

Co-planning College: How Latinx Prospective First-Generation Students Co-Plan College and
Career Choices with Parents, Close Friends, and Significant Others

by

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Abstract

Prospective first-generation Latinx college students face specific challenges in the process of deciding whether or not to apply to a four-year college or university and in deciding on a career. This research focused on how Latinx students in a 12th-grade English Language Arts classroom make decisions about college and careers including delaying college to work, attending a two-year community college, or attending a four-year college or university. Data included interviews with five focal students, whole class survey responses, teacher observations and field notes, school data, and GPA calculations on five focal students. This study found that cultural norms, parental pressure, input from close friends and significant others, and financial considerations influenced perceived barriers, on the one hand, as well as the creation of possible selves and possible futures regarding going to college and/or moving into careers. The implication of these findings is that high school counselors and teachers must support Latinx students in the college choice and application process in a way that includes parents, close friends, and significant others as co-planners.

Keywords: prospective first-generation college students, Latinx students, possible selves

Introduction

“We’re going to be downstairs. We’re signing up for East Bay Community,” Raquel¹ tells me as she pulls me aside before class begins. It is early April and the seniors are all preoccupied with conversations revolving around what everyone has planned for next year. I ask her who is joining her downstairs, and she lists off the names of two other students in our class that she typically sits with.

The last time I checked in with these three students about college none of them had settled on a concrete plan to go to East Bay Community, so this came as a welcomed surprise. A few minutes earlier. I had received a similar heads up from one of the other young women via text message that she would be downstairs enrolling in community college. Part of my surprise also came from the fact that, although these students attended my class regularly, two of them rarely turned in large assignments, and they all had expressed interest in delaying college in order to work and save money.

Now that it was halfway through the spring semester, most seniors were focused on doing whatever it took to graduate. Our school instituted a policy that seniors must be passing all of their classes with a C- or better in order to go to prom, which inspired several conversations with my students trying to negotiate how to get a better grade in my class.

When Raquel and her two friends returned from the academic counselors’ offices downstairs I greeted them with a, “Hello, college students!” and two of them gave me a high five as they passed my desk. Katrina, however, held her high five back and told me, “Oh, I didn’t sign

¹ All names of people and schools are pseudonyms.

up.” I ask her, confused, “Really?” Then she laughed and told me she had signed up, and gave me a high five as she and the others returned to the table they share near my desk.

During the final quarter of Spring semester, my seniors had been preoccupied with planning for their future. Some were receiving decision letters from the four-year colleges they applied to a few months ago; others were signing up for community college; and almost everyone was concerned about doing what it takes to walk across the commencement stage in June. Their impending graduation forced each person to ask themselves what they planned to do after high school. For my Latinx students, this decision was not made in isolation or to prove a level of independence popularized by media portrayals of young people going off to college to start their adult lives by themselves.

School Context

Alvarado High School is a urban, comprehensive public high school with approximately 1500 students, grades 9-12, and serves a diverse student body. Approximately 70% of the students body are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The student body is diverse: 44% Latinx, 24% African American, 13% Asian, 11% White, 7% Filipino, and 1% Pacific Islander. Fifteen percent of Alvarado’s students receive special education services, the largest percentage among schools in its local district.

Alvarado High School was consistently performing below state standards about one decade ago. Since then the school has benefitted from grant funds and the implementation of multiple strategic plans to promote collaboration among the staff, support new teachers, decrease teacher turnover, provide standards-aligned curriculum, and help students improve standardized test scores. Attention paid to creating a positive school culture has resulted in an increase over

time in Alvarado's percentile ranking for the California Healthy Kids Survey School Climate Index, although this school still performs below similar schools. In order to create a small school atmosphere within the larger school, Alvarado separates the grade 10-12 students into three Career and Technical Education pathways, known as "academies", wherein students get exposure and hands-on training related to their academy focus.

There is a college going culture at Alvarado High School, and it can be seen by the annual push-in that counselors do to the English classrooms to teach students about graduation requirements and applying to the California State University and University of California systems. Other resources, like the College Support Center² and test prep books in the library, are available to students should they choose to use them. There are several different college-bound extracurricular groups on campus that students can be recruited into during their freshman year. Although these groups support students with a wide range of GPAs and ethnic backgrounds, there are few opportunities for upperclassmen to get involved in college-bound support groups. The PSAT/SAT is administered to all sophomores, juniors, and seniors and is free of charge. Advanced Placement (AP) classes are offered in a variety of subjects. Lastly, there is strong relationship between the local community college, East Bay Community, and Alvarado High School such that seniors can easily participate in the dual enrollment program at a cost that is subsidized so that it is almost free.

Research Question

The first project my seniors worked on was a presentation focused on their plans for life after high school which asked them to consider the various career paths they were interested in

² A pseudonym.

and what kind of education or training it would take for them to achieve those career goals.

Many students considered a variety of college and career paths, but what was missing from these presentations was the considerations these young people made when choosing which career paths interested them. It became apparent that the decision making process was a mystery to an outside observer. When students were asked the seemingly innocuous question, “What are you going to do after you graduate from high school?” it did not reveal the complexities of their decision-making process. Their answers were not fully formed, thought out, or intentional. The question did not take into account considerations of cultural capital implicit within it regarding expectations for exploring career paths in the 21st century or obtaining a bachelor’s degree that is now touted as the “new high school diploma.” As a teacher and an adult in their lives, it was important to understand how these decisions were made including the challenges and the breadth of opportunities considered as well as who was influencing these students’ decisions. Moreover, it seemed important to explore this topic in a culturally attuned way in order to see which possible career and higher education pathways are accepted and encouraged within the context of Latinx culture, since the majority of my students come from that background.

Consequently, the research question for this study is, “How do Latinx prospective first-generation college students make decisions about career and college choices?” Subordinate questions include, “What career and college options have they considered?” “What cultural or family expectations are students trying to live up to? And, “Who is helping them plan for their future?” Because my students are coming from predominantly low-income, immigrant Latinx families and will be the first generation in their family to go to college, if they go on to higher education, they already face institutional and cultural obstacles that make the choice to go to a

four-year college more difficult, despite the advantages of obtaining a bachelor's degree for them individually and for society as a whole.

Literature Review

Equity in higher education is predicated on making opportunities available to all high school students regardless of their background, including, but not limited to, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural identity. This is especially true for students from historically marginalized backgrounds and identities. Supporting a Latinx senior in high school, especially a prospective first-generation college student, through the planning process and helping them actualize a dream of pursuing higher education successfully can have significant consequences, including economic ones. The competition and success in the labor market after obtaining a bachelor's degree is the same for first-generation and continuing-generation students, which means that obtaining a bachelor's degree can serve as a step in the direction of creating a more equitable society (Cataldi et al., 2018). They also found that there was no statistical difference in median annual salaries or employment rates of bachelor degree holders using a 2012 sample that included both first-generation and continuing-generation students, and this was true of individuals employed full-time as well as individuals employed part-time. Given the fact that bachelor degree holders have greater annual salary potential than those with less than a bachelor's degree, postsecondary education is a critical step towards increasing earning potential for students who would be the first in their families to go to college. Not only can this help individuals, this could have a long-lasting positive economic impact on their immediate families.

