SINGLE PARENTS, RACE, AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUCCESS:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Viviana Bravo, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "Single Parents, Race, and Community College Success: A Qualitative Study," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.
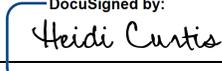
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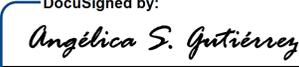
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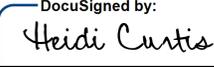
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DEDICATION

My doctoral journey is dedicated to my mother, Sandra, for always believing I could do anything and everything. You've pushed me to be a better person, and your journey has been the inspiration for this study. I'm lucky to have you in my life, continuously telling me that I was born to make a difference, and I'm going to do amazing things with my life. Here's to the next step in making that amazing difference.

ABSTRACT

Single parents are enrolling in postsecondary institutions at an increasing rate; however, their graduation rate remains low. Single-parent, community college students who drop out tend to do so due to the various barriers they encounter. Research concerning single parents and their viewpoints of community colleges' student services is lacking. This qualitative study explores single-parent students' perceptions about community colleges' student support services with regard to their marital status, race or ethnicity, and gender. Themes from focus group and one-on-one interviews found single parents to perceive services as solely focusing on traditional students and not on single parents' needs. Additionally, Hispanic/Latinx, single-parent, community college students viewed the services poorly compared to African American students and White participants due to negative experiences with staff and an overall lack of support from their institutions. Single mothers and single fathers differed slightly in perception, with single-mother, community college students focusing on how the current services do not meet their needs as single parents. Single fathers, alternatively, had a lack of demand for the services. Community colleges can help support single-parent students' education by increasing the promotion of services that apply to nontraditional students as well as having flexible modes of learning for single parents to access. Institutions can also train their faculty and staff to be more accommodating towards single-parent, community college students in order to promote students' success.

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Chapter I

Introduction

When society thinks of a college student, the traditional, ideal college student comes to mind. The traditional student typically involves a young adult straight out of high school with no dependents, still living with their parents, and not employed (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). However, many nontraditional college students, who do not fit the traditional stereotype, are looking to expand their education to improve their daily lives (Beeler, 2016; Ekowo, 2015; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Nontraditional students have at least one of the following characteristics: being independent, having dependents, delaying their postsecondary education after high school, and/or working while attending school (Ekowo, 2015; Radford et al., 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) reported that in 2011-12, approximately 74% of undergraduates had a nontraditional characteristic. In the 2015-16 school year, there were roughly 181,182 community college students in California. This was comprised of 20% of the undergraduate parent population, with 37% of them being single mothers (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019b; Wine et al., 2018). However, in the United States, only about 8% of single-mother, undergraduate students attained an associate or bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling in college, compared to 49% of other women who were not mothers but earned their degree (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Wine et al., 2018).

Single-parent students are enrolling in community colleges at an increasing rate, but their completion rate remains low (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Single-parent, community college students have difficulty completing their degrees due to the demands of parenthood, their daily job, and other responsibilities (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Some students feel courses are too

complicated, while others need to drop out because of familial obligations, work, or lack of financial stability (Smith, 2019a, 2019d). So far, experts have found that there have been numerous measures taken in order to retain all community college students, including single parents, such as through constant contact as well as having the institution offer child care, tutoring, and financial resources (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Wine et al., 2018). But the literature lacks information regarding single-parent, community college students' perception of community colleges' services that can help improve completion rates. As a result, this study will research single-parent, community college students' perceptions of community college services in relation to race or ethnicity and any distinct differences between single mothers and single fathers regarding their use of services and their effectiveness of those services. Race is based on the standards of race defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, while a person's ethnicity is comprised of cultural beliefs, language, and ancestry (Bryce, 2022; Stanford University, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The racial backgrounds of Caucasian/White and African American/Black, as well as the ethnicity of Hispanic/Latinx, will be used throughout this study. This research is essential for community colleges and other postsecondary institutions to improve single parents' degree attainment and completion rate (Beeler, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Wine et al., 2018).

Statement of Problem

Single parents are at risk of not completing their degrees at higher education institutions, highlighted by the low completion rate compared to traditional students (Beeler, 2016; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Single parents are usually financially independent, hard-working, and low-income earners (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Due to single-parent, community college students managing their hectic lives and the aforementioned

characteristics, they tend to drop out of college (Dunst, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). By dropping out, they then experience other problems, such as financial issues where their socioeconomic status remains below those who would have otherwise attained a college degree (Dunst, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). When single-parent, community college students have financial difficulties, such as delaying or halting an increase in their lifetime earnings by dropping out of college, they begin to use government assistance, which can significantly affect the economy (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

There have been measures to help community college students succeed, such as implementing student support services; however, there is insufficient information on how the services affect single parents (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Additionally, there is little research concerning single-parent, community college students' perspectives of the student support services offered at community colleges, as well as how the services influence their education based on the students' gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity. Most of the literature studying single parents that are also college students focuses on quantitative data and how institutions need to implement child care (Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). There are few qualitative studies focusing on this issue, and those previously researched only focused on how institutions promoted success with services (Beeler, 2016; CCSE, 2005; Dunst, 2019; Hook, 2015). But they did not focus on the single-parent, community college students' perceptions of the support services based on race or ethnicity, and gender differences.

This study examined single-parent, community college students across the United States to analyze the impact between student support services and single parents in accordance with

their gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity. This research's main goals were to determine if there were any differences in perception regarding the gender of the student and their race or ethnicity.

Background

Single-parent, community college students have complicated lives as they balance family, work, and school (Wesley, 2018). They are considered an at-risk population due to their demanding schedules and low-income socioeconomic status, which can lead to the risk of dropping out of college (Beeler, 2016; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Wesley, 2018). Moreover, when utilizing Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory, several factors emerged for single-parent, community college students to create academic success and educational persistence. Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) theory focuses on making students achieve scholarly persistence rather than retention in higher education. Persistence is an action combined with motivation for a student to attain their degree. At the same time, retention overlooks motivation and focuses on having consistent student enrollment (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Therefore, a need for observation on how student support services help create persistence among single-parent, community college students justifies a qualitative approach to discover these students' perceptions. Previous literature has noted that single parents are neglected compared to the traditional college student in terms of services (Graham & Bassett, 2012; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). However, previous research emphasized the importance of single-parent, community college students achieving a college degree to help the economy save millions of dollars in unused government assistance while also increasing tax revenue from miscellaneous spending from extra income (Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a).

A multitude of studies have been conducted on single mothers and their college experiences, whether at a community college or university, and the importance of a college education on the student's family, as well as the nation (CCSSE, 2005; Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Student support services have been observed on their usefulness to the traditional college student and how the services can either promote academic success or be underutilized (Breen et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2020; Pierce, 2015; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Smith, 2019a). Some research focused on child care as a student support service and its influence on single-mother, college or university students, although these studies are few in number (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Despite the current scope of the literature, a gap exists in connection with single-parent, community college students' perspectives of the student support services offered and whether they are impactful with regard to persistence. Additionally, there is minimal information on the perspectives regarding not just marital status but also the students' race or ethnicity, and gender, specifically in single mothers versus single fathers.

Research Questions

This research aims to fill the gap in the literature and add to existing research revolving around student support services and single-parent, community college students based on gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity. The information collected and analyzed can contribute to community colleges implementing student support services targeted toward single parents or improving their existing services to satisfy the wants and needs of single-parent, community college students (Breen et al., 2015; Pierce, 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Smith, 2019a). To

discover how community college services affect single parents, the following research questions provided proper guidance within this investigation:

1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?

2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity?

3. What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single mothers and single fathers?

Description of Terms

It is essential to keep a core understanding of common terms within previous literature surrounding student support services and single-parent, community college students since some terms may be similar to others. Creswell (2019) stressed the importance of clarifying terms to avoid any misconceptions. The following terms are used in this study:

Academic Counseling. Students receive transcript evaluations and program guidance to help achieve their academic and/or professional goals (Pierce, 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

At-risk students. Unprepared students who are at risk of dropping out of school, who may also be students of color, first-generation, or nontraditional learners (CCSSE, 2005; Sakai et al., 2014; Sallee & Cox, 2019).

Biculturalism. People blend or move smoothly between cultures (McGee, 2016).

Child care. Children of single-parent, college students are cared for while the single parent attends class (CCSSE, 2005; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018).

Code-switching. People change languages or styles of speech to confirm or deny stereotypes or blend in with present circumstances (McGee, 2016).

Ethnicity. Groups of people who share a common ancestry, culture, or language; usually based on customs, religion, and beliefs (Stanford University, n.d.).

Financial aid. In addition to federal financial aid, students can also receive financial assistance, which consists of scholarships, private grants, loans, work-study, opportunity drawing incentives, and fee waivers (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Hinton-Smith, 2016; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014).

Flexible schedule. Instructors have relaxed policies on assignments, due dates, attendance, etc., to accommodate the student's schedule (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018).

Gender. Although some confuse this term with "sex," gender is broader, focusing on the expression of an individual rather than biology (Bailey & Graves, 2016).

