“They’re Badass. You Defy the Odds”:
First Generation Students with Immigrant Parents Communicate About College Experiences

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**Introduction**

By the time I graduate in Spring of 2018, I will be the first person in my family to graduate from a four-year college. Being the first person in my family to pursue a degree at a four-year college is an honor that I wear proudly, but it’s undoubtedly a major responsibility that often comes along with a sense of pressure. As a junior in college, I’m in a major stage in my life right now, but I’m very aware that attending college is an experience that I don’t have in common with my parents. My father was born and raised in Los Angeles, but my mother immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her family when she was a child. My mother’s experiences as an immigrant has had a tremendous impact on my life in more ways than one. She has always emphasized the importance of pursuing higher education, and even though that wasn’t a possibility for her when she was growing up, both of my parents have done everything in their power to make sure that my siblings and I have that chance that wasn’t available to them.

Although I’m attending college for my own personal growth, perhaps more than anything, I want to make my parents proud. I want to show my younger siblings that even if the odds seem stacked against us, we can get a degree and have a meaningful college experience just like any other student. My mother’s identity as an immigrant is absolutely linked to my identity as a first generation college student. I wouldn’t be here without her family’s decision to enter the United States, clinging to their vision of an “American dream” and all that it encompasses, including higher education. Embarking on this research project felt slightly ironic in the beginning, especially now as I sit in my college’s library, writing a paper about first generation college students with immigrant parents- when I myself belong to the very community that I seek
to study. I know that in 2018, when I receive my diploma in Saint Ignatius Church, and move my tassel from right to left, I will have gone where no one in my family has gone before. Picturing graduation day gives me an overwhelming sense of pride and emotion, one that’s difficult to articulate. I may be the first in my family to pave this path towards obtaining a degree at a four-year college, but I want to make sure I’m not the last.

Research has been conducted on first generation college students, yet minimal literature and research has focused on the unique sub-population of first generation college students with immigrant parents. This population needs more attention in academic research because their college experiences deserve to be heard in order to understand where they’re coming from, and what they experience in college. The duality of researching first generation college students with immigrant parents, rather than solely researching students who identify as first generation, lends itself to the revelation of new, unheard, and often overlooked experiences. Researchers need to acknowledge the distinct set of shared experiences and insight that first generation college students with immigrant parents, have to offer.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand how first generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences. At this stage in the research, first generation college students will be generally defined as those who are the first in their family to attend a four-year college or university, meaning that their parents did not attend a four-year institution. In what follows, I provide a literature review on preexisting first generation college student research, explain the methods of my study, describe the findings of my study, and explore communication implications relating to this central phenomenon of first generation college students with immigrant parents.
Literature Review

When conducting research on preexisting data published about first generation college students, I came across articles and sources that primarily focused on the multifaceted issues and challenges that the first generation student population often encounters, as well as the role their families play in their educational pursuits. Preexisting literature I came across mainly focuses on the experiences of first generation college students, without acknowledging those first generation students who have immigrant parents. This literature review exposes the unique set of experiences that first generation students face during their academic career, both from a personal and academic viewpoint. In this literature review we explore three major themes that have emerged from different sources concerning first generation college students, including: (1) Challenges First Generation College Students Encounter (2) Overall Family Influences, & (3) Parent Relationships in First Generation College Students’ lives.

Challenges First Generation College Students Encounter

One main, overarching theme that emerged from the literature, is that first generation students face multiple challenges and obstacles throughout their college career, which sets them apart from their peers. Previous research has shown that the first generation student experience lends itself to a certain set of challenges. Specifically, first generation students are especially at risk of not staying in college, since it is more likely for these students to leave a four-year institution before their second year at the institution, than it is for non-first generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). At the same time, while retention is a relevant risk that first generation students face, these students are much more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree if they start their higher education at a four-year institution, instead of a two-year college (Bui, 2002). Even then, it is important to take into consideration the underlying factors, and often overlooked
areas of concern, that have proven problematic or difficult for this specific population of college students. For starters, most first generation students come from a low socioeconomic background, and it is likely that they identify as ethnic minorities (Bui, 2002). In addition, these students are likely to speak a language other than English at home, and this becomes an even more complex situation when considering intercultural communication that they face in the household setting. When looking at intercultural communication, specifically between immigrants, research shows that interculturality in cultural and linguistic tendencies, is constantly readjusting and formed on a case-by-case basis from the speaker to their addressee. This balancing act of determining an appropriate intercultural response given the context of a conversation, can be applied to first generation students who speak more than one language in their home settings (Bolden, 2014; Bui, 2002).