The road to obtaining a bachelor's degree is fraught with obstacles for students whose parents did not go to college. Prospective first-generation college students are less likely to be college-ready, having taken fewer high level math classes, AP classes, or IB credits, than their high school peers who have parents that completed some college or a bachelor's degree (Cataldi et al., 2018). Furthermore, they found that students whose parents did not go to college were more likely to enroll in a two-year college rather than a four-year college or university. This is significant because Berkner et al. (2002) found that obtaining a bachelor's degree is threefold higher when students start at a four-year college or university versus a two-year community college. Similarly, Cataldi et al. found that "3 years after beginning college, proportionally fewer first-generation students stayed on the persistence track (48 percent) than did their continuing-generation peers whose parents had attended college (53 percent) or had earned a bachelor's degree (67 percent)" (2018, p. 8).

College match. College match is important to consider and decisions about going to college and which colleges to apply to is a process that happens in high school. The four-year college or university that a student attends matters. Individual students will have a greater chance at persisting in college if they are attending a college that is in line with their performance and abilities in high school (match) or above (over-match) (Roderick et al., 2011). Moreover, Griffith and Rothstein (2009) found that attending an elite private college was advantageous for students when looking at persistence data. Their study also found that low income students are less likely to apply to elite four-year colleges and universities. Proximity to a selective or elite four-year college "may raise awareness of opportunities" (Griffith & Rosenstein, 2009, p. 626). This is in line with the idea that high school students cannot construct possible selves that include

information or concepts with which they are unfamiliar. One cannot imagine a future that includes options they have never been exposed to. This would put prospective first-generation college students at a marked disadvantage for applying to a four-year college, especially an elite, private college. Roderick et al. (2011) found that “Latino and White students are less likely than African American students to plan to attend a four-year college” and attending a two-year college, for example, would be an “undermatch” to their GPA and abilities (p. 191). Furthermore, they noted that “hours worked is negatively associated with the odds of college match” (p. 197).

Students, especially those from low-income families, have the best chance of graduating with a degree if they attend selective four-year colleges that are a “match” to their academic performance/ability in high school, rather than go to a less selective four-year college or university (Alon & Tienda, 2005). Roderick, Coca, and Nagaoka (2011) found that “Only 73 percent of students qualified [...] planned to attend a four-year college, only 61 percent applied, and ultimately, only 43 percent were enrolled in a four-year college in the fall” (Roderick et al., 2011, p. 186).

First-generation students and the road to college. The road to college for first-generation students contains many challenges and obstacles. Kantamneni et al. (2018) researched how contextual factors influence student engagement and academic and vocational trajectories of prospective first-generation college students and found that ethnic identity played a significant role “in developing academic and vocational self-efficacy and outcome expectations for prospective first-generation college students” (p. 190). They found that parents play a role in students’ development of self-efficacy and maternal support is related to “the development of

vocational outcome expectations” whereas paternal support is “predictive of vocational self-efficacy,” suggesting that counselors and students can consider how parental support directly or indirectly influences the path a student chooses to pursue (p. 191).

Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that prospective first-generation college students (PFGCS) “were more likely to be Hispanic/Latino, much less likely to be in a higher level math course, and much more likely to indicate entering something other than a 4-year university compared with their non-PFCCS peers” (p. 203). Their study found that prospective first-generation college students “reported lower college-going self-efficacy expectations than did their non-PFCCS peers” and this has a direct impact on what choices those students will make about college and career opportunities (p. 203). Prospective first-generation college students were found to have more perceived barriers to college including “finances, family issues, racial/ethnic discrimination, lack of college-educated role models, lack of college-planning guidance, negative educational role models, and lack of preparation and/or desire” and “Hispanic/Latino students had more negative college-going outcome expectations and perceived the highest level of perceived barriers to college going”(Gibbons & Borders, 2010, p. 204).

Identity and forming a concept of self, both present and possible, is critical on the road to college. Using Social Cognitive Career Theory, a theoretical framework that examines the interplay between individual and contextual factors in academic and career efficacy and outcomes, Kantamneni et al. (2018) found that “possessing a strong ethnic identity is positively related to the development of vocational self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which, in turn, predicts increased engagement in their academic work and schools” (p. 191). Pizzolato (2006) used the concept of possible selves defined by Markus and Nurius (1986) to research “the

construction of hoped for, expected and feared possible selves” and long-term identity goals around college and found that students needed to create conceptual and procedural schema to further their aspirations of becoming college students (Pizzolato, 2006, p. 58). Pizzolato found that “achievement of their aspirations seemed to come through renegotiation of familial, peer, and community relationships such that students were able to maintain and balance these important relationships with their personal aspirations” (p. 67).

Student achievement is influenced by peers and context. There is research with differing results regarding the effect of peers on student performance. In a meta-analysis of the research on this phenomena, Ewijk and Slegers (2010) found that when the data was analyzed at the class level, as opposed to the school level, the peer effect was more significant and that analyzing data at the school level, leads to underestimation of the true peer effect.

Tracking students into different levels of math and English courses in high school may also contribute to this idea that students rise together or fall together and that the peer effect has a positive influence when students of higher SES backgrounds are grouped together, for instance, in AP courses or at choice schools. When investigating the academic performance and future plans of students in the lowest tracked senior-level English class, it is possible that the converse is true: not only are these students not benefitting from the positive peer effects of a heterogeneous class roster that includes students from a variety of SES backgrounds, but the peer effects of a class of predominantly low-SES students may even have a negative overall effect instead of a neutral or no effect. According to Ewijk and Slegers (2010), the peer effect impacts academic performance equally across a variety of subjects including language, math, and science as measured by test scores. Therefore, one would expect to see students in the same classes and

peer groups to have similar trends in academic performance, regardless of subject, and GPA and possibly similar trends in being prepared for and applying to four-year colleges.

Delaying college. Some students who see higher education in their future plan to delay enrolling in college. Wells and Lynch (2012) investigated “which aspects of SES are most influential in delaying college, including how factors that predict college enrollment differ based on students’ plans to delay” (p. 677). They found that “both income and first-generation status are predictive of students planning to delay entry into college” and approximately 11% of high school seniors who believe they will go to college also plan to delay college, with ultimately about half of those students enrolling right away despite plans to delay (p. 681) and that having taken an advanced mathematics course was the only predictive factor for immediate enrollment in college (p. 685). They also found that continuing-generation students and female students are less likely to delay whereas low-SES students are more likely to delay college (p. 686). They suggest that having parents who went to college as well as “college-bound peers may be another form of advantaged cultural capital” that help students navigate the application process and enroll in college (p. 687).

