she will be able to rely on colleagues and her network to continue advancing her career after beginning her full-time role at a large IT consulting firm.

Gabriella

From a young age, Gabriella drew inspiration for potential careers through role models she saw in media. Gabriella's parents did not pressure her into any particular career path and remained supportive of whatever her interests were. Without the pressure from her family, Gabriella took it upon herself to remain especially committed to her academics so that she could successfully apply to competitive high schools and colleges. She attended a high school with various career center programs, and the track she chose for herself was the IT academy because it seemed like a pragmatic option that would pay well if she pursued a career in it. It also blended computer and technology with human experience, which was more appealing to Gabriella than just solely working in computer science. This influenced her to apply to Mid-Atlantic college as an information science major.

Once she started taking classes in information science, Gabriella realized she could not envision herself working in this field feeling so unsatisfied. The hustle was not appealing to her whatsoever. As an alternative, she enjoyed writing and added journalism as a second major. However, the classes in that major were not enjoyable either and she did not feel comfortable in such a cutthroat environment that was dominated by White men. Despite her negative in-class experiences, Gabriella was thankful for the opportunity to diversify her resume with various part-time roles, extracurricular activities, and internships. In particular, she was involved with the campus's entertainment programming board since her first year and slowly realized that a career in entertainment would be a great fit for her. Talking with alumni of the programming board helped her solidify her aspirations to pursue entertainment, even if it was a more unstable path compared to IT. Although her parents may not be completely aware of transitioning her career efforts to entertainment, Gabriella is confident that she will have their support moving forward.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, do undergraduate FGC students of color navigate career indecision?
2. In what ways, if any, do racial cultural values these students hold shape how they make meaning of their career indecision?

Introduction of Study to Participant

Hello [participant],

Thank you for volunteering your time to participate in my research study regarding the career development of undergraduate first-generation college students of color. To share a little about myself, my name is Jeffrey, and I am a second-year master's student in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I identify as a first-generation college student and a second-generation Korean American because both my mom and dad emigrated from South Korea. I completed my bachelor's degree at the University of Southern California in 2020.

Here are some logistics about today's interview. It should last about 60-90 minutes. I will be recording this interview. Everything you share with me today will remain confidential, including your name and references to any schools you have attended. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you only have to share what you feel comfortable sharing. You may choose not to answer any question and may withdraw from the study at any time.

What questions might you have about what I've talked about so far? [PAUSE]

We will now begin the interview.

Interview Questions

Stage 1: Pre-College Experiences
1. What were your earliest career goals? How old were you when you developed these goals? What do you remember thinking or feeling about what you wanted to be when you grew up?
2. What activities or opportunities do you recall shaping what you wanted to be when you grew up? How did the activities or opportunities shape your feelings or thoughts about your career?
3. Sometimes people's families play a role in career choices. What conversations have you and your family had about what you wanted to be? What memories or stories can you share about what your family and you discussed about your career?
   a. In what ways did your family encourage or deter you from deciding what you wanted to do as a career?
   b. Thinking back, how do you think your racial/ethnic background influenced the messages you received from your family?

4. To what extent did your desired career matter in your college choice?
5. At what point did you recognize you were a first-generation college student?
    a. What messages did you receive about what it means to be a first-generation college student? Who did you receive these messages from?
    b. Who did you receive these messages from? Any stories you can share about identifying as a first-generation college student?
6. What is a specific time you can remember where being a first-generation college student impacted what career you wanted to pursue? How so?
    a. How do you feel your race/ethnicity played a factor in what you wanted to pursue? How so?

Stage 2: Early College Experiences and Career Indecision
1. What has your relationship with your family been like ever since you started college?
    a. How has being a college student changed your relationship with your family, if at all?
    b. How did your racial cultural values influence the way you navigated your family relationships?
2. As you entered college what were some of the things you looked forward to about your time in college? What were some things you were nervous about?
    a. Was there any moment during college where you felt like being a first-generation college student was especially salient? What happened? Who was involved?
3. When did you first notice that you were experiencing career indecision during college? Are there any moments that stand out to you that highlighted the peak of your indecision?
    a. What thoughts and feelings do you associate with this period?
    b. Looking at your resume, would you say that you were getting professional experiences that align with what you may want to do as a career?
4. In what ways has being a first-generation college student shaped the way you felt about your career indecision?
5. How do you believe your race/ethnicity played a factor in your career indecision? In what specific ways?
6. What is one specific story you can share about talking about your career indecision with your family? What did those conversations feel like?

Stage 3: Resolving Career Indecision
1. What are some things you have done/are considering doing to help you make up your mind about which career to pursue?
    a. What resources are you using/did you use to resolve your indecision? What do you wish was available as a resource to you (mentorship? family?)?
    b. How do you think your first-generation status and/or race/ethnicity impact your decision?
2. How confident do/did you feel in your ability to resolve your career indecision? What helps you feel less confident? More confident?
3. If/when you decided to change your career path, how might your relationship or conversations with your family change? Would they stay the same? How so?
4. What do you see yourself doing immediately after college? What are your career plans for 5 years from now?

      a. How do you see your resume changing to better prepare yourself for the career goals you would like to achieve?

5. What else should I know that we haven't discussed so far?

Appendix G

Document Analysis Procedure

Students will be asked to submit the most updated version of their resume when indicating their interest to participate in the study. For students who are selected as participants for the study, I will review their resumes prior to their interview to obtain a preliminary overview of their professional experience. This may inform some of the questions I ask during the interview. Additionally, I will prepare questions in advance that give participants the opportunity to discuss aspects of their resume that they find relevant to their career development and career indecision. Following the interview, I will examine the participant's resume to achieve the following goals:

- Document their most recent professional experiences, including but not limited to paid employment, volunteering, and extracurricular activities
- Document the locations in which each professional opportunity occurred to capture what opportunities were geographically available to the participant
- Identify the depth in which the participant described each experience by analyzing the language used for each experience

By analyzing participant resumes, I hope to understand:

1) how well the participant's desired career goals match the experiences they have on their resume
2) potential connections between the participant's professional experiences and values associated with their first-generation status and race/ethnicity based on the rationale given for putting these experiences on their resume

I will use the following form to document information from each participants' resume. Given that each participant may have varying levels of experience on their resume, the length of the form is not an indication of the maximum number of experiences I will document.

Participant Resume Documentation Form

1. **Education (name of institution(s), graduation date, location):**

2. **Experience 1:**
    a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

    b. **Duration**

    c. **Location**

    d. **Name of Organization**

    e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

    f. **Descriptor Word Count**

3. **Experience 2:**
    a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

    b. **Duration**

    c. **Location**

    d. **Name of Organization**

    e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

    f. **Descriptor Word Count**

4. **Experience 3:**

      a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

      b. **Duration**

      c. **Location**

      d. **Name of Organization**

      e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

      f. **Descriptor Word Count**

5. **Experience 4:**
      a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

      b. **Duration**

      c. **Location**

      d. **Name of Organization**

      e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

      f. **Descriptor Word Count**

6. **Experience 5:**
      a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

      b. **Duration**

      c. **Location**

      d. **Name of Organization**

      e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

      f. **Descriptor Word Count**

7. **Experience 6:**

      a. **Type (employment, volunteer, extracurricular activity, other)**

      b. **Duration**

      c. **Location**

      d. **Name of Organization**

      e. **Position Held (if multiple, list all with corresponding dates)**

      f. **Descriptor Word Count**

8. **Additional Resume Sections (e.g., skills, certifications, awards, volunteering, etc.)**

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