Generation. Refers to family members who are in the same descent stage, such as first-generation applying to those foreign-born, while the second generation requires one foreign-born parent and third and up need two U.S.-born parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Government aid. Used interchangeably with public assistance, received from the county/state welfare department that can help low-income individuals obtain a steady income while finding work or gaining an education (Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016).

Institutional barriers. These are attendance barriers derived from a higher educational institution, such as the school's location, the schedule of classes, and enrollment policies (Saar et al., 2014; Wesley, 2018).

Marital status. Includes never married, married, widowed, and divorced individuals. "Single" is a combination of those who have never married, are widowed, or divorced (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Medicaid. Government program which offers health care to families and individuals with low incomes (Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019).

Microaggressions. Minorities receive subtle forms of intentional or unintentional racism through "hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (Naynaha, 2016, p. 200; Lewis, 2016; McGee, 2016).

Online learning. Students can access courses through the internet, usually using Google Classroom, Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, and other online platforms (Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

Orientation. Students learn valuable information regarding their courses, services, and the institution before and upon enrollment (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Milman et al., 2015).

Persistence. An action that focuses on students' motivation to attain their degree or certificate (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Public assistance. Used interchangeably with government aid and includes welfare, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is also known as food stamps (Dunst, 2019).

Race. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines the standards on race through a minimum of five categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Originally race was identified based on biology, however, there is much variation, and it is now based on self-identification (Bryce, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Resource center. Access to instructional and professional resources, tutoring, and staff assistance in completing government forms, college applications, and other documents (Breen et al., 2015; Sakai et al., 2014).

Retention. Institutions encourage students to remain in their programs, disregarding motivation (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Single father. A male figure that cares for child-age dependents and is unmarried (Miller, 2010).

Single mother. A female figure that cares for child-age dependents and is unmarried (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018).

Single parents. Consists of single mothers or single fathers that are raising a child and usually have one or more of the following characteristics: low income, being a minority, and/or having a lack of education (Albert, 2018; Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Shipe et al., 2022). However, some single parents do not have any of the aforementioned characteristics.

Student support services. Valuable services that students utilize to help improve their academic performance and overcome different barriers that may conflict with their persistence (Milman et al., 2015; Sakai et al., 2014).

Significance of the Study

Throughout the recent literature, experts agree that single-parent, community college students need to be included in the conversation about what needs are not being satisfied for these students to succeed (Breen et al., 2015; Pierce, 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Single parents are constantly being excluded from community colleges' policy changes, rules, and regulations (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Community colleges

focus on the traditional college student, but the NCES proclaims that the nontraditional undergraduate student is a growing population, which includes single parents (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Ekowo, 2015; Radford et al., 2015). Thus far, studies that focus on single-parent, community college students fail to include either a more in-depth analysis of the single parent's gender, race or ethnicity, or their connection to student support services (Beeler, 2016; Breen et al., 2015; Cerven, 2013; Dunst, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Experts have studied various institutions and students to understand how student support services have impacted their educational journey, such as with academics, grade point average, and graduation (Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milman et al., 2015; Sakai et al., 2014; Tehan, 2006). Some studies have focused on technical colleges, while others have focused on community colleges and universities (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Smith, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d; Tehan, 2006). Most of the studies have emphasized the need for child care and government aid programs for single parents, but studies fail to include single-parent, community college students' perceptions of these programs through qualitative means (Crumb, 2021; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Also, studies neglect to include information on how institutional services promote success with single-parent, community college students concerning their race or ethnicity, and if they are single mothers or single fathers.

Through this research study, institutions can discover which student support services are the most effective, which can help them focus on these services to ensure student persistence and high satisfaction levels to prevent dropouts and increase completion rates (Milman et al., 2015). By doing so, institutions are helping the individual student as well as the economy through college attainment benefits, such as an increase in lifetime earnings and tax revenue to boost the

economy through miscellaneous spending (Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a).

Overview of Research Methods

This study utilized qualitative methods, which was chosen since common themes can emerge from participants experiencing the same phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). This qualitative study sought to identify the effectiveness of student support services through the eyes of single-parent, community college students concerning their race or ethnicity, gender, and marital status. There is limited research thus far regarding this issue since most of the literature focused on child care specifically and single parents in general rather than the differences between fathers and mothers as well as the diversity of single parents.

The participants engaged in focus group and one-on-one interviews, in which single-parent, community college students were separated based on their race or ethnicity to be further divided based on gender during analysis. Focus group and one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to analyze participants through open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Students varied in age and how long they attended their current institution. Focus group participants were asked questions about whether they thought their ethnicity and/or race influenced whether they used certain services versus others, as well as if the services met their needs as a single parent or were more targeted toward the traditional college student. The data was coded and clustered to extract common themes between the races or ethnicity, and genders. The following chapters will subsequently explain in further detail previous literature about student support services and single parents, as well as the findings reflected from the data collection.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Being a single parent is one of the many characteristics that represent the nontraditional college student (Ekowo, 2015; Radford et al., 2015). To provide for their families and earn a well-paying job, single parents are enrolling in college at an increasing rate (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). However, collegial institutions remain stagnant in their outreach and overall policy change to include these students when making decisions regarding academics and support services (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Therefore, single-parent, community college students have difficulties earning their degree due to various demands, such as child care and their work schedule, that combat their academic success, which could be supported through student support services (Crumb, 2021; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Furthermore, those student support services that currently exist are not evaluated in consideration of single-parent, community college students as well as their race or ethnicity and gender. By analyzing Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory and the characteristics of single parents, while regarding their race or ethnicity, and gender, community colleges can understand the impact student support services have on single-parent, community college students' success.

Race and ethnicity are two separate terms as defined previously in Chapter I. Race is based on the "Standards of Race" created by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and is usually determined by self-identification, although in the past was determined based on appearance (Bryce, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Alternatively, people's ethnicities are established based on ancestry, language, customs, culture, religion, and/or beliefs (Stanford

University, n.d.).   Race throughout this study is focused on people who identify as Caucasian/White, non-Latinx, and/or African American/Black. Ethnicity, however, focused on Hispanics/Latinxs, regardless of race, although most likely White.

Current State of Affairs for Single-parent, Community College Students

Single-parent, community college students have multiple characteristics that portray them as an at-risk population, such as being of low income and having a demanding schedule (Albert, 2018; Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Shipe et al., 2022; Wesley, 2018). They tend to be overwhelmed with the demands of parenthood, education, as well as their job to support their family's livelihood (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Specifically, single mothers tend to be of low income, and they usually lack a high school diploma and financial independence (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Crumb, 2021; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). Single parents also tend to be over the age of 24, and they attend college part-time (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013). These characteristics and challenges affect single-parent, community college students' graduation rate, especially single mothers, which label them as at risk of dropping out. The literature focused more on single mothers than single fathers; therefore, it is unclear but can be assumed that single fathers are also at risk (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). According to Reichlin Cruse et al. (2019a), single mothers are also at risk because they typically do not graduate with a degree within six years of enrolling, with just an average of eight percent showing completion.

Currently, single-parent, community college students have low graduation rates, which can be due to demanding work schedules, with the rest of their time spent on parenting (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Pizzolato et al., 2017). These obstacles can cause single

parents to have difficulty maintaining consecutive enrollment by taking a semester off periodically or delaying their degree completion (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019).

Single-parent, community college students also tend to be of minority backgrounds and are usually first-generation college students (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Pizzolato et al., 2017). In 2015-16, single mothers within higher education were mainly composed of Black and Native American ethnicity, with Black single mothers being 31% of undergraduate women who are single mothers, and Native American single mothers representing 23% (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Single-mother, college students typically lack an understanding of how the college system works regarding financial aid, enrollment, time management, and how to balance work and their academics (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Experts and other researchers have expressed that government policy change and institutional support can help alleviate stress from single parents for them to be able to achieve community college success (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Perry et al., 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). One example of a government policy change includes financial incentives targeted toward single parents, such as the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program, which promotes college parent students' success through child care (Dunst, 2019; Gault & Zeisler, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Additionally, there is institutional support which includes changing the school's culture to be more acceptable and flexible of single-parent, community college students' schedules, as well as providing their own financial incentives apart from federal and state programs, such as scholarships and resources for students to access from the

community in order to promote students' persistence (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010).

Institutions and government aid programs have coordinated to support single parents in achieving their academic goals, including attaining a degree (Hinton-Smith, 2016). According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), there has been a smaller percentage of single mothers with an associate or bachelor's degree compared to women without children and married mothers (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018). In 2016, 24% of single mothers, age 25 and older, had a degree, compared to 27% of all women with no children and 37% of married mothers (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018). However, the government aid programs have been poorly marketed in order for single parents to easily access these programs (Cerven, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). Additionally, rather than single parents being able to achieve scholarships or grants, loans have been highly prevalent in single parents' education, primarily due to the increase in undergraduate enrollment and easy access to obtain student loans (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Graham & Bassett, 2012). Furthermore, if students wish to work more in order to have a more stable livelihood and increase their income, this can jeopardize their government aid, which then results in loss of public benefits, which can affect their education through financial assistance (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016).