Latinx students in particular. When Latinx students, who make up a large percentage of first-generation college students and a growing population on college campuses, arrive in this new context they face additional challenges like a college culture that sometimes clashes with the values of their Latinx culture (Tello & Lonn, 2017). These researchers further note that interpersonal relationships, which hold a place of importance in the lives of Latinx students, and fatalism are aspects of these students’ culture that can affect how they act in high school and, consequently, what path they choose to pursue after high school.

Gendered differences between Latino and Latina students. Differences between Latino and Latina students must also be considered. In a longitudinal analysis, Zarate and Gallimore (2005) found that there were differences in college enrollment of Latinxs with respect to gender and that “Latinas in the sample were enrolled in two-year and four-year institutions in disproportionately higher numbers than Latinos ($p < 0.05$)” (p. 393). They found that Latino’s parents associated “formal education with improved economic status” whereas Latina’s parents would “characterize formal education as a means of counteracting the girls’ gendered vulnerabilities” (p. 394). Interestingly, they found that all of the Latino students enrolled in college, in their sample, had been born in the United States “compared with 60 percent of the noncollege boys ($p < 0.05$) and this correlation “was not apparent for Latinas” (p. 394).

The gendered differences in K-12 educational experiences and later college enrollment starts at a young age. Teachers “rated girls higher than boys” in middle school (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005, p. 397). They noted that for Latino students, but not Latina students, “Spanish literacy, English placement in kindergarten, and the grade at which they moved into English instruction appear to foreshadow significant differences in later college enrollment” (p. 397). They further noted that mathematics test scores were predictors of college enrollment for both Latina and Latino students, with a stronger correlation evident for Latino students (p. 402). Finally, they found that Latino students reading scores were also predictive of college outcomes and “gendered instructional practices may account for these boys’ declining reading performance” (p. 402). Perhaps a combination of socialization, parental expectations, and teacher-student interactions all contribute to the difference in Latina and Latino academic experiences and eventual college enrollment.

Methods

The goal of this research was to uncover how Latinx prospective first-generation college students made decisions about pursuing higher education, who was involved in making these plans, what influenced Latinx high school students as they consider different college and career opportunities, and how these plans changed over the course of the college acceptance season (i.e. March and April of their senior year of high school).

Research Site

Alvarado High School has a student body with a majority of students of color and students that come from low-income families. There are school-wide efforts to demystify the college application process and the pursuit of higher education. There is an advisory class once a week where seniors focus on graduation and college-related topics, like credits and financial aid, a College Support Center that students can access if they need help with the application process, and a Family University Group for parent/guardians to learn more about what it takes to get their child on a path towards a four-year degree. We currently have a parent/guardian group for Spanish-English Bilingual families, and a separate bilingual graduation ceremony, to help serve our majority-Latinx population.

Alvarado High School operates on a seven period block schedule. This allows for students to retake classes they previously failed and graduate on time as well as pursue a variety of electives. There is also a strong relationship with the local community college, East Bay Community, and students have the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment at both Alvarado High School and East Bay Community while they are high school students. More than half of the graduating seniors in recent years have qualified as A-G prepared (i.e. eligible to apply to the

CSU and UC schools) and approximately half of our students are enrolled in at least one AP class.

Data was collected from students in a single period of a senior level English Language Arts class during Spring semester 2019. Students that voluntarily participated in whole class surveys and interviews were compensated with extra credit. Additional data was collected through the online gradebook platform and from the most recent WASC Self-Study Report that Alvarado High School submitted.

Focal Students

Focal students were selected based on their willingness to participate in interviews, their status as prospective first-generation college students, and their ethnic background as Latinx. The five focal students that were chosen included two male students and three female students. It should be noted that all three female participants are members of the Queer community, although this was unintentional and sexual orientation was not a factor used in determining who would be a focal student.

Pseudonym	Status as prospective first-generation or continuing-generation college student	Ethnicity
Juan	First-generation	Latino
Lorenzo	First-generation(one parent - some community college)	Latino
Maria	First-generation	Latina
Paula	First-generation (one parent - some community college)	Latina/White
Raquel	First-generation (one parent - some community college)	Latina

Juan. Juan was a Latino student whose parents immigrated to the United States from El Salvador. He has extended family in the Bay Area as well as in El Salvador. Juan was a very social student and a class clown. From the beginning of the year he engaged me with his humor and quickly the class had several inside jokes regarding our class and me as their teacher. During the second semester new inside jokes were added to our repertoire, including an ongoing joke about what White people eat (i.e. bland food) based on the thrown-together lunches I typically packed myself and ate in my later periods of the day. Juan typically turned in work, but rarely worked maintained focus in class. Instead, he often would be found walking around, socializing with different groups within the class and engaging in practical jokes with several of the other male students in class. When asked to focus on his work and return to his table he would settle down at a table and then begin socializing more quietly. He openly and unabashedly gave his input on lessons and tried to make people laugh or to engage others, sometimes the whole class, in a rich, albeit off topic, discussion.

Juan's parents immigrated from El Salvador. His father attended school up to and including second grade. His mother attended high school. For the purpose of my research I considered Juan a prospective first-generation college student. Juan planned to attend a local community college and possibly transfer to a four-year college to major in Business.

Lorenzo. Lorenzo was a Latino student who was typically fairly quiet, but socialized with a few people in class at his table. When called on to join in a discussion or answer a question, he was likely to answer quietly or, sometimes, pass on his turn to talk. He would quietly do work in class and turned most of his work in, although the quality of his work was below that of his group of friends in class and occasionally his classwork seemed rushed. The

curriculum for this English class was focused on expository writing and often the skills we built were connected to their utility in college. He verbalized on several occasions that he was not interested in going to college and, instead, he was interested in pursuing a career as an automotive technician, like his father.

Lorenzo's parents immigrated from Mexico. One parent completed some community college classes and the other parent finished middle school. For the purpose of my research I considered Lorenzo a prospective first-generation college student. Lorenzo considered pursuing vocational training at a local technical school, but planned on attending a local community college to explore his options.

Maria. Maria was a Latina student who was very diligent about doing her work in class and turning in her assignments on time. She participated readily in whole class discussions and while she would socialize at her table it was never at the expense of her work. She typically only socialized with female students in class. Her critical thinking skills were some of the strongest in the class. She often could be found eating her lunch in English/World Languages hallway by herself and would greet me when I passed her during lunch, but always declined my offers to let her eat lunch in my classroom even though others students from her period sometimes ate lunch in my classroom. One of her brothers was in one of my English 2 classes and occasionally she would ask about how he was doing. She had been on the high school's swim team since her freshman year.