In addition, first generation students tend to feel less prepared for college, and fear that they’ll fail. Research also shows a discrepancy between these students’ academic goals in comparison to their actual academic achievement later down the road. For example, just over 40.2% of the first generation student participants in one study, expressed their goal of receiving a bachelor’s degree, however only 29.5% of those students actually earned a bachelor’s degree once they were contacted years later (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). These various challenges that stand in the way of first generation students are noteworthy and further emphasize the importance of collecting data from these students.

**Overall Family Influences**

Previous research also provides insight into how first generation students’ families influence their lives, both personally and academically. The connection and relationships between first generation students and their relatives can be a source of support for many students,
as well as a friendly reminder of where they came from (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). One major source of familial conflict for these students is when their personal academic goals somehow conflict with their family’s collective goals for them (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). First generation students often feel a strong need to assume various responsibilities, and live up to their family’s expectations, and make their family proud. Some first generation students want to bring honor to their family based on the college/institution they attend. First generation students’ family members may emphasize the importance of attending college so that they can support themselves financially on their own in the future, but at the same time, other first generation students feel a voluntary responsibility to financially contribute to their family while they are in school (Wang, 2014; Sy, Romero 2014).

Parent Relationships

While family influences as a whole are worth analyzing in the context of first generation student’s lives, more specifically, the relationship between these students and their parents is an especially interesting area to study. Parents greatly influence first generation students’ lives and perceptions about college from an early age, and parents may communicate important messages to their children about family life in relation to their academic lives. Often times first generation students are told by their parents, or by their college mentors, that it is crucial to incorporate their family into their academic life. These sentiments are echoed through statements that remind first generation students that parents and family are always there to support students throughout their college career, and that it is also important to put family first, but at the same time students should not become preoccupied or worried about their family/parents while they’re busy working and attending school (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). It can be helpful for students to keep in mind where they came from, who they are, and what their families are sacrificing so that they can
attend college (Wang, 2012). There is a positive relationship between first generation students’ college aspirations and their parents’ involvement in their postsecondary lives (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Although this research is insightful and provides an in-depth view into the lives of first generation students, there are gaps in this research since it doesn’t take into consideration sub-communities of first generation students, such as those who have immigrant parents. Researchers and communication scholars need to acknowledge this community of first generation students with immigrant parents, in order to strengthen preexisting literature, and provide a voice to this marginalized community of students on college campuses. The sources featured in this literature review, as well as the bulk of research centered on first generation students, fails to address the experiences of first generation students with immigrant parents, and as a result, preexisting research is severely limited. My study aims to fill these gaps by proposing the following research question: How do first generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences?

Research from my study can benefit first generation college students with immigrant parents since it can show them the shared experiences they may have in common with their other first generation peers. In addition, this research is beneficial for parents of first generation college students, for university administration and faculty, such as admissions offices and recruiters, administration concerned with retention rates, and campus wide resources and offices that focus on student achievement and success. Particularly with university administration and campus offices/student resources, this research can help highlight some of the main areas of concern and improvement in order for these offices to provide effective assistance to these students.
Method

This study was conducted using the framework of qualitative research methods, in order to use in-depth interviews as a means of exploring and understanding how first generation college students with immigrant parents, communicate about their college experiences. Denzin (2010) describes qualitative research, saying “we study the way people represent their experiences to themselves and to others” (p. 10). Using qualitative methods, I specifically decided to take a phenomenological approach. Within this phenomenological study, I aimed to learn more about the shared experiences between these types of first generation college students.

Data Collection

Participants.