Recommendations to increase single-parent, community college students' completion have been to increase program assistance via government aid as well as from higher education institutions; however, there remains a gap in the different programs' effectiveness (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Some of the recommendations include having a contextualized learning program, counseling services, and

access to emergency funds for single parents to utilize as needed (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Also, experts recommend child care, which is increasingly becoming rare in two- and four-year colleges (Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Graham & Bassett, 2012).

Theoretical Framework of Tinto's Persistence Theory

Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory communicates how students seek to persist, rather than retain, in their higher education enrollment. Persistence and retention evolve from either the institution's or student's perspective, but they each contain a different motivation in attaining either. For instance, persistence revolves around the action of a student's motivation to complete their degree. At the same time, retention is an institution's objective to have as many students remain or complete their programs, ignoring motivation altogether (Tinto, 2016, 2017). Tinto (1993, 2016, 2017) believed persistence is a type of motivation and action, and institutions need to adopt students' perspectives to increase their chances of persistence. If institutions focus on retention rather than persistence, they will continue to lose students (Tinto, 2016). The three types of experiences that create a student's persistence to which community colleges need to focus are self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the belief that the curriculum learned has value (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Self-efficacy involves an individual's belief that they can succeed at a particular task or situation (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). According to Tinto (2016), self-efficacy needs to be learned and is not a part of an individual's DNA at birth. When students enter a higher educational institution, they either have the self-efficacy to succeed or lack this trait, which can affect their college success (Tinto, 1993, 2016). If a student does not have self-efficacy, the student tends to become discouraged and eventually withdraw when confronting difficulties, leading to limited

success (Tinto, 2016, 2017). Throughout their college experience, there is the possibility that students' self-efficacy can dwindle, resulting in a weakened sense of confidence and a heightened sense of failure from their educational experiences (Stuart et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975, 2016, 2017). To learn self-efficacy, students need to understand that they can succeed during their early college years, which is usually developed through support services (Tinto, 2016, 2017). Tinto (1993, 2016, 2017) recommends institutions implement an early-warning system to assist students when struggling with their motivation to persist. Institutions should also communicate to students that struggling with their academics is normal for first-year students while providing them with support resources (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

In addition to self-efficacy is a sense of belonging. Students need to view themselves as part of a community containing their peers, faculty, and staff with similar interests or experiences (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016). Through a sense of belonging, students can feel a part of a group to find support despite any challenges they may face (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2017). Students need to feel important and belong to their community (Dwyer, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). Usually, students can form this sense through their chosen major, taking classes of similar interests, joining extracurricular activities, and participating in college experiences (Dwyer, 2017; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). Institutions can create a sense of belonging by welcoming the different cultures and types of students and ensuring an inclusive network for each student to belong (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). Additionally, instructors can execute cooperative and problem-based learning for students to interact with their peers (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Lastly is the curriculum's perceived value, in which students appreciate the material and subject matter taught throughout their classes (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Value is created through the subject matter's relevance to the student (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Perceiving the

subject matter's quality justifies the student's time and effort to commit to its mastery (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). However, if the curriculum lacks value to a student and is of low quality, the student's persistence can decline and ultimately diminish learning (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Tinto (1993, 2016, 2017) expresses that the curriculum's perceived value varies by student. Not all students view certain subjects in the same light; therefore, institutions must take active measures, such as ensuring the student is enrolled in their appropriate field of interest as well as find their classes inclusive of different experiences to meet different variations of perceived curriculum value (Tinto, 2016, 2017).

Although the characteristics mentioned above blend to create a formula for persistence, other matters can influence students' persistence even if they lack a sense of belonging or have low self-efficacy (Tinto, 2016). External factors to succeed in college include family pressure or outside pressure, such as a requirement from their employer (Stuart et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975, 2016). But Tinto (1975, 2016) asserts by succeeding in college, despite external influencers, a degree's achievement is not as worthy as intrinsic persistence.

Some theorists perceived Tinto's theory as flawed (Dwyer, 2017; Stuart et al., 2014). There are other means for students to develop a sense of belonging and improved self-efficacy, such as through academic advisement, internships, and teaching methods (Dwyer, 2017; Stuart et al., 2014). Additionally, challengers of Tinto's theory believe students' persistence fades due to the lack of social integration rather than academic means (Dwyer, 2017; Stuart et al., 2014). But these arguments fall short since Tinto (1975, 2016, 2017) does not describe a sole way to achieve self-efficacy or a sense of belonging as there are multiple ways to accomplish those factors. And also, if persistence fades from lack of social integration, then the sense of belonging attribute, a

component of Tinto's (1975, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory, is deemed the most important,

since it affects academics as well as social integration.

Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory demonstrates single parent students'

pathways to success, as seen in Figure 1. If colleges' student support services can implement

Tinto's theory within their programs and resources, single-parent, community college students'

perception of the service can vary greatly compared to ignoring the theory altogether. For

instance, if a college implements a tutoring program and each year gathers survey data from all

students alike, including single parents, this can create a sense of belonging amongst its users. If

single-parent, community college students experience the three characteristics that make up

Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory, they are more likely to continue their education

at that institution. These characteristics can alter single-parent, community college students'

perception of the student support services negatively or positively.

Figure 1

Tinto's Model of Retention

Departure/Dropout						
Goals/Commitments						
Academic Integration			Social Integration			
Performance	Professional interactions		Sense of belonging			
Intentions	Goals	External factors	Institutional culture	Social interactions		
Family	Individual characteristics	Experience	Family	Individual characteristics	Experience	

Note. (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017.)

Student support services should develop and implement a similar model of retention inspired by Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Model of Retention, as seen in Figure 1. A student persists or drops out depending on their relation to academic integration and social integration, which follows Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory of self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the belief that the curriculum learned has value. The fifth and sixth rows in Figure 1 are the influencers of the Persistence Theory's characteristics. If a student has a majority of the boxes within each integration, then they are more likely to fulfill their goals and commitments. However, missing those options can lead to dropouts. Student support services can evaluate these integrations to provide the aforementioned characteristics to all students, including single parents, to ensure academic success and graduation. By evaluating single-parent, community college students' perception of the student support services, it can be learned where the gaps lie with regard to self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, or curriculum value (if appropriate).

Higher Education Obstacles

Earning a higher educational degree is necessary for financial security (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Single mothers without a college degree have lower lifetime earnings, worse health outcomes, and are in jeopardy of not earning postsecondary credentials (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). Single mothers face multiple challenges in returning to and succeeding in school (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). By overcoming obstacles in degree attainment, financial insecurity, and various time demands, single mothers can invest in their own education that eventually benefits themselves, their families, and society (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

Degree Attainment

Single mothers are more likely to have an associate's degree than a bachelor's degree (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Thirty percent of single mothers in the United States have an associate's degree or higher (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Then, there are the single mothers who started their college journey but never finished, resulting in 28% of single mothers having some college education, which is more than all other women (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Single mothers have difficulty attaining their degrees for various reasons (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019). Some of the reasons revolve around time constraints, institutional barriers, or lack of self-efficacy, as noted in Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory (Dwyer, 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Wesley, 2018). Although single-parent, community college students have access to different aid programs, there is still a low graduation rate in this population (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Pizzolato et al., 2017). Single-parent, community college students may not be engaging with the aid programs due to a lack of understanding or information on utilizing such programs (Cerven, 2013). Institutions and policymakers have received recommendations through numerous studies on assisting single parents in completing their college programs, but still, poor graduation rates remain (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Pizzolato et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a).

Financial Insecurity

For single parents to obtain a degree, they need to be able to afford their education along with additional expenses from their daily lives (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Those who face financial challenges have a lower chance of graduating than those who are financially stable (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Single mothers in college usually have the

characteristic of being low income, with approximately 63% living at or below the federal

poverty level, which is approximately $26,500 for a family of four across the U.S. in 2021

(Crumb, 2021; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020). Therefore, they most likely will need to apply

for financial aid and possibly pay out-of-pocket costs to cover any additional expenses they may

accrue during their community college journey (Kruvelis et al., 2017).

      Any unmet need student parents face, such as academic assistance, child care, and

especially living expenses, can vary by race or ethnicity, and the type of institution attended

(Kruvelis et al., 2017). Women of color had an average of $600 more unmet need than White

women (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Additionally, those that attended a for-profit school also had a

greater unmet need (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Single-parent, community college students are

financially disadvantaged due to having one income source for their families (Beeler, 2016;

Dunst, 2019). Plus, most single parents attending college earn less than $10,000 a year (Dunst,

2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Because of their socioeconomic status, single parent

students' first choice is to enroll in a community college where tuition and fees are lower than

other institutions (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis

et al., 2017). But as tuition rises, as well as other fees, in addition to their parenting

responsibilities and bills, college becomes an afterthought (Hinton-Smith, 2016). It becomes

more difficult for single-parent, community college students to balance work, school, and family

in relation to finances (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016;

Kruvelis et al., 2017). Furthermore, single-parent, community college students typically believe

if they increase their income, they will be able to attend college and be financially stable (Dunst,

2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). They become more focused on

raising their immediate wealth rather than their long-term wealth, which would increase with a degree, therefore neglecting their college courses (Hinton-Smith, 2016).