Maria's parents immigrated from Mexico and Guatemala. Neither of her parents attended college. One parent attended high school while the other attended elementary school. For the

purpose of my research I considered Maria a prospective first-generation college student. Maria planned to attend a community college in order to complete a two-year degree.

Paula. Paula was a Latina student of mixed Latina and White heritage. Although some of her close female friends were in the same English class, she would often separate herself from them and sit with quiet, male students in order to get her work done. Otherwise, she would sit next to her best friend, another female student of mixed Latina/White heritage who is a prospective continuing-generation college student and member of the Queer community. Her presence and gender expression in class was on the more masculine end of the spectrum. Although she was often distracted by her cell phone and inconsistently focused in class, she put forth great effort on larger assignments, such as essays. She would go out of her way to conference with me in order to make her writing better. She would also solicit feedback after essays had been graded. She had a close friend in class and often they will ask to eat lunch in my classroom.

Paula's mother immigrated from Mexico and her father immigrated from Europe. One of her parent's highest level of education is elementary school while the other parent completed some community college classes. For the purpose of my research I considered Paula a prospective first-generation college student. By the end of the study Paula planned to attend a local community college instead of taking a gap year.

Raquel. Raquel was a Latina student who was a quiet student who often sat by herself. Often she seemed tired and was sometimes off task, but would ultimately turn in more than half of her work, including larger assignments. She often changed her seat to sit with various table

groups where she had classmates who were her friends. She typically helped others during group work and would talk to me privately during class, mostly to explain other students' behavior.

Raquel had one parent who completed some community college classes while the other parent's highest level of education was high school. For the purpose of my research I considered Raquel a prospective first-generation college student. She planned to attend a community college after high school.

Data Collection

Field notes. Field notes were collected mainly during a project at the beginning of the school year that asked students to define what their plans were for life after high school and during the months of February through April when many students were finalizing their college applications and then receiving decision letters. Field notes were also taken during and after class as well as after student interviews. The goal of the field notes were to capture impromptu interactions with students, in class conversations or reactions to the college application season, and what students were making decisions about life after high school as it evolved over the course of March and April.

Surveys. Four surveys were administered during the eight month period. The initial survey used a four point Likert scale, which forced choice between Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree to gauge how students felt about their high school experience, their career and college opportunities, and their perceived ability to apply and have success in higher education. This initial survey also asked students about their plans for career or college after high school. All four surveys collected demographic information about the students. The final survey asked students about whether or not they had applied to at least one four-year

college, what their parents' expectations were about applying to college, whether or not their close friends applied to at least one four-year college, and whether or not their significant other applied to at least one four-year college.

Student interviews. Students who were identified as prospective first-generation college students and Latinx were chosen from a single period of a senior level English Language Arts class. Interview questions revolved around the decision making process, school resources the students' had used, parental pressure and expectations, communication with close friends, communication with significant others, and what plans the students had considered and decided on. The goal of the interviews was to illuminate how Latinx prospective first-generation college students make decisions about career and college opportunities and address challenges, needs, relationships, and goals.

Student performance records. For the five focal students that participated in this study GPA, ranking, and completed units were collected from the online grade book platform that Alvarado High School uses. The goal of this aspect of data collection was to gauge the college readiness of these focal students.

School data. School data from the most recent WASC submission was collected. This data included demographic information, A-G completion rates, graduation rates, and self-reported college plan information from a survey conducted with the graduating class of 2018. This data was collected in order to see school wide trends of college readiness and the college going culture at Alvarado High School.

Data Analysis

The central research question of this study asked “how” decisions were made about life after high school and a qualitative, ethnographic approach was taken to collecting and analyzing data. As a researcher my goal was to understand the decision making process my Latinx students went through in the spring semester of their senior year. I had to contextualize their perceptions of their future or possible self in order to understand how these students were trying to make the best decision they could given their values, opportunities, culture, and the expectations they were trying to live up to.

Perceived barriers. The concept of perceived barriers, that Gibbons and Borders (2010) used to analyze the behaviors and survey data from prospective first-generation college students, was used to analyze considerations that the focal students in this study made in their decision making process.

The survey Gibbons and Border (2010) used to uncover students’ perceived barriers to college, the Perception of Educational Barriers Scale – Revised (PEB-R), included forty-five statements that students could identify as a likely or unlikely barrier and rate the barrier in terms of how hard this barrier would be to overcome. I took these forty-five statements and coded them based on themes that emerged from the statements. The original forty-five statements were found to fall into twelve categories including academic, family, financial, friends, knowledge (of higher education), parents, personal (i.e., emotional like “feeling guilty,” etc), safety, self-esteem, significant other, social, and support network. These twelve categories were then used as codes when reviewing field notes taken during the original focal student interviews and upon reviewing the audio that was recorded during the interviews.

Interview questions and the ethnographic approach to the focal student interviews did not attempt to replicate the PEB-R. Rather, the goal of the ethnographic interviews was to reveal what career or college path students were planning to pursue and how they came to that decision. During the interviews I focused on uncovering considerations that the students had made, which had the greatest parallel to perceived barriers. The considerations focal students made were coded into the twelve categories of perceived barriers and included in the Findings section as a table. The considerations or perceived barriers that were influential to the decision making process were categorized and presented in a way that grouped students' experiences. The categories used to present the information emerged by finding similarities between students. Special attention was paid to illuminating the cultural context, considerations or perceived barriers, and people that were involved in the student's decision making process.

Possible selves. The concept of possible selves, as defined by Markus and Nurius (1986), was used to analyze the focal students' concepts of self in relation to career and college choices and in relation to the expectations of parents, close friends, and significant others. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggested that researchers should recognize "the value of examining motivation not as a generalized disposition or a set of task-specific goals, but as an individualized set of possible selves" (p. 966). They suggest that goals are not represented as abstractions, but as possible selves that individuals can envision. During focal student interviews one of the goals was to establish how the decision making process had unfolded for the individual: who had they consulted, which opportunities had they considered, and which opportunities did they think were possible. Questions about the near future, such as the summer or the upcoming fall semester, were used to uncover which possible selves were motivating the choices students were making

regarding applying to a four-year college, enrolling in a community college, or pursuing full time employment. Students were asked to articulate their goals and explain how these goals had been created in an attempt to uncover which possible selves were aspirational and which ones students feared.

Possible selves are influenced by an individual's context and focal students were asked about factors that would illuminate outside factors playing a role in possible self creation. Close friend, significant other, and parental expectations and responses to student plans were used to see if students' possible selves were aligning with how other people perceived them (i.e., college bound) or what other people wanted for them (i.e., to be financially stable). School performance data, like GPA, and school data was collected in an effort to further contextualize the possible selves and plans that the focal students revealed in their artifacts, interviews, and surveys.

Positionality as Teacher-Researcher

There are several factors that influence how data was collected and interpreted.