In this study, I interviewed six individuals who identify as first generation college students, with immigrant parents. Five of the participants are currently in college, while one participant is a recent graduate. These students attend universities in Northern California. Two participants identify as male, and the other four participants identify as female. In this case, it just so happened that five of the six participants I interviewed, explained that both their mothers and fathers were immigrants to the United States. Participants identified with a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. For anonymity purposes, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants. Each participant stated their parents’ countries of origin: Amber’s parents immigrated from the Philippines, Emma’s parents immigrated from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Isabel’s parents are from Mexico and El Salvador, Leo’s parents are from China, Nate’s parents are from Russia and Ukraine, and Yolanda’s mother is from Vietnam.

Procedures.
Participants were found through convenience sampling. This study occurred in a private four-year university in Northern California during the Fall semester of 2016. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants one-on-one, in a neutral and private setting. A semi-structured interview guide was used in all interviews. Questions were open-ended, and the semi-structured interview guide provided the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, and introduce new questions during the interviews. An example of some of the questions asked included: “What does it mean to you knowing you’re the first in your family to go to college, and considering that your parents immigrated to this country?” and “When does your identity as a first generation college student become obvious to you?” Five of the interviews occurred in person, while one interview occurred via FaceTime. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour.

Throughout the research process, informed consent procedures were clearly followed, explained, and disclosed to the participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. Data gathered from the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Overall, the data collection led to 51 pages of double-spaced, loose transcriptions.

Data Analysis

Data collected from this study was analyzed through the thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis process included summarizing data through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Significant statements were then found within the data by using insight, intuition, and impression (Dey, 1955). Finally, these significant statements were coded and grouped into large, overarching themes that encompassed the statements’ meaning. The coding process led to three main communication themes that emerged from the data: (1) Mentorship and Guidance; (2) Challenges and Obligations; and (3) Parental Influences in Students’ Education.

Analysis
Mentorship and Guidance

When reviewing data from this study, each participant mentioned the significance of mentorship and guidance in their college careers, yet as first generation college students, most participants lacked the very mentorship they deemed as important. The theme of mentorship and guidance was addressed in a variety of ways in these interviews. It was overwhelmingly clear that these students longed for a mentor, someone who has gone through the college process and could provide insight and assistance, since these students are among the first in their family to venture out into college and usually don’t have anyone in their immediate family to show them the ropes. Participants could not find mentorship through their parents, and often times found themselves as the educator in which they educated their parents about the college process and what to expect in a higher education setting. Many participants said that their parents couldn’t directly help them, didn’t know how to help, or didn’t fully understand what they were going through to the point where they could provide mentorship. These students do not have a template to follow, or someone to tell them what to expect. As a result, those who did not have older siblings in college and were the very first in their families to attend college, had to seek mentorship elsewhere whether it be independently, through friends on campus, or through campus resources.

Uncertainty in not knowing what to do next in specific college situations due to lack of familial mentorship, was consistent throughout the interviews. Isabel mentioned the difficulty in not being able to turn to her family for help in certain instances:

It’s hard to relate your own college experiences with your family because they don’t have those experiences and it is kind of hard to get specific advice but there’s just different things, like whenever you don’t know how to do something in college, or like freshman
year problems- how do I register for classes? Do that? I kind of had to do all that by myself and learn it myself because my parents never really did that and that’s just a thing that first generation college students go through as a whole. In applying to colleges, same thing it’s like I have to do my applications by myself and learn all that. My parents wanted to help but it’s like I kind of took it on myself to do it myself, but I was able to get outside help from outside sources like counselors and stuff. But you can’t really rely all on your parents for help with things specific to college.

Isabel’s insight shows the difficulty in having to face technical college tasks alone with little to no guidance from family members, not because her family didn’t want to help, but because they didn’t know how to help since they’ve never been in that situation themselves. Several other participants echoed this sentiment and listed independence as a common character trait among first generation college students with immigrant parents. This independence stems from these students having to rely on themselves to seek help on various tasks or situations they encounter in college.

Leo also discussed how he gained independence through having to navigate the college education system without the help of his parents. He mentioned that as early as high school, he found himself in situations where he had to take the helm and figure out what he needed to do in order to get into college, since his parents weren’t fully aware themselves. For example, he stated:

Being a first generation college student, you’re initiating a lot of things for yourself and while you have your parents’ financial support, they don’t know how to give you emotional support or guidance in the right direction, or telling you what’s right or what’s wrong in your college education. So it’s a lot of independence, initiating things to start on
your own if you want to get somewhere and also sharing more responsibility with your parents.