However, if single-parent, community college students put more effort into their college courses, their poverty rates would decline, specifically among single mothers (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Single mothers from 2013 to 2017 showed a significant decrease in poverty with more education obtained (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019). For instance, single mothers with less than a high school diploma had a 62% poverty rate compared to an 8% poverty rate for single mothers who had earned a graduate degree (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). There were similar results for all women, but single mothers had the most significant difference, at 54% (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a).

Time Demands

Caring for their children and their home can hinder a single-parent, community college student's academics since he or she usually works a full-time job (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Single mothers spend an average of nine hours per day on housework and caregiving (Gault & Zeisler, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). They need time to sleep, exercise, and make time for their classes (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). This proves difficult when the responsibilities of a household fall on one person's shoulders (Kruvelis et al., 2017 Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). Sixty-two percent of single mother students work twenty or more hours every week at their jobs, and half of this percentage are enrolled in school full-time or a mixture of full-and part-time, depending on the academic term (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Pursuing higher education and working full-time can affect a single-parent, community college student's grade

point average, time to achieve a degree, degree attainment, and overall persistence (Kruvelis et al., 2017).

Researchers also stated single-parent, community college students have more mental health issues than their traditional college student counterparts, which can also result in low completion rates (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). It was found that single parents had mental health issues from a significant relationship between mental health, socioeconomic status, and age (Pujar et al., 2018). Being a full-time parent, working, and attending school is highly stressful, affecting single-parent, community college students more than the ideal college student who has their parents and usually no other full-time commitments (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Due to finances, family, and various relationship difficulties, single-parent, community college students were more inclined to attempt suicide than other students (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Mental health issues can impact a student's time demands as well since they may have more difficulty performing in their classes as well as managing their other responsibilities (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Institutions and policymakers need to consider single-parent, community college students' demanding schedules and financial aid obstacles when implementing successful services to increase persistence (Kruvelis et al., 2017).

Single Parents' Financial Investments and Outcomes

Although single-parent, community college students have difficulty attaining their degrees, the benefits prove valuable for the individual student and the economy as a whole (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Studies found single parents who attended college and/or attained a degree had significantly higher lifetime earnings than those who only had a high school diploma or less (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Single mothers who attained an associate's degree averaged to gain

approximately $250,000 more over their lifetime than just a high school diploma, totaling around

$750,000, as seen in Figure 2 (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Figure 2

Single Mother's Lifetime Earnings Increase Significantly as a Result of Postsecondary

Educational Attainment

Individual Single Mothers' Expected Total Lifetime Earnings & Gains as a Result of Educational Attainment, Compared with Earnings for Single Mothers with a High School Diploma
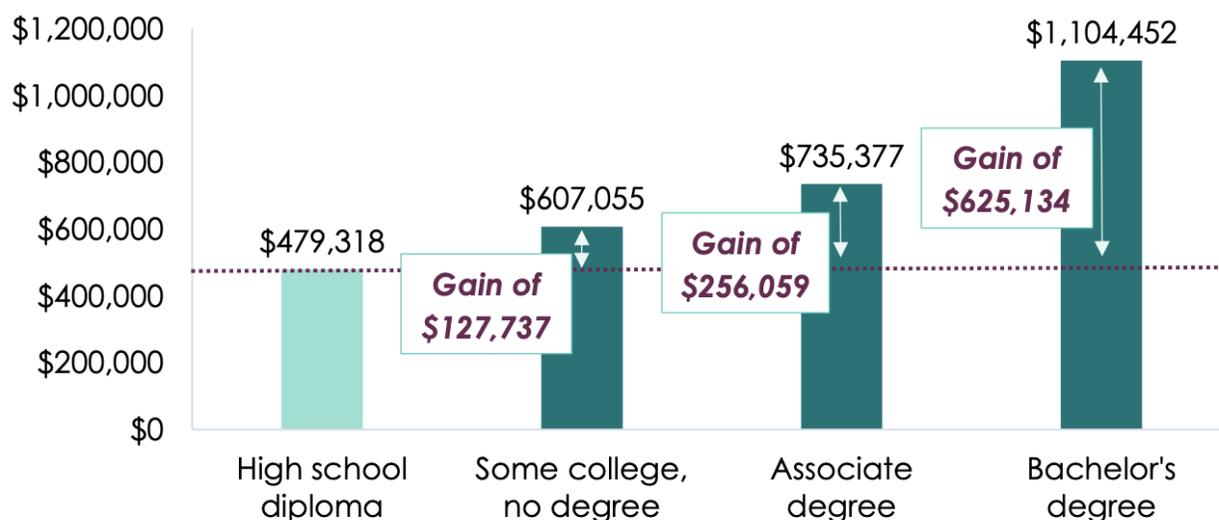
Note. Single Mother's Lifetime Earnings Increase Significantly as a Result of Postsecondary Educational Attainment from *Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: National and State Estimate of the Costs and Benefits of Single Mothers' Educational Attainment to Individuals, Families, and Society, IWPR #R600, by* Reichlin Cruse et al. (2019a). Retrieved from http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/R600_Investing-in-Single-Moms-National.pdf Permission for use granted (see Appendix D).

With these added earnings, the return on their college investment is estimated to be about

$12.32 for every dollar spent on their education (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). For example,

Reichlin Cruse et al. (2019a) show that single mothers spend an average of $14,200 for an

associate's degree across the United States. Once they have graduated, single mothers receive

around $13 back for every dollar they spent originally (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Single-mother, college graduates with an associate's or bachelor's degree are less likely to need government assistance or remain in poverty (Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019). Because of a single-mother, college graduate's increase in lifetime earnings, she will also pay more in taxes than those with just a high school diploma (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Single-mother, college graduates would also use their extra earnings on miscellaneous spending, resulting in increased sales tax revenue (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b).

Additionally, single mothers with a college degree have less need for public assistance through programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps (Beeler, 2016; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019; Dunst, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). This is due to their increased lifetime earnings as well as their ability to acquire a better job, therefore disqualifying them for additional assistance (California Community Colleges, 2019; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Pizzolato et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). The result can be substantial, with millions saved and earned throughout the nation, as seen in Table 1 (Duke-Benfield & Sponsler, 2019; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Table 1

Economic Influence from Single Mothers with a College Education in the United States

	Some college	**Associate's degree**	**Bachelor's degree**
Additional Taxes Contributed	$35,000	$71,400	$220,000
Public Assistance Savings	$10,000	$25,600	$40,000

Note. (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

By understanding single-parent, community college students and their perspectives concerning student services, institutions can strive to make student support services changes to retain this demographic of students, which can help reduce the number of single parents currently at poverty level (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020).

Support Services

Single-parent, community college students who complete their college programs have attributed their success to their support system and institutional structures (Cerven, 2013; Perry et al., 2020). Their support system typically involved their significant others, including family, friends, and peers (Cerven, 2013). The institutional structures included support services and public benefits, including welfare, Section 8 Housing, and Medicaid (Cerven, 2013; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Hinton-Smith, 2016).

In previous literature, researchers have found students typically find academic services to be more important than campus services (CCSSE, 2005; Milman et al., 2015; Sakai et al., 2014). These types of services and supports can help boost single-parent, community college students' persistence to prevent attrition (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Some of these services can help the single-parent, community college student persist through advisement, counseling, orientation, online learning, tutoring, online resources, access to technology, and administration and support staff contacts (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milman et al., 2015; Perry et al., 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). However, researchers also state that institutions offer many different types of support services (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). Unfortunately, not all institutions provide the same kinds of student support services due to a lack of funding and staff resources (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). Furthermore, institutions do not focus heavily on single

parents but rather on parents as a whole; therefore, neglecting single-parent, community college students' specific needs compared to their married counterparts (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Furthermore, institutions are cutting the available programs for single-parent, community college students to utilize, such as child-care centers and on-campus family housing, without considering the students' perspectives (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012).

Single Parents' Children and Child care

A valuable student support service is child care. In recent literature, studies have discussed child care being very important to students that are also parents (Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). With child care, student parents felt it was not adequate enough to make their educational journey a success (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). College campuses were not taking into account their students' children (Beeler, 2016; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Usually, single mothers tended to experience long waitlists to attain daycare spots for their children. They wasted finances, time, and subsequent frustration with college child care, making the student feel as if the institution was ignoring the student parents (Beeler, 2016). Plus, the ease of access to obtain child care has been declining due to institutions eliminating or reducing child-care services overall (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012).