First, as a teacher-researcher my personal background influences how I see the world. I attended a small, project-based charter school where there was no tracking or AP classes and there was a strong college-going culture. Every single student at the high school I attended applied to at least one four-year college or university. Although there are many supports in place for students who are considering applying to a four-year college at Alvarado High School, there seems to be an atmosphere of "college for some" and not "college for all" especially in the context of a tracked English class. As a teacher who believes that everyone can continue on to college, I framed skill building in my English classroom in terms of how each skill would be useful in college (e.g., MLA formatting and avoiding plagiarism). To show my students how

much I valued higher education I spoke to my students about my educational background, my status as a graduate student, would answer questions about the college experience, and pinned two pennants, one from UCLA and UC Berkeley, and one foam finger of my alma mater, UCLA.

Second, my identity as a White, female teacher with class rosters of mostly students of color influenced how I navigated the interpersonal relationships between myself and my students. Music is always playing in my classroom and I started incorporating student requests and popular hip hop played on local stations to make my students feel comfortable. Playing popular and local artists was always greeted with acknowledgements from my students, but part of this response was due to the fact that I am seen as an “other” and outside their culture. For example, one of my students asked me if I knew who was playing (which I did) and he responded, “How do you know that?” and another student, in response to playing a Bay Area rapper said, “Ms. Manske’s getting down” and a female senior, in response to playing another local, popular group said, “Ms. Manske, you listen to this? You’re a little ratchet.” As someone who is White and grew up in a predominantly White neighborhood, my cultural background is different from that of my students, which places me as an outsider.

Third, my socioeconomic background, as someone who grew up in a middle class family, impacted the way I navigated a space serving mostly students from low-income households. On several occasions I had students ask me if my family was rich or if I was “wealthy.” This question always surprised me because I wear clothing similar to what other teachers at Alvarado wear and I drive a car that is twenty years old. Regardless of how I believe I present myself, the way I am received by students, i.e., as wealthy, is something that impacts how students may act

around me or how much they are willing to reveal about their family or financial considerations for life after high school.

Fourth, my status as a new teacher at Alvarado High School places me in position of ignorance regarding school culture and institutional knowledge. As a new teacher I stood out as a teacher with a “difficult” class and my students openly compare me to the other English teacher in our cohort and ask me to give them less work. Being a new teacher allowed me to ask authentic interview questions because I truly did not know the answers about how seniors at Alvarado experience their senior year of high school.

Fifth, my age relative to my focal students may have made some students more comfortable with me and willing to relate to me. Most of my students perceived me as young, despite the fact that I am about ten years older than all of them. As someone in my twenties, I am a similar age to some of their older siblings and cousins. With my seniors, who were eager to be recognized as adults themselves, they openly spoke about personal matters with me regarding friendships, significant others, and conversations they had with their parents.

Finally, my position as a teacher of my focal students meant that these students were familiar with me during this research. Students had an entire semester to build a relationship with me before the interviews took place.

Findings

Latinx prospective first-generation college students in this study faced perceived barriers on the road to college and had to grapple with aspirational and feared possible selves. This study found that perceived barriers and possible selves influenced the decision to pursue higher education. Perceived barriers included academic ability, cultural norms, and financial

considerations. Possible selves were informed by input from parents, close friends, and significant others. Parental pressure made feared possible selves seem more possible, while close friends and significant others helped inform students' aspirational possible selves. Furthermore, this study found that the decision to go on to higher education was co-planned with others, namely the people that influenced the creation of possible selves. Despite the fact that attending a four-year college seemed out of reach for these students and some of their initial plans changed, by the end of the study all of the students were planning on attending one of the two local community colleges in the fall following their senior year of high school.

School Data

The majority of students at Alvarado plan to attend some form of higher education after school, with the majority of those students planing on attending a community college. The norm at this high school is to pursue higher education, with only two percent of the class of 2018 reporting that they would delay college to work full time. Furthermore, Latinx students have the second to highest graduation rates and A-G completion at Alvarado, second to Asian students in both categories. From this data it would seem likely that the majority of my focal students and their friends would plan to attend either a two-year or four-year college.

Alvarado gave the seniors (class of 2018) a survey where they indicated their plans for higher education and/or work. They self-reported their plans:

- 33% four-year college or university
- 60% community college
- 3% join the armed services
- 2% full time work

- 1% trade or technical school
- <1% unsure of plans

Graduation Rates - %						
Year	Total	Latino	African American	Asian	White	Filipino
2014	82.1	82.9	85.4	80.7	73.7	84.6
2015	87.9	87.0	86.3	93.6	80.0	92.0
2016	89.8	89.7	85.1	94.3	85.7	100
2017	90.7	91.4	87.9	91.7	91.3	88

A-G Completion - %						
Year	Total	Latino	African American	Asian	White	Filipino
2014	38.3	26.9	43.9	59.3	33.3	50
2015	38.4	33	29.8	54.3	45	41.7
2016	34.8	32.5	20	40	58.3	63.2
2017	54	58	50	62	38	39.4

Perceived Barriers to College.

Perceived barriers identified in this study included academic ability, cultural norms, and financial concerns. These perceived barriers made attending a four-year college seem outside the realm of possibility. The following table illustrates which barrier categories were identified in each of the five focal students based on the analysis of field notes. The twelve categories of barriers included academic, family, financial, friends, knowledge (of higher education), parents, personal (i.e., emotional like "feeling guilty," etc), safety, self-esteem, significant other, social, and support network. The barriers that existed for the majority of my focal students included

academic considerations like grades or being able to get into a four-year college, financial concerns like being able to afford college, student loan debt, or the inability to contribute to the household income or saving money, parental expectations, and the influence of significant others.

Focal Student	Perceived barriers (extrapolated from the PEB-R)
Juan	academic, financial, knowledge, significant other, support network
Lorenzo	academic, financial, significant other
Maria	financial, parents, significant other, support network
Paula	academic, financial, parents, significant other
Raquel	financial, family, parents, personal

Academic ability. Students in this study were faced with a decision to apply or delay applying to a four-year college. The table below shows the GPAs, credits, and class rank of the focal students in this study. All of the focal students ranked in the bottom third of their class and academic ability was pierced barrier for three of the five focal students. Without a competitive GPA or academic profile, these students needed to consider casting a wide net in order to find schools that would accept them into their freshman class. Some of these students voiced having academic struggles in high school and few of them had attempted to take challenging AP courses or to participate in dual-enrollment in the program sponsored by the local community college. Furthermore, all of the focal students performed at average or below-average in the English class which I taught and often they would complain about the work load. Lorenzo and Juan both objected to the work load with jokes about not wanting to go to college (Field notes, March 12, 2019). Having success, or the lack thereof, in difficult high school classes was a perceived

barrier for the focal students because they assumed that college classes would be even more difficult.