As demonstrated in this participant’s experience, a common message of independence emerged from the data, as participants took it upon themselves to navigate the higher education system. Also, most of the participants were the oldest sibling in their families and therefore did not have a sibling who had gone to college yet.

Mentorship was also addressed when participants explained that now, as college students, they find themselves helping their younger siblings and providing the guidance that they wish they could’ve had when applying, enrolling, and attending college. Isabel and Emma in particular, went in depth and explained that they have now assumed this mentor/role model position to their younger siblings. Isabel explained that when she thinks of responsibilities as a first generation student, the two main things that come up include being a role model to her younger relatives and getting good grades. Isabel’s younger cousins often consult her for advice regarding higher education, and her sister is currently applying to college. During the college application process, Isabel helped her sister with her personal statement, figuring out which schools she’s interested in, and determining what she might major in. Isabel noted the importance of including her family in her college experiences as much as possible, and as the first in her family to go to college, she feels pressured to be a good role model to her younger relatives. She added, “it’s an honor because obviously I want all of my younger cousins and siblings to go to college and get the experience too, so it’s nice that I can be a role model and show them I can do it, and they can do it too.” Although Isabel herself didn’t have anyone in her family to look up to for guidance while in college, she acknowledges that she has now become a mentor to her younger relatives who are aspiring first generation college students themselves.
They’re now looking to her for help and advice, and Isabel understands the importance of mentorship and guidance since it’s something she wish she had in the collegiate setting.

Emma also discussed her relationship with her younger sister, and said that by sharing her positive college experiences with her sister, she hopes that she can encourage and motivate her sister to attend college too. Emma’s older brother went to college but did not graduate within a four-year time frame, and now they’ll be graduating college just one semester apart from each other. As a result, Emma didn’t find complete mentorship from her older brother. “Seeing that this is what I went through and I wish my brother could’ve done these things for me, when I was going through all of that, now I can do it for my sister,” she said. Emma stated that she has very maternal instincts when it comes to her younger sister. She tries to keep her sister engaged in the fun and positive experiences she’s had at college, in hopes that this will motivate her to branch out and pursue college. While participants explained the importance of mentorship, as well as their lack of familial mentorship when they embarked on their college journeys, some of them are now providing that mentorship to their younger relatives.

**Challenges and Obligations**

Throughout all of the interviews, data revealed key challenges that this population faces during their college careers. Financial stress, financial obligations, and challenging socioeconomic status was consistently expressed by participants. The financial burden of attending college, and all of the subsequent financial worries, emerged as the most common challenge and concern. Filling out FAFSA every year was a challenge for participants, due to lack of mentorship and no template to follow as previously stated, but it also posed as a financial worry. Participants explained having to balance between schoolwork and part-time jobs needed to help ease the financial burden on their family, and help cover the costs of things ranging from
rent to food. Steep tuition prices are also a concern among participants, such as Amber. In addition to addressing the financial challenges that arise during college, Amber also mentioned her family’s push for her to secure a high-paying job once she graduates. Immersed in financial pressure presently during her college career, and anticipating financial worries upon graduation through repayment of loans she had to take out to fund her education, finances are Amber’s main concern. This was not an isolated occurrence but a common theme throughout each interview with each participant. Paying bills, sending money back to relatives, taking on part-time jobs whenever they aren’t in class, and finding ways to fund their educational pursuits, was a consistent concern. Yolanda provided insight into her average workday, and financial obligations during her college years.

I had like 10, 11, 12 hour days. So I had to work, make money, send money back home for either my mom or my little brother because he was in school and he was struggling and he was young too in high school, so he needed me and that’s what I did. I pretty much paid bills revolving every single month for them, and it takes a toll. It’s like you want to be focused on your studies but on the other hand you get so tired going to work, going to classes the next day that you just don’t have the mental focus or concentration to really obtain those high grades. My grades weren’t mediocre but it wasn’t to the point where I myself could say I was really proud of them. So that was that huge disadvantage because I was overworking myself and my family needed money.