Even though institutions neglected student parents' children, when parents decided to return to school, many were motivated by their children (CCSSE, 2005; Cerven, 2013; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Their motivations aligned with the idea if they were able to achieve a degree, they would be perceived as a positive role model to their children, but the student parents' schedules

created obstacles to achieve that perception (CCSSE, 2005; Cerven, 2013; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Additionally, they wanted to create a better life for their family overall (CCSSE, 2005; Cerven, 2013; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019). Student parents found with an education, they would be able to earn a higher salary that would be able to financially support their family enough in the future (Cerven, 2013; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). To succeed, experts agreed student parents needed to have a consistent routine and schedule that allowed them to balance their work-life along with family and school, not specifying single parents (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). However, without consistent child care, their schedules cannot be consistent.

Another aspect to include in causing parents to have difficulty accessing child care is cost (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Sometimes child care was too expensive, or since child care was offered throughout campus, other students, faculty, and staff reserved a spot for their child, resulting in limited spots left for single-parent, community college students (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Therefore, within the literature, experts found student parents wanted additional support services other than just child care (Cerven, 2013; Dunst, 2019; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). For instance, Lindsay & Gillum (2018) recommended that institutions have child-friendly classrooms and have more flexibility within current child care facilities. Additionally, other suggestions were to have a sliding-scale fee structure for child care or on-campus activities families could utilize after school (Dunst, 2019). Studies also expressed the benefit of on-campus housing for families, which could help alleviate the lack of child care, but institutions tended to focus their activities and benefits toward the ideal traditional student who attends college right out of high school and has no dependents (Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett,

2012). Nevertheless, child care utilization increased student parents' probability of degree attainment by 21% for a community college in New York, showing the effectiveness of child care on college graduation (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Tutoring and Resource Centers

Another type of student support service is tutoring as well as educational resource centers (Breen et al., 2015; Sakai et al., 2014). Researchers and experts state these centers are not always utilized to the fullest potential (Breen et al., 2015; Perry et al., 2020). The centers typically serve as a way for a student to gain access to additional resources, with one resource being tutoring (Breen et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2014). In the literature, there were few studies demonstrating tutoring and its effects on single-parent, community college students. However, experts agreed tutoring use varied amongst college students, in general, depending on their age (Breen et al., 2015). Additionally, with single-parent, community college students, tutoring services and the parents' schedules clashed due to institutional barriers, such as when the service was available, as well as child-care issues (Coronel, 2020; Wahl, 2018). Some parents felt bringing their child to the tutoring service and resource centers was ill-advised, which prevented them from attending the service altogether since they viewed their child as a distraction during the tutoring session (Coronel, 2020; Wahl, 2018).

Other than tutoring, resource centers, also known as success centers, typically help students find a job, create a résumé, practice interview skills, submit government documents, and more. However, there is little information on single-parent, community college students' use of resource centers in the literature, although it is grouped as a recommendation for institutions to implement (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Sasser, 2020). Most colleges and universities find it difficult to advertise these resources to the traditional student to help them take advantage of

the center (Breen et al., 2015). The reasons varied when asked why the common college student did not use tutoring or the resource center. Some students expressed they did not feel they needed those services, while others thought the way the centers were organized, such as with their hours and the center's size, could not accommodate their needs sufficiently (Breen et al., 2015). Some studies recommend these types of centers ask students for suggestions on what they wanted the centers to provide (Breen et al., 2015; Sasser, 2020).

Guidance

Another popular student support service is college and career advisement and counseling. Researchers have stated the traditional college student needs advisement and counseling to achieve success within their education (Brown et al., 2020; CCSSE, 2005; Graham & Bassett, 2012; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Some studies discovered which aspects of advisement and counseling were the most important to college students to achieve persistence and motivation in a college setting, which were having the guidance and resources available to them through an actual person (CCSSE, 2005; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). There was a lack of recent information focusing on single-parent, community college students and their access to counseling and advisement (Tehan, 2006). But studies on single mothers, in general, discussed how single mothers would benefit from having access to advisors and counselors to overcome any barriers these students encountered (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Tehan, 2006). Furthermore, studies recommended counseling and advisement as an additional service that should be implemented and targeted toward the single parent demographic to help push single-parent, community college students to degree attainment (Beeler, 2016; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018).

Advisement.

Previous research determined that college advising experiences help increase retention and persistence (Brown et al., 2020; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).   In particular, one study analyzed the differences between online students, a cohort, and in-person, on-campus students and their perceptions of their college advising experiences (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). However, they did leave out single-parent, community college students. The research concluded that college advisement allows the student to feel important and feel they have the capability to succeed academically (Brown et al., 2020; CCSSE, 2005; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Despite this need, multiple studies have expressed that college advisement needs significant improvement (Brown et al., 2020; Pierce, 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Smith, 2019a).

Even though students have expressed dissatisfaction with advisement, the reasons varied (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Some students were unsatisfied with the services because they expected emails back within hours or needed an advisor who could check up on them throughout the school year (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Unfortunately, some advisors and counselors have hundreds, or even thousands, of students they need to manage within some postsecondary institutions, which is unrealistic (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Pierce, 2015). Therefore, rather than having each student have an advisor, an alternative is to ensure only first-time enrollees have an advisor (Pierce, 2015). If students need additional advisement with regard to which classes to take or other types of services, students can access technology that allows students to view their progress within the courses they are taking as well as if they follow a specific pathway (Pierce, 2015).

Other expectations students have when it comes to advisement include the belief that advisors should be able to guide them through their program and obtain their trust (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). They also commented on how advisors should see the student as an individual and not perceive all students as the same (Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Additionally, advisors should advocate for student success and be readily available as needed (Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). College students typically wanted their advisement to reflect a specific direction as well as knowledge of policies and procedures the students may encounter within their program (Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). They believed that their advisor would be organized and well-informed about the student process and their progress throughout their years at the institution (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

Academic and Mental Health Counseling.

Counseling is helpful within postsecondary institutions because academic or mental health counselors can understand the overwhelming schedule college students face balancing their work, family, and school life (Brown et al., 2020; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). This is also true for single-parent, community college students. Providing academic and mental health counseling for single-parent, community college students is essential for them to be sufficient in time management, handle their financial difficulties, and help support their mental health (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006). Therefore, due to their family and the possibility of better job prospects, single-parent, community college students tend to take their education very seriously, which an academic or mental health counselor can assist with making students' lives less problematic by offering

perspectives to the student to help with decision-making (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Monaghan, 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Tehan, 2006).

Counselors can help encourage students to have relationships with faculty and staff, which can help boost their academic success and help them cope with their various demands (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006). Counselors, as well as advisors, can also assist students in finding multiple resources which may not be easily accessible (Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Tehan, 2006). When a student first begins their program, it would be helpful for students to have access to a counselor within their first year, along with follow-up sessions throughout their education at that institution (Schroeder & Terras, 2015). However, academic counselors typically have an overwhelming student load and other responsibilities, preventing satisfactory counseling from coming to fruition. Hence why many students believe academic counseling and advisement need to be greatly improved (Brown et al., 2020; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

However, there are some instances in which students, in general, are not comfortable reaching out to access help (CCSSE, 2005; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Some students may feel too mature to ask for college and career advice. They believe that they should already understand how to access this information due to their age or already know this information to begin with (McDonnell et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Experts agreed postsecondary students would benefit from guidance and "intrusive advising," which is when mandatory activities and meetings are scheduled for students to interact with their advisor (McDonnell et al., 2014, p. 8; Smith, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). This type of intervention can assist in academic planning and promoting student success (McDonnell et al., 2014; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Smith, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d).

College and Career Pathways

Students tend to also increase their motivation and persistence when a specific pathway is given to them when first enrolling (Complete College America, 2016). Pierce (2015) stated one community college in Maryland implemented an accelerated pathway program in which students could learn about the required courses needed to graduate. They also implemented a development class that alerted students to the different types of services provided (CCSSE, 2005; McDonnell et al., 2014; Pierce, 2015; Smith, 2019c). By implementing these types of support systems, the community college was able to see an increase in completion rates compared to before implementation (Complete College America, 2016; Pierce, 2015).

Additionally, institutions have combined college pathways with career pathways (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). According to the literature, career pathways revolve around obtaining a job, learning about human services, and developing various workforce skills (Complete College America, 2016; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; McDonnell et al., 2014). Therefore, this can relate to the previous section with regard to counseling. Counselors and advisors can offer students their choice in a pathway that educational institutions provide (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). If a student has a designated plan concerning their career and/or education, this can help them succeed in achieving their goals (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018).

Furthermore, college and career activities support students in completing their designated pathways. When students, in general, interact with the activities and events schools offer, such as internships, externships, and college and career fairs, they can "foster the development of strong relationships" (McDonnell et al., 2014, p. 9). They gain access to resources and information to help develop their educational and professional goals (Complete College America, 2016; Marade, 2019; McDonnell et al., 2014). One resource offered is stakeholder

partnerships in which students can meet with potential employers and other referrals (Marade, 2019; Smith, 2019a; Wesley, 2018). Without these resources and information, employers agree that students then major in invaluable programs, which are unbeneficial for students, employers, and the community overall (Marade, 2019; Wesley, 2018). These activities guide learners to meet employers' preferences (Marade, 2019; Wesley, 2018).