	Juan	Lorenzo	Maria	Paula	Raquel
9-12 Weighted GPA	2.018	1.776	1.902	2.694	1.636
10-12 Weighted GPA	2.179	2.114	1.946	2.486	1.897
10-12 Unweighted GPA	2.051	2.057	1.946	2.429	1.872
10-11 Cal-grant GPA	1.73	1.73	1.64	2.38	1.71
AG Weighted GPA	1.816	1.682	1.872	2.617	1.623
Cumulative Credit Hours	249.00	195.00	220.00	255.00	230.00
Class Rank	263 out of 325	270 out of 325	286 out of 325	224 out of 325	293 out of 325

Cultural norms. The focal students in this study were aware of certain cultural norms and were trying to find a path for life after high school that aligned with these expectations of what is considered “normal” in their community.

Living at home. All of my Latinx students expressed an interest in living at home and staying close to home (i.e., not moving away from their community). It is common for adult children to live at home even when those adult children have spouses and children of their own. Juan, after considering my explanation of the stigma against adult children living at home in some communities, told me that not only is living at home normal, it is expected (Juan, interview, March 21, 2019). Moving out of the family home too early could cause undue risk to the adult child moving out. These risks include housing and financial insecurity (e.g. if money is

needed in the future, parents may not willingly help an adult child who does not live at home) and damaging parent-child relationships by being disrespectful (i.e. moving out could be seen as a sign of disrespect or rejecting the family) (Juan, interview, March 21, 2019).

Contributing to the household. Contributing to the household is a priority and my focal students found it important to secure a good-paying job so that they could give back to their families. Raquel kept revisiting the importance of finances when she explained how she had made decisions about what to do after graduating from high school. Her initial plan was to join the Marines, partially because the military provides a dependable income while enlisted.

The focal students with younger siblings often contributed to the household in the form of childcare. This may be a responsibility that will continue in the future, especially if these young adults live at home. Taking care of siblings was not mentioned as a motivating factor to move out, in fact, three out of five of the focal students planned on living at home after graduating high school. Maria, Raquel, and Juan all had childcare responsibilities for younger siblings including helping younger siblings get dressed, driving them to/from school, preparing meals, and helping them with homework. These responsibilities go beyond the responsibility of being a positive role model for younger siblings. This cultural norm took focal students' time and energy, limited resources which would otherwise be dedicated to working part-time, academics, or extracurricular pursuits. All three focal students who engaged in some aspects of childcare found these responsibilities to be important and an expected part of their daily lives. None of them spoke about these responsibilities in a negative way, but instead expressed varying levels of sadness over the idea of leaving the family home in order to pursue higher education.

Financial considerations. All of the focal students in this study perceived finances to be a barrier to going to college. From applying to college, to acquiring and later paying off student loan debt, to putting off full time employment in order to pursue higher education, finances were a paramount concern for these students. Current financial security and future financial security were perceived as a barrier to going to college.

Maria. When asked what responsibilities she had outside of school and if she worked, Maria declared that she was not employed. She seemed exasperated at the process of finding a job. She acknowledged that while her friends and peers all have jobs, she has struggled to get a job offer, despite sending out multiple applications. She told me of how her mother, who held a managerial position at a hotel, secured her an interview at the same hotel. However, when she was being interviewed she told me that she got the sense that it was not going well and, ultimately, she was not hired. She took this story as an opportunity to critique the work environment that she noticed at the hotel. The two people who interviewed her were White and she told me that she noticed that the people working under them were all Latinx and that the managers treated their workers poorly. I asked her if she felt like she was treated unfairly in the interview and she tells me an anecdote of how the majority Latinx workers at this hotel do work that is “not noticed” or acknowledged, despite the fact that they work very hard (Maria, interview, March 25, 2019). Maria’s current financial insecurity was a perceived barrier to going to college, which would take financial resources she did not have.

Maria told me that she wants to join the Marines, but is planning on working for at least a year before going onto higher education in order to save money. When asked if she was planning on starting at a community college to do a two-year degree or to transfer to a four-year college or

university, she said that she was planning on getting a two-year degree. She did not elaborate or indicate any plans to go on to a four-year college.

Paula. Paula, who revealed that she was keeping her choices to herself during our first interview, said that she was planning on working for a year and taking a break from school to save money. After our initial interview she came up to me to ask for my advice on sending a direct message to CrossFit. She wanted to act as a social media influencer for CrossFit and needed to ask them to sponsor a cross country road trip. She explained that her plan was to visit some of the CrossFit gyms around the country and promote community among multiple gyms with a social media campaign. At the time of the initial interview she was considering how she could pay for the road trip. Like Maria, Paula was concerned with immediate financial security and saw finances as a barrier to college. Unlike Maria, Paula had been working part time for several years and could comfortably navigate the process of getting a job. When weighing the options between working full time and having financial independence or going to college and taking on student loan debt, Paula valued working full time over going to college.

Possible Selves and Co-Planning with Others

In addition to considering perceived barriers to college students had to navigate relationships with parents, close friends, and significant others, which influenced the creation of possible selves. Aspirational possible selves, like “successful college student”, were more salient when shared with close friends or encouraged by parents. Feared possible selves, like “financially unstable adult” or “unemployed college graduate with student loan debt”, dissuaded students from applying to a four-year college and may have encouraged students to delay college altogether. Aspirational possible selves like “happily married” may have been contrasted with

feared possible selves like “Ex-boyfriend/girlfriend”, when students considered moving away from home to pursue higher education. Students’ commitment to their significant others makes sense when we consider that future plans are not made in a vacuum and typically our visions of our future include those considerations about the important people in our life.

Possible selves as future college students. The following table shows how the plans of the five focal students changed over the course of eight months. None of the students were considering enrolling in a community college as their first choice at the beginning of the school year. Ultimately, all five focal students ended up enrolling in a local community college by the time data collection ended. At the beginning of the school year the focal students had envisioned future career and vocational paths that would deliver immediate or near-future results in the labor market. Students were concerned with being able to make enough money to afford basic necessities and this translated into a possible self that was employed and financially stable. Students had created aspirational possible selves that were financially stable and able to give back to their families. Because possible selves can represent aspiration or feared outcomes, it was clear that the majority of the focal students had conceptions of possible selves that were financially insecure. Several students spoke of their fear of student loan debt and their skepticism of their ability to pay back their loans even with a bachelor’s degree. This feared possible self may have been motivating their desire to enter the labor market as soon as possible and delay college, perhaps indefinitely.