Yolanda’s excerpt is a prime example of the financial hardships that first generation college students endure, and how they’re forced to react and help ease the financial pain during their time in school. Finding a way to balance schoolwork with work schedules is another
obstacle that these students face. When placed in this type of situation, students find that they have to prioritize their schedule to fit around their other obligations outside of the classroom.

Other challenges included familial pressure, meaning the pressure to succeed and validate their immigrant parents’ sacrifices. Many participants feel pressure to do well in school and push themselves towards success in order to show their family that they appreciate the sacrifices they’ve made so that they could attend college. Whether that means focusing on schoolwork and obtaining good grades, in the back of the participants’ minds they seemed to remember their family’s sacrifices for them, which was a main motivator to keep going. Nate mentioned his personal experience of familial pressure to succeed taking into consideration his parents’ sacrifices and work through the years. “I always feel like I have to be on top of my game. And maybe it’s because I know that my parents worked so hard to get to where they were when I was born and how they basically raised me until now,” he said. Not only are these students in school for their own personal gain and academic goals, but they acknowledge that they wouldn’t be in college without the sacrifices their relatives have made for them. Like Nate mentions, this serves as a reminder in the back of his mind as he goes through his day-to-day activities. One participant even mentioned that when she’s feeling tired after a long day of studying and would like to take a nap, she musters the strength to stay awake so that she can do more with her time, adding that she’d feel guilty if she avoided schoolwork.

In discussing the challenges and obligations the participants felt, the conversation diverged slightly into comparing the different experiences between first generation college students with immigrant parents versus non-first generation students who can trace their family history in America. All participants acknowledged that their identities as first generation college students with immigrant parents, differentiated them from their other peers in some way. These
differences ranged from these students having a more global and cultural perspective than their peers, devoting their time to other tasks and obligations than their peers, encountering different struggles throughout college, different access to resources, and different sources of motivation. Emma mentioned the occasional frustration she felt through exchanges with some of her peers.

A lot of the people that are surrounding you are very privileged and sometimes act very entitled to what it is that they have. And it’s frustrating to be around that and want to tell them like “hey, you don’t understand how lucky you are and you’re just blowing off school. You don’t understand how much your parents are paying for your education.” So it’s hard to not judge people when you’re in this situation. But then you remind yourself, hey, everyone comes from different backgrounds and they start with different circumstances and things in their lives. So whenever they meet an obstacle, whatever they’re equipped with mentally and physically is different, and so in their minds that paper or midterm is like the worst thing in their world because mentally they aren’t equipped with the things we are equipped with. That’s their worst enemy and for us finances are worse, so it’s hard not to judge them.

In some exchanges with peers, students like Emma become aware of their different background and upbringing, and how this contributes to different college experiences than their peers. Realizing these differences can lead to a sense of frustration, but overall this realization reinforces the idea that first generation college students with immigrant parents have unique college experiences and stories that deserve to be heard. Emma’s insight references various challenges that first generation college students face, such as financial worries. She also mentions the different playing fields that these students are on, simply because of their different backgrounds. Also, they have different ideas of what designates a “problem,” which isn’t to say
that non-first generation students don’t experience financial troubles as well, but for first
generation college students these challenges and frustrations are extremely prevalent throughout
their entire educational career. Leo also talked about slight differences these students might
encounter. He mentioned that first generation students who have part-time jobs are usually
saving up to pay for rent or cover a portion of their tuition, whereas their peers might not have
that financial obligation and can spend their money elsewhere. He also noted that non-first
generation students have mentorship and guidance unlike first generation students. Nate, on the
other hand, addressed the distinction between first generation college students with immigrant
parents in comparison to first generation students established in America.

You can have a student who’s from America saying “yeah I grew up here and my parents
didn’t go to college so when I started preparing for college it was kind of like I went in
head first.” And then you can have a student on the other side who is with immigrant
parents and they say, “I agree with you, but it’s a little bit different because my parents
didn’t grow up, they didn’t even understand what college really was until they got here.”