Financial Aid

As previously addressed, single-parent, community college students can be considered low-income (Duke-Benefield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Many low-income students find the situational barrier of not being financially sufficient to be reason enough to not continue with their education (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). If a student lacks the proper funds needed to provide for their basic needs and/or their family's basic needs, then education is not a priority (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Therefore, experts agreed postsecondary institutions providing financial aid could help with student persistence (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; McDonnell et al., 2014; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014).

To alleviate the stress of finances, institutions can provide various student support services that can help a student save money, budget bills, and other finances, as well as find additional opportunities to increase cash flow (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; McDonnell et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2020; Sakai et al., 2014; Wesley, 2018). Some institutions have implemented financial aid workshops to offset this barrier, which teaches students how to apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), scholarships, and other financial aid available (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014; Wesley, 2018). Other

student support services provided have been offering courses at no cost as well as providing grants and scholarships to eligible students (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Graham & Bassett, 2012; McDonnell et al., 2014). Institutions can also offer work-study positions or increase the number of programs that qualify for financial aid (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). By providing additional classes, students can expand their education without worrying about the financial responsibility that comes with the traditional tuition or the class fees (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Sakai et al., 2014). Institutions can take advantage of other opportunities through community support, such as transportation vouchers, educational resources provided by external stakeholders, and more (Duke-Benfield et al., 2018). Students who are at-risk and fall victim to the obstacles previously mentioned can use financial student support services to help alleviate those challenges. If financial assistance is increased by $1,000 through federal grants, students are two to three percent more likely to complete their college program, demonstrating the importance of financial aid on the single-parent, community college student's completion rate (Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

Another factor in a single-parent, community college student's success is government aid. Typically, low-income single mothers found access to community colleges by a referral from their county welfare program (Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Specifically, in California, single parents can qualify for the California work opportunities and responsibilities through the CalWORKs program (Cerven, 2013; Monje-Paulson et al., 2019). This program provides aid to needy families who can participate in the program through 18 to 24 months of welfare to work activities (Cerven, 2013). If CalWORKs recipients follow through with work or community service, along with the welfare to work activities, they can remain eligible for funds for up to 60 months (Cerven, 2013). This increased income allows single-parent, community

college students to feel more stable in returning to school while also staying afloat with financial responsibilities (Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016). However, there is a caveat with regard to welfare programs, such as in some instances where students were required to get an education, but as soon as they received a certificate, the aid was retracted (Cerven, 2013). CalWORKs did improve the low-income, single parent educational attainment rate, which when the student received a degree, it increased the probability of withdrawing from public assistance (California Community Colleges, 2019; Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Monje-Paulson et al., 2019; Pizzolato et al., 2017). A majority of students that utilized government aid had a positive experience (Brown et al., 2020; Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Monje-Paulson et al., 2019; Pizzolato et al., 2017).

Cultural Differences

For many years, African Americans have been stereotyped as uninterested in engaging with school and pursuing higher education after high school (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). However, Blake (2018) has countered this belief to, in fact, state that Black students are more likely to want to succeed in college compared to their White counterparts. She continues by stating that African Americans attend college at a higher rate, which shows that race is not a significant indicator of attending college (Blake, 2018).

The stereotype of African Americans postponing or not participating in education came from the belief of how Black people tried to fit in with their peers (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). By attending school and doing well, it came with a perception of "acting White," which would supposedly work against them with regard to society and their personal social life (Blake, 2018, p. 553; Lewis, 2016, p. 5). Researchers have found the opposite to be true in terms of how succeeding in school gave African Americans more support from their peers, which led to Black

students wanting to attend college and believing they could attain a degree (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). Their relationships with professors, friends, and family, as well as their own self-perception, influence their relationship with education both positively and negatively (Lewis, 2016). Positive support from their peers encourages African Americans to attend college (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). But according to Lewis (2016), negative criticism through doubt casting also helps increase persistence amongst African Americans, with them aiming to prove others wrong.

Despite Black students striving for academic achievement, their expectations of success and wanting to attend college do not always equate to fulfilling their goals (Blake, 2018). College-going behaviors, such as taking the SAT or ACT and applying to numerous colleges and universities, show the desire but not the obstacles these students may face while entering or being in the middle of their college career (Allen et al., 2018; Blake, 2018). Barriers encountered by African Americans usually involve educational policies that have a deterring effect (Allen et al., 2018; Harper et al., 2009). These policies limit college access, degree returns, and overall college success (Allen et al., 2018; Harper et al., 2009; McGee, 2016). These limitations also sprout other barriers throughout African Americans' lives politically, economically, and socially (Allen et al., 2018; Harper et al., 2009; McGee, 2016).

Another college-going behavior is students contacting school supports to inquire about higher education, which is similar to student support services (Blake, 2018). African Americans wanting to attend college and making an effort to learn more about school and other entrance preparations show they are receptive to using services as a cultural norm (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). They take advantage of resources available to them, especially through leadership roles, to involve themselves with extracurriculars and organizations (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). This

is especially true for African Americans in historically Black colleges and universities because they feel more welcomed and have a greater sense of belonging than in other minority colleges and predominately White institutions (Lewis, 2016; McGee, 2016; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). Even so, there are some barriers where African Americans may not seek out support, such as financial issues, balancing life obstacles, and academic assistance (Lewis, 2016; McGee, 2016). Lewis (2016) explains how this primarily applies to men since finding support for the aforementioned barriers can negatively affect their masculinity.

There are varied reasons as to why Black students have high expectations and aspirations of attending college. Previous research has found affirmative action to be a positive indicator and motivator to encourage these students to attend college (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). Also, since the labor market affects Blacks more than Whites, Blake (2018) believes this to be another motivator for African Americans to attend college to help combat those barriers. But the labor market could be influenced based on affluent colleges. According to Mendelberg, McCabe, and Thal (2017), students who attend affluent college and university campuses inherit affluent views. The affluent views develop into pro-wealth views, which in turn affect policy, affecting African Americans into wanting these economical, pro-wealth views, increasing college attendance (Allen et al., 2018; Blake, 2018; Mendelberg et al., 2017).

Besides African Americans, Hispanic/Latinx students had the next highest participation rate in this study. Latinx students typically have similar obstacles as African Americans but have slightly different cultural norms that demonstrate their use or disuse of various services. Their use of resources greatly depends on their parents' use of resources (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Depending on their generation, those of a more recent generation lean towards using resources found in high school to help with their college

acceptance, financial aid, and other supports offered through higher education (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018). That is not to say that those of an older generation do not use resources, but they use them much less often and more informally by speaking to a community member about a new program rather than school personnel (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). They also prefer to talk to someone in person rather than communicate through social media or online, limiting their ability to access the appropriate information to succeed in college and gain the necessary support (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017).

The obstacles Latinxs face while attending college are similar to Black students in which higher educational institutions operate with a White mindset, which leaves out non-White experiences and voices (McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016). Minority students then have to conform to this academic stereotype of dressing professionally and neglecting their culture to fit in with other students, which can lead to microaggressions (Alessandri, 2017; Lewis, 2016; McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Racial stereotypes, unfortunately, are within most institutions and prove challenging to overcome (McGee, 2016). When minority students defend themselves, they are seen as violent and difficult (Alessandri, 2017; Lewis, 2016; McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Therefore, minorities tend to integrate code-switching or biculturalism to blend in and succeed amongst their peers (McGee, 2016; Reyes, 2022). However, eliminating their culture from their appearance and behavior creates a theory of professionalization based on White culture (Alessandri, 2017; Sánchez-Connally, 2018). Hispanics and African Americans can be ignored or pushed out of their institution just based on their race, no matter their use or non-use of various resources and supports (Alessandri, 2017; McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016). According to McGee (2016), culture is not a significant

indicator of succeeding in college since minority students either neglect their culture altogether or bend to White professionalization (Alessandri, 2017). Learning to be professional is learning to be White, although minorities can never become White due to their appearance, which encourages racial stereotypes and discrimination amongst their peers and professors to create a never-ending cycle (Alessandri, 2017; Sánchez-Connally, 2018).

Despite African Americans and Latinxs overcoming barriers to enrolling and completing college, there are a few differences between the races (Lewis, 2016; Ryan & Ream, 2016). For instance, like African American women, Latinas are more successful academically than their male counterparts (Lewis, 2016; Ryan & Ream, 2016). And for those students whose first language is not English, they typically have additional barriers to overcome due to a perception of "inadequate academic preparation" (Naynaha, 2016; Ryan & Ream, 2016, p. 959).

One important cultural norm to note is that Hispanics enroll in four-year colleges less often compared to other races because they need to be close to their family (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Furthermore, sometimes their families are uninformed about how the college system works and are of low income (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018). Students who wish to stay close to their family or live at home may need to do so if they are undocumented and do not have the same financial opportunities as those who are citizens (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018). These cultural differences amongst Blacks and Latinxs can affect their use of student support services at the community college level, which may demonstrate the variations in perceptions amongst single mothers and single fathers based on race.