Focal Student	Plans (first semester of senior year)	Plans (second semester of senior year)	Applied to a four-year college	Considering a four-year college in the future	Plans (April 2018)
Juan	No Data	Vocational Training	No	Yes	Community College
Lorenzo	Vocational Training or Four-Year College	Vocational Training	No	No	Community College
Maria	Work Full Time	Community College	No	No	Community College
Paula	Work Full Time	Gap Year	No	Yes	Community College
Raquel	No Data	Work Full Time	No	Yes	Community College

Possible selves are social insofar as they are affected by factors such as cultural context, role models available to us in the form of friends, family, and community members, and cultural norms. As students were introduced to a variety of paths they could pursue after graduating from high school, conceptions of possible selves diversified. Two focal students who had previously considered working full time were planning, at the time of the initial interviews, to attend community college in order to complete a two-year degree, and to take a gap year in order to travel and explore their options. At the beginning of the spring semester academic counselors had a visible presence in senior level classes. Students were often pulled from class to work with the counselors and all seniors had access to a college/career event on campus where they could explore the opportunities available to them. Despite the fact that not all students at Alvarado plan to apply to a four-year college, the students who are applying to college are highly visible. This is a cultural and contextual factor at Alvarado, which likely influenced the focal students'

conception of possible selves. This is most evident in the plan that all of the focal students settled on: community college. Although applying to a four-year college may have seemed outside the scope of what students perceived as possible, enrolling in a community college was portrayed as a valid college path by supportive counseling staff. Counseling staff helped students through the enrollment process and two local community colleges gave presentations at Alvarado. This gave students the ability to create a possible self as a community college student and, perhaps, a future four-year college student.

Parental pressure. Some Latinx mothers encouraged their children to get an education to increase financial security and independence. My Latino focal students did not mention clear parental expectations and it should be noted that both were considering careers as auto technicians at the time of our initial interviews.

My Latina students who were interested in military paths both had parents that dissuaded them from joining the military. In one case, Raquel's parents pointed out how dangerous a career in the Marines would be. For Maria, her parents, especially her father, believed a career in the Marines, and the military in general, to be an unacceptable path for women.

Raquel. During our interview we discussed which options Raquel was considering after high school, including joining the Marines. However, her parents disapproved of this career path and dissuaded her from pursuing it. Raquel acknowledged that joining the Marines comes with some risks and she explained that her parents did not want her to put herself in harm's way. Respecting her parents wishes was enough to make her change her plans and permanently eliminate this as a career option.

Maria. Maria was considering joining the Marines so that she could have financial stability. She acknowledged the possibility of continuing her education with the support of active duty or veteran benefits. When she discussed this option with her parents, her father strongly disagreed with her and told her that he does not believe that it is an appropriate career path for a woman. The pressure her father placed on her, on top of the cultural norm to respect one's parents, stopped Maria from actively pursuing this option in the near future.

Paula. Paula, who had been keeping her plans to delay college to work private from her parents, had a conversation with her parents shortly after our initial interview. She told them that she planned to go on a road trip over the summer and then work for a year before attending a two-year community college. In response to this proposal, her father said, "That's not a plan" and their dinner conversation turned into an argument (Paula, interview, March 22, 2019). Paula's father told her that she should sign up for community college classes for the fall.

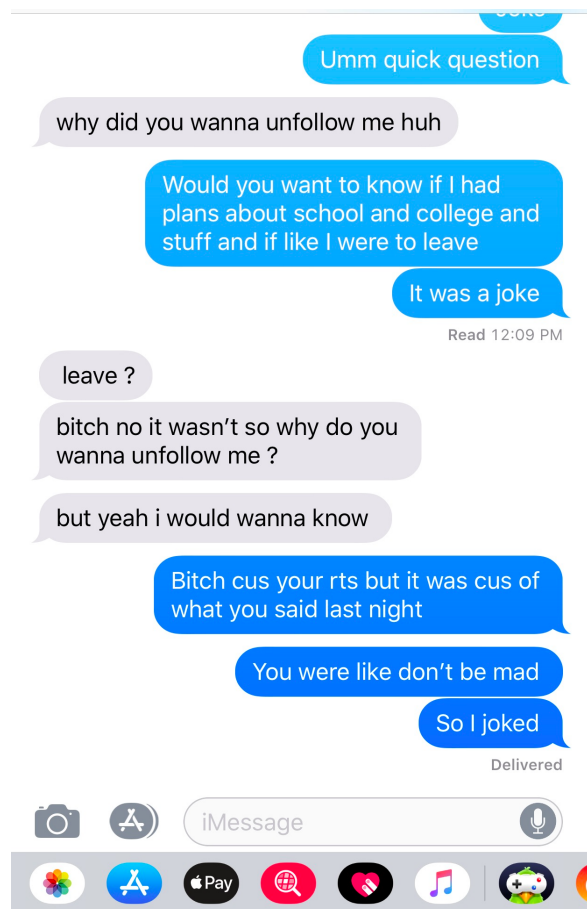
Shortly after this conversation with her father Paula reached out to me and asked for a follow-up interview so that she could give me an update about her plans. Due to parental pressure and expectations, Paula changed her plans from taking a gap year and working full time to enrolling in a local community college with a close friend. Over the course of a few days Paula completely changed her plans due to her father's influence.

Input from close friends and significant others. All of the focal students in this study had discussed or co-planned their futures with their close friends and significant others. Once the focal students in this study had decided to attend a two-year college, they chose which community college based on what their close friend or significant other was planning to attend.

Paula. One of Paula’s closest friends was considering starting at a community college, but had not taken any steps to actualize that plan. After having an argument with her parents Paula spoke with her friend about enrolling in community college. Both decided to enroll in community college classes for the upcoming fall and, specifically, to attend the same community college, a twenty minute drive from their childhood community, instead of the closest community college to Alvarado.

During a joint interview with both Paula and her close friend present, I asked Paula if the young woman she was “talking to” (i.e., unofficially dating) had been involved in the creation of these plans. She told me she had not told her yet, but that she would text her. During this interview the following texts were exchanged while Paula and her significant other were fighting about Paula threatening to unfollow her/break up with her:

Paula	Would you want to know if I had plans about school and college and stuff and if like I were to leave
Her Significant Other	but yeah i would wanna know



Maria. When asked about her close friends and significant other, Maria explained that she was planning on living with her best friend after graduating from high school. At the time of the interview Maria's friend was pregnant. They planned to work complimentary work schedules so that they could support each other with household responsibilities and childcare duties. Maria had offered to work the graveyard shift so that her friend could spend more time with her child. Maria explained that they had been debating who would take which shifts so that they could spread out their time at the apartment. Maria identified this friend as her closest friend at Alvarado High School and, although this person was not a significant other, she was influential in the plans Maria had made and can help explain why Maria had prioritized working and going to college over going to college full time or moving away to go to college.

Raquel. When asked about how her significant other influenced her plans for life after high school, Raquel explained that she had previously been involved in a serious relationship. She explained that they broke up during their junior year of high school, after having dated for several years. Raquel told me that while they were dating they started planning their future together and that the breakup, and the reflection that came in its wake, made her realize that she needed to prioritize herself going forward.