Here, Nate addresses how a first generation student with immigrant parents has slightly
different experiences from first generation students whose families have a long history in
America. Not only do students like Nate enter college head first with little to no familial
guidance, but since his parents are immigrants, they had to learn about college in the U.S. and all
that it entails. This sets his schooling experience apart from first generation students alone. In
both subtle and large ways, their stories and experiences are distinctly different from their non-
first generation peers, and even from their first generation peers who do not have immigrant
parents. All of these messages reveal that throughout college, first generation students with
immigrant parents experience different challenges that make them aware of how their student identity differentiates them from their peers.

**Parental Influences in Students’ Education**

In relation to this study’s research question, participants explained their immigrant parents’ influence and involvement in their college education, and noted how frequently they talk to their parents about college life. Participants’ relationships with their parents was a main topic of discussion. Overall, most participants acknowledged how their parents’ identities as immigrants factored into their identities as first generation college students. Their parents’ experiences as immigrants manifested itself into their educational lives in different ways. Nate went as far back as elementary school, and explained how he became aware of his parents’ culture during elementary “cultural days.” He remembers his mom showing up to class and preparing Russian food. These cultural influences that presented themselves early on in Nate’s childhood, still impact him today in college. He attributes his multicultural, global perspective on contemporary world issues, to his parents’ experiences as immigrants. For Nate, this global perspective he has acquired from his parents’ immigration history, has impacted class discussions he has in college.

Isabel, on the other hand, said that as the first in her family to go to a four-year college, she finds herself interested in taking classes that relate to her family’s culture and countries of origin. “We’re starting a new journey in our lineage in the U.S., so I always have that constant reminder in my head. We’re living in this country now, but we weren’t, like our family wasn’t before,” she said. Now in her third year of college, Isabel felt inclined to take Latin American classes in order to learn more about the places her parents are from. In addition, she also joined her college’s Latina cultural club and student organization. Participants addressed their
connection to their parents’ culture and how their parents’ immigration experiences have influenced their academic pursuits. Participants communicated about the clear link between their college experiences and their parents’ immigration experiences.

When discussing how often participants communicate with their parents about their college life and experiences, frequency in communication varied across the board. Amber and Leo admitted to rarely speaking to their parents about college, while Emma and Yolanda said almost never. Isabel said she speaks to her parents about her college life once a day, and Nate said twice a week. When participants speak to their parents about their college experiences, different topics of discussion arise. Most participants only spoke to their parents about their general day-to-day experiences, such as how they’re doing in school and if they’re alright. Other common topics of discussion with parents included finances, grades, and status of part-time jobs. Only a couple of participants said they talk to their parents about specific things they’re learning in class or assignments they’re working on.

In addition to revealing parents’ influences in the participants’ education, and frequency in parental communication, data also revealed how participants communicate about their parents’ immigration. Participants talked about their parents’ ties to their culture and how their parents’ immigration influences their goals as first generation students. Yolanda acknowledged the hardships her mother endured in her six attempts to escape Vietnam during the fall of Saigon.

She came here with the purpose of trying to have a better life for her children and the truth is that she has provided. The hardships, adversities that she’s gone through in this country and having her children grow and earn an education that she would have never been able to, to her that’s something of an accomplishment… I thank her for providing me the opportunity despite all the arguments, the heartaches, and the adversity.
When reflecting on their parents’ immigration experiences, participants like Yolanda feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the hardships her mother endured in order to provide her with opportunities that weren’t available to her mother in Vietnam. Data shows that many of the participants’ parents associated the United States with opportunity and the potential for success. Similarly, Leo expressed his thanks to his parents in our discussion.

My parents wanted what’s best for me and this is what they saw as the solution and they went through with it. Dropping everything behind, everything about your home, everything that’s familiar to you about your home country you’re leaving behind for your child and that’s why I’m so determined to do well in college because I want to make sure that hey, your sacrifices weren’t for nothing and I want to prove that to you by getting a degree and getting a good job too and finally being able to repay them for all that they’ve given me.

Leo’s personal account emphasizes his appreciation of the sacrifices his parents made for him. His parents’ journey as immigrants was fueled by the hope and promise that in the United States, their children could thrive and succeed. Taking into consideration the sacrifices they made for him, and the personal challenges they encountered when leaving their home countries, Leo now wants to repay his parents by obtaining his degree and securing a job. This further shows how first generation college students with immigrant parents have specific collegiate goals and post-graduation goals, that are formed with their parents’ immigration experiences in mind. Overall, the participants explained their parents’ influence in their academic lives, their average communicative exchanges about college, and how their parents’ immigration connects to their identities and experiences as first generation college students.