Conclusion

      Within community colleges, single parents had high enrollment rates but difficulty completing their degrees (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Some of the obstacles included work commitments, family issues, illness, and more (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Saar et al., 2014; Smith, 2019a, 2019d). Student support services can alleviate these obstacles and can affect the academic success of a student through advisement, counseling, tutoring, financial aid, and college and career pathways (Brown et al., 2020; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; McDonnell et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Sakai et al., 2014; Wesley, 2018). By institutions amending their services or by offering new services to their single-parent, community college students, their attendance rates may improve as well as increased completion (Al-Shammari, 2016). By institutions investing in student support services, society can benefit from increased tax contributions and reduced public spending to the point where the services pay for themselves and generate additional revenue (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Unfortunately, even though institutions may provide student support services, single-parent, community college students do not always have access to the services or use them since the graduation rate is still low (McDonnell et al., 2014; Pizzolato et al., 2017).

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, student support services are useful for single-parent, community college students with regard to their academic performance and motivation to complete their degree. However, the literature lacks information about single-parent, community college students, including their perception of the services concerning their marital status, gender, and race or ethnicity (CCSSE, 2005; Cerven, 2013; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Tinto, 2016, 2017). Previous studies had limited information on the effectiveness of student support services and the differences in perception between single mothers and single fathers as well as between different racial backgrounds. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify how single-parent, community college students perceive student support services while acknowledging their race or ethnicity, and gender.

There are multiple factors as to why single-parent, community college students stop attending school, such as family obligations, work responsibilities, and/or illness (Smith, 2019a, 2019d). But studies show student support services can impact students' performance as well as their motivation to succeed within community colleges and universities (Breen et al., 2015; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). The following questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?

2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity?

3. What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single mothers and single fathers?

Research Methods and Design

A study with a qualitative design was chosen because qualitative studies can reveal common themes among various individuals who have faced a similar experience (Butin, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative studies focus on participants' opinions and perspectives while concentrating specifically on details and nuances (Butin, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). They also consist of open-ended questions that give the researcher a sense of the situation from the participants' points of view (Creswell, 2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To conduct a successful qualitative study, data needed to be collected in the natural world while focusing on the humanity of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative data is interpretive and is constantly evolving (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Quantitative methods were not appropriate for this study due to the limitations that would have resulted from this type of approach. Typically, the data collected from quantitative studies is formatted in a way that limits the worldview on a variety of subjects, such as student support services (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Quantitative methods could identify the most essential and valuable student support service, but they could also neglect to give insight as to why students use that service. Additionally, if a researcher used a quantitative survey as his or her data collection method, it might result in single-parent, community college students picking only one support service they feel is most important when in actuality, there may be multiple student support services that can also have a similar impact on the student.

With a qualitative study, the researcher can understand what makes different student support services important and effective. If single-parent, community college students noted the computer lab was necessary, for example, the researcher—by using qualitative methods—can delve into what makes the computer lab vital to students' persistence and motivation, such as personnel, updated technology, or hours of operation and location. Qualitative studies enhance storytelling, whereas quantitative methods can displace personal stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Participants

In 2019, approximately 15.76 million children lived with a single mother, and 3.23 million children lived with a single father (Statista Research Department, 2021). As of 2019, the United States had 328.2 million people who were 18 years old or older, including single mothers and fathers (Statista Research Department, 2021). For this research study, all participants resided in the United States. Participants chosen were single parents, 18 years old or older, and attended or are currently attending various community colleges across the United States. The participants selected were of different races and/or ethnicities, including Hispanic/Latinx, African American/Black, Caucasian/White, and American Indian/Alaska Native. Some of the participants were single fathers, while others were single mothers.

Because single-parent, community college students manage multiple responsibilities, they often drop out of school (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Sometimes, after a semester or quarter passes, some students re-enroll to repeat the process. The reason for this transient nature can range from various barriers the students face (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). Therefore, single-parent, community college students chosen for this study

might have attended a community college in the last three years and currently not be enrolled due to the transient nature of students through various barriers, including COVID-19.

With the theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory, students need to be able to create their own persistence through the different experiences of self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and see the relevance in what they are learning. For instance, a student needs to be able to believe they can succeed; otherwise, they can negatively affect their college experience through self-doubt, which can lead to failure (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). Also, students need to feel a part of a group and appreciate their education to create their own persistence. Through these experiences, which can be supported by student support services, students can have a higher chance of success than those who lack those experiences (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Stemming from this theory, single-parent, community college students were organized into focus groups and were asked how community colleges' support services met their needs as single parents (see Appendix C). They were also asked how the student support services targeted their individual race or ethnicity, and gender.

Due to COVID-19, in-person focus group interviews were unable to be conducted. Additionally, schedule constraints and participants living all over the country idealized online focus group interviews. Therefore, online Zoom meetings (see Appendix L) were utilized while also being recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai. Due to the 2020-21 school year mainly being online, participants were comfortable with a virtual experience.

The students were given explicit instructions on accessing Zoom (see Appendix L). Focus group discussions can be online instead of in-person while still receiving the same effect if held physically (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Virtual focus groups are not limited by location or time, which can be helpful for the students' flexible schedules (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

However, the researcher may miss out on body language by holding the interviews on Zoom, but since the interviews were recorded, the researcher re-watched the interviews several times, searching for themes, patterns, and other interesting details not analyzed during the original interview (Butin, 2010).

Before beginning the interviews, the researcher introduced herself through a Google Slides presentation, with information about the study, her educational background, and a review of the consent forms (see Appendix H). Participants completed a Google Form giving their consent as well as answering basic demographic questions (see Appendix F) to discover any overlapping themes between gender and/or race or ethnicity. The participants were informed that their information would be protected to ensure privacy (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Furthermore, the participants were notified in the consent form that the interview would focus on the 2018 to 2021 school years, their postsecondary institution, and the services they have encountered during their time at their school, whether virtually or in person. COVID-19 was present in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, which may have impacted the community colleges' services.

The Google Form also asked students if they were interested in conducting a follow-up, one-on-one interview with the researcher to gain more insight into their perception of student support services. This question was asked again after the original focus group interviews were analyzed and transcribed. Member checks via email (see Appendix I) were sent to the participants where single-parent, community college students could opt in or -out as to whether they were interested in a follow-up interview. The researcher planned to have additional interviews to clarify misconceptions and ask further questions related to the single-parent, community college students' answers during the previous focus group interview. However, the

focus group interviews proved insightful, and only two follow-up interviews were completed. The two follow-up participants were single mothers; one was White and the other of mixed race, which was comprised of White, African American/Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native descent. Those who participated in the follow-up interview were emailed a $20 gift card to Amazon.

To select participants, the researcher used purposeful and snowball sampling. By using purposeful sampling, the researcher was able to interview candidates that fit the study's criterion (Creswell, 2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, snowball, or chain, sampling proved helpful in identifying potential participants from word of mouth (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The target number of participants was 36, and the researcher had 37 total participants. The researcher wanted to separate the participants into groups of four to total nine focus groups, but the groups varied from two to seven participants, with there being a total of eight groups and two individual interviews. Scheduling conflicts due to location differences and participants not arriving to the scheduled Zoom interviews prevented the ideal group of four from fruition. Participants feel more comfortable and are more likely to engage when the focus group's number of interviewees is small (Creswell, 2014, 2019).

The researcher desired 36 participants initially to get a range of opinions from students who used student support services compared to those who did not. This range was to include 18 single mothers and 18 single fathers. From those 18, the researcher aimed to have diverse participants from various races and ethnicities to finalize the differences in perception. Out of the 37 participants, 17 were single mothers, and 20 were single fathers, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographics from Interview Data

n=37

Variable	Number	Percentage
Male	20	54.1%
Female	17	45.9%
Full-time Student	18	48.6%
Part-time Student	19	51.4%
White	5	13.5%
African American/Black	24	64.9%
Hispanic/Latinx	5	13.5%
Pacific Islander	1	2.7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	2.7%
Other/Mixed	1	2.7%
18-24	2	5.4%
25-31	27	73%
32-40	6	16.2%
41+	2	5.4%
1 child	25	67.6%
2 children	8	21.6%
3 children	3	8.1%
4+ children	1	2.7%

The participants were gathered from Instagram and Facebook, along with snowball sampling as aforementioned. Two Facebook groups were contacted, "Father's Rights: Custody, Child Support, and More" and "Single Parent Sanity." The first group had 45,700 members, and the second group had approximately 4,000 members. In each group, the admin granted the researcher permission to post in their group, searching for volunteers for the focus group interviews (see appendix G). On Instagram and Facebook, the researcher posted to her profiles as well. She used hashtags and "please share" marketing to spread the word about her search for

participants. The image and description used to post (see Appendix K) described the study and possible compensation for participating.

To conduct research ethically, a certificate was acquired from the National Institute of Health from training completed (see Appendix A). Moreover, permission was received from the Facebook groups' admin for each group to advertise for participants of this study (see Appendix G). Lastly, consent was obtained from Northwest Nazarene University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting data and finding participants (see Appendix E).