Juan. Juan was extensively co-planning his future with his significant other. During the study he sought me out for a follow-up interview in order to give me an update on his plans. He informed me that he changed his mind about pursuing a career as an auto technician because the training was too expensive. Instead, he and his significant other had chosen to attend a local community college together. (Note: the same community college that Paula and her best friend were planning to attend. It is the next closest community college to Alvarado. The closest community college has a negative stigma attached to it by the students at this high school because it is perceived as an extension of the high school.) When I asked what his significant other had been planning previously, Juan told me that she had been planning on attending a four-year college after high school.

I asked whether, to his knowledge, she had applied to any four-year colleges. He responded, “I don’t think so” (Juan, interview, March 26, 2019). This could indicate a lack of communication or, simply, that they had changed their plans before she had followed through with her initial plans to apply to a four-year college. In a survey given to this class of seniors in early April there was a correlation between students who disagreed with their parents plans for applying to a four-year college and whether or not their significant other was planning on

applying. When a student's decision to apply or not apply to a four-year college was different from what their parent(s) wanted for them, it always aligned with the choice their significant other made for applying/not applying to a four-year college.

Discussion

The goal of equity in higher education is a project that starts at the K-12 level and includes work that must be done in high schools in order to properly meet the needs of all students. Latinx students, in particular, have needs that will not be met with traditional approaches to counseling and teacher support. Culturally responsive support must also incorporate a Latinx student's significant others including close friends and partners into a discussion of planning for life after high school. The dominant culture in the United States imposes a narrative of individualism which runs counter to values within the Latinx community. Planning for the future is a process of co-planning with others.

Perceived Barriers

Perceived barriers to college can influence what decisions Latinx prospective first-generation college students make about their future. Gibbons and Borders (2010) studied the relationship between perceived barriers to going to college and their relationship on self-efficacy in prospective first-generation college students (PFCCS) and found that "PFCCSs in this study reported lower college-going self-efficacy expectations than did their non-PFCCS peers" (Gibbons & Borders, 2010, p. 203). Although several of my focal students began their senior year with the possibility that they may go on to a four-year college or university, all five of my focal students decided, instead, to attend community college in the fall. This may have been due, in part, to perceived barriers, such as the financial burden of student loans.

Leaving home is not just a change of address. Griffith and Rothstein (2009) assert that students may be considering financial consequences to applying to a four-year college outside of their local area and that students make the decision to stay “close to home for convenience, lower travel costs, and for the option of living at home to avoid paying for room and board” (p. 621). Indeed, the focal students in this study were aware of the financial consequences of their decisions. However, what is lacking from Griffith and Rothstein’s assertion is the idea that there are cultural and community reasons for staying close to home or living at home. Young adults may be contributing to their households in the form of childcare, tending to domestic duties within the home, or contributing to the household income. Asking young people to move away from their families may be asking them to act in a way that goes against their cultural values or puts strain on their immediate family.

There may also be cultural considerations related to discrimination that we must consider. If a student is from a historically marginalized community or identity, moving away from their home community may be asking students to put themselves at unknown/unknowable risk while simultaneously removing them from their established support networks. We do not live in a colorblind, post-racism or inclusive society. We cannot ignore the underlying assumption that college campuses are these ascetic, academies on the hill, where being involved in the work of higher education removes students from the structural pressures of institutional racism, culture clashes, and culture shock when students of color enter predominately White, affluent spaces of higher education, especially elite private colleges and universities. As important as it is for institutions of higher education to admit diverse freshman classes, we cannot diminish the large

demand that we are placing on students, especially Latinx students, first-generation college students, and students from low-income families.

Possible Selves

Students' possible selves are created with input they get from others including parents with expectations about their child's future, close friends who are similarly making career and college decisions, and significant others with whom they are trying to build a future.

Co-planning with others and negotiating needs. All of the focal students had to negotiate personal desires with the needs of parents, close friends, and significant others. This study found that parental pressure can directly influence which path students choose to follow. In the case of two of my focal students their parents were able to dissuade them from joining the military, despite financial benefits to being a member of the armed forces. For another focal student, an argument with her father over her tentative plans to take a gap year and delay college in order to work contributed to her decision to enroll at a local community college; she chose which community college with her close friend, who also influenced her decision to choose the second closest community college over the closest community college in their neighborhood. This study also found that when students' actions around applying to a four-year college were counter to parental expectations, those decisions always matched what their significant other had chosen to do. This study found that close friends can influence which community college a student enrolls in and the findings suggest that significant others influence the decision of whether or not a student will apply to a four-year college or university at all.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, namely the scope and length of the study. Five focal students provided a glimpse into how some Latinx prospective first-generation college students make decisions about career and college opportunities. This study took place over the course of eight months with the majority of the data collected in the months of March and April, when students were receiving decision letters from four-year colleges and universities and this was a dominating topic of conversation. It would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study that followed students during all four years of high school to see how possible selves are created and how possible selves, perceived barriers to college, and plans for career and college opportunities evolve over time. Lastly, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews with close friends, significant others, and parents, which this study found to be influential in the decision making process and who were co-planners of the path that focal students ultimately chose.

Conclusion

Prospective first-generation college students are at a disadvantage because their parents do not have the same information, experience, cultural and institutional knowledge that parents of prospective continuing-generation college students have of the application process and of higher education itself.

Schools that expose students to colleges, provide information and support during the entire application process, and go the extra step of communicating with parents/guardians create an environment where parents are brought back into the conversation of applying to college where they were otherwise excluded because they themselves never attended college.

Administrators, counselors, teachers, and athletic coaches need to acknowledge that parents of prospective first-generation future college students enter conversations of what to do

after high school with less information about four-year colleges than their peers who attended college. Both parents and prospective first-generation college students have a right to access information that will help them make a more informed decision about applying to four-year colleges and universities and related decisions like whether to take the ACT or SAT, to seek outside college application consulting/counseling, which colleges to apply to, to start at a two-year or to gain work experience before applying to a four-year college, applying for financial aid, and whether they should apply to a selective four-year college or university. These decisions all have economic consequences for a prospective first-generation college student. From a generational perspective, by not providing these supports and providing knowledge where there is a gap, we reinforce the lack of equity and representation of this population in higher education and we reinforce the status quo that systematically marginalizes communities of immigrants, low-income families, and people of color, and, consequently, we reinforce the de facto social class system in the United States.

Administrators, counselors, teachers, and athletic coaches must also acknowledge that counseling and support for Latinx prospective first-generation college students needs to include parents, close friends, and significant others as co-planners in the decision making process. There are specific cultural norms that Latinx students have, like living at home or contributing to the household income, which run counter to the dominant cultural narrative in the United States that portrays success in college as moving away from home and pursuing a path on one's own.

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