Discussion
Implications

Research from this study reveals how first generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about the various aspects of their college experiences. It is crucial to learn more about these types of students’ college experiences and challenges they encounter in order to hear their stories and ensure that their concerns are being addressed in higher education settings. As the data revealed, first generation college students communicated about the independence, and self-reliance they resort to when navigating through college, since this is an experience no one in their family has ever had. Communication scholars and qualitative researchers alike, need to pursue this area of study. By doing this, they can make sure that this community of students knows that their stories are being heard, and that they truly aren’t alone in their college careers. University administration also needs to explore these students’ stories and take measures to help combat the fixable issues they encounter, and provide a campus climate that encourages first generation college students to grow and prosper despite setbacks.

The results and findings of this research reveal the personalized, multifaceted, and intricate experiences that first generation college students with immigrant parents face when they embark on their college journeys. This study shows how we can raise awareness about the unique experiences of various types of college students, given their personal, familial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. By using this research as a tool to create positive change through direct, and tangible responses, these students can be encouraged to come forward and communicate about their experiences.

Limitations
Although this study provides insight on first generation college students with immigrant parents, and the corresponding communication implications, this study still has many limitations which need to be addressed. Data was obtained through convenience sampling and one-on-one interviews with six individuals from October to November. This time frame is a limitation on its own. Given more time to collect data and interview more participants could strengthen this study and provide even more perspectives. In addition, most of the participants were female, which didn’t allow for equal representation of genders. All participants went to college in Northern California, within an urban city set in a very liberal and progressive setting. This study could be strengthened by interviewing a variety of students from different geographic locations, and places with different sociopolitical ideas. Future researchers can keep this study’s limitations in mind as they expand upon the results presented here.

**Future Directions**

College students’ experiences do not exist in a vacuum. Every students’ college experience is different. When conducting research on how first generation college students communicate about their experiences, researchers should be aware that this is a massive area for future research. As first generation college students with immigrant parents show, there are many sub-communities within the general population of college students. Researchers can expand upon this study by branching off from this topic in new directions. Possible future areas of study include interviewing students at different educational stages, meaning interviewing incoming first generation freshmen, current college students, and alumni. These different points in students’ education could lend itself to the revelation of different experiences, and it would be an interesting comparative study to see how people communicate about being a first generation student prior to attending college, during, and afterwards. This study can also be expanded upon
by interviewing both first generation college students, and their immigrant parents. While this study focused on how first generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences, future researchers can also take the alternative route in their studies. For example, future researchers can interview immigrant parents with children in college, and explore these parents’ stories of immigration and how they communicated about college to their children. Such a future study would expand on this study by bringing the other party into the conversation. These are just some possible routes future researchers can take when expanding upon this topic.

**Conclusion**

Whenever I find myself overwhelmed by my various responsibilities, and academic obligations, I find solace in envisioning graduation day. I’m privileged to be where I am. I’m acutely aware of the sacrifices both of my parents have made and continue to make, in order for me to pursue my college education. Personally, it’s an honor and blessing to attend college, especially considering that this is an experience denied to so many. When writing this paper, I was reminded of the culmination of efforts and sacrifices that my parents made in order for me to have this shot at graduating from college. In 2018 when I receive my diploma, it will be like my entire family is receiving a diploma with me. This is a collective effort, something that couldn’t have happened without my relatives’ support, and without my mother immigrating into this country.

This study sought to understand how first generation college students with immigrant parents communicate about their college experiences. I used qualitative methods and the phenomenological approach to explore shared collegiate experiences among this population of students. Research in this study introduced three major themes: (1) Mentorship and Guidance;
(2) Challenges and Obligations; and (3) Parental Influences in Students’ Education. Participants in this study revealed personal experiences they’ve encountered in college, addressed their identities as first generation students, and explained how their parents’ identities as immigrants has influenced their lives. Overall these participants have shown how they communicate about the phenomenon of their experiences as first generation college students with immigrant parents.
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