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews from September to December 2021. The focus group interviews investigated which student support services single-parent, community college students found most effective and why. The focus group questions were based on their experiences using any service offered at their institution, as well as which services they thought should be improved upon or added (see Appendix C). The main focus was on single parents' perceptions of community colleges and how those schools' services promoted single-parent, community college students' success. However, during the focus group interviews, differences in opinion between single mothers and single fathers, as well as race or ethnicity, were honed in on without splitting the group or making the participants aware of the focus. Some participants were chosen from those who volunteered for individual interviews based on their experiences with the services based on the students' gender, race or ethnicity, and marital status (see Appendix F and I).

Before conducting the study, the interview questions were validated by a group of experts. The experts had experience working in adult education, higher education, student support services, or with single parents. Five experts received a face validity feedback form (see

Appendix M).   These experts rated each question on its relevance of student support services with respect to single-parent, community college students with regard to gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity. Based on the expert review, no changes were made to the interview questions to be more suitable for the upcoming participants. The experts rated each interview question as "highly relevant," except for the introductory questions, which were included to become familiar with the participants, such as "Why are you a student?"

After the expert review, the interview questions were piloted with a group of single-parent, university students. The process of connecting to Zoom, using Otter.ai, and asking the interview questions was tested amongst three individuals. After the pilot focus group interview was complete, the researcher asked the group how they felt about the whole interview. The researcher also asked questions about the pacing and gathered positive or negative feedback about the main questions or interview process. The three participants gave positive feedback regarding the interview questions and pacing. They suggested to the researcher to explain more about the study before the interview. One participant was self-conscious about how she spoke more than the others, but the other participants were fine with the additional discussion from that one participant. The two participants felt the added discussion helped them contribute to the conversation by giving them additional reminders of similar experiences during their college experience.

After the pilot interview, the researcher began marketing her study on Facebook and Instagram. She posted to each platform three times in the different groups and through her personal profiles. The first time was in the late evening, which proved ineffective for finding participants. She changed the timing of the following post to the afternoon and then the morning. She began receiving direct messages and emails from potential participants.

Once a potential participant communicated with her, the researcher would email the participant to find a potential interview time. If she heard back from the participant, she would then email them a link to the Google form for their consent. After a participant completed the consent form, the researcher created a Microsoft Excel sheet to document potential participants' availability as well as time zones. After receiving five or more completed consent forms, the researcher began grouping the participants based on time zone and availability. Most participants were from the East coast, and their availability ranged from morning to night.

Before the data collection, participants were given information about the process of the focus groups as well as the different parameters to achieve the overall purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Potential candidates were given a choice on whether or not to participate, with no consequence if they chose to opt-out. However, it was clearly stated prior to the interview via email (see Appendix J) that participating in this study could help community colleges implement successful student support services contributing to students who are single parents attaining their degrees. It was explained to those in the focus groups that participation had a very low risk and, in the written version of the study, their identities would be protected through pseudonyms.

The researcher alerted participants explicitly and on the consent form (see Appendix B and F) that the discussion would be recorded, but the participants' identities would still be protected. Participants needed to be fully aware they were to be visually recorded to analyze their behavior along with the dynamics of the group later on in the analysis phase. Even though some participants gave consent to be recorded through video, they had their cameras off. All participants agreed, however, to be voice-recorded, to which all did participate. The recordings were not distributed and were locked away on a password-protected computer. It was imperative

to protect the participants' identities, and therefore, each participant needed to sign a consent form to be recorded (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). If a participant declined to be visually recorded but still wanted to participate in the study, they could turn off their camera via Zoom. However, the participant still needed to consent to be on an audio recording.

Once a group was established, the researcher emailed the participants instructions on attending the Zoom interview along with a calendar invite. Some participants accepted the invite and then did not show up to the interview, while others did not accept the invite, but did attend the Zoom meeting. The meetings started within five minutes of their scheduled start time. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes to one hour. The researcher used set interview questions (see Appendix C), but would deviate from the questions to receive more information from participants if their story was intriguing or needed further elaboration.

At the beginning of the focus group interviews, the researcher initiated the conversation by reiterating the purpose of the study and ensuring that everyone turned in their consent form and basic demographic questionnaire, which asked students if they were also interested in a one-on-one interview (see Appendix F and I). The researcher then began asking the relevant questions about their institution's student support services as per the focus group interview questions (see Appendix C). Any student could speak; however, they needed to be considerate and respectful of other people's opinions and experiences. If the conversation slowed, the researcher continued with the following focus group question. As the interviews progressed, the participants were visually recorded as well as audio recorded through Otter.ai for transcription. During the interviews, online field notes and participant observations, including nuances, were collected to help uncover themes during the data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After each focus group interview and one-on-one follow-up interview, the researcher recorded

observations and thoughts to document the experience. Holding interviews over Zoom proved difficult with regard to participant observations since participants were not always focused or they were looking elsewhere on camera. Additionally, since some participants did not turn their cameras on, their observations were missed entirely.

The researcher interviewed 37 participants for this study. Students who participated were entered into Wheelofnames.com, where a random name is chosen with each spin of the wheel. At the end of each focus group session, the researcher spun the wheel to determine to whom the Amazon gift card of $25 would go. Participants were informed that some might be contacted for an additional interview to explain their experience further. Those interested expressed this through the Google consent form and/or member checking email (see Appendix F and I). The participant follow-ups were on a volunteer basis first. They needed to express interest in a one-on-one interview. If so, the researcher then used purposeful sampling based on their responses during the focus group interviews to find participants who expressed an intriguing perception of their college's student support services. The researcher had two women follow up with one-on-one interviews, which were conducted in a similar manner.

The member checking email summarized participants' experiences stated during the focus group interview. The researcher asked participants for any objections to the interpretations and/or reactions. She also questioned the participants whether they would like to share any more information through a one-on-one interview (see Appendix I). A majority of participants did not respond to the member checking email, only 12 out of 37 responded, but those who did had no objections, questions, or other interpretations. Based on the focus group interviews, the researcher separated the participants into a group as to who she would be interested in interviewing alone for further information about the student's experiences with a particular

college and its support services. The researcher searched for stories specifically targeting a student's race or ethnicity, and gender to clarify if there were any differences in comparison to other races, ethnicities, and genders.

With the one-on-one interviews, the researcher reached out to those selected for follow-ups via email (see Appendix I). If the student was interested, the researcher set up an online Zoom meeting to discuss more about the student's experiences with the student support services. During the interview, once again, it was recorded both visually and audibly. Otter.ai provided transcription, and the interviewer flexibly used the specific follow-up questions (see Appendix C). A few participants the researcher had reached out to declined or did not attend the scheduled one-on-one interview, which limited extensions of their previous accounts. There were only two one-on-one interviews completed with two single mothers.

Analytical Methods

After data collection, the researcher delved into organizing and transcribing the focus group interactions as well as extracting themes by race or ethnicity, and gender. For the focus group interviews, Otter.ai's voice-recognition software was utilized to separate each individual who spoke. Using voice-recognition software is helpful because it can increase effectiveness and efficiency, eliminating the time it would take to transcribe the interviews manually (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Once the transcriptions were ready for analysis through Otter.ai, the researcher examined the data to discover any themes. The themes searched for were theory-generated codes, which are themes derived from the literature review, such as barriers, types of student support services, and successful outcomes, and in vivo codes, which come from real-life data to delineate other themes captured from the participants' thoughts and perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016;

Miles et al., 2020). Descriptive codes were also found based on the retelling of their experiences the single-parent, community college students had with different services. From the codes, the researcher began developing the codes into categories via keywords and then breaking them up into clusters to reveal overarching themes (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), clustering is useful in creating relationships and finding out which ideas are overarching.

Afterward, a second cycle method was conducted to classify, integrate, and synthesize the themes found throughout the interviews, both focus group and one-on-one (Saldaña, 2016). The themes generated were sorted by research question using Microsoft Excel. Themes for research questions two and three were separated based on race or ethnicity, and gender. Therefore, there were three sheets for research question two and two for question three; one to represent single mothers and one to represent single fathers. The sheets were labeled Hispanic/Latinx, African American/Black, and White for question two. Themes were tallied up for each demographic group to identify their main perceptions of student support services. Several details from the focus groups can fall under different support services or themes; therefore, it is essential to uncover the similarities and differences between the students regarding gender and race or ethnicity, as per the research questions previously mentioned. A majority of the themes discovered were similar or fell close to the overall themes found from research question one.

Throughout the coding process, the researcher noticed a majority of participants were African American. To help connect the themes discovered from the coding process and the cultural norms of African Americans, the researcher read additional literature with regard to their perceptions of education. The literature was summarized and added to Chapter II. The

researcher also summarized Hispanics' cultural norms in Chapter II. The literature studied was based on how those racial groups perceived education and their overall success rate with higher educational institutions. Understanding these components assisted the researcher in making connections between the results from the data collection and cultural norms discovered previously. The researcher's committee recommended identifying cultural norms during the data analysis process to ensure relevance amongst the literature and the pool of participants. Connections discovered are discussed more in Chapter IV.

Role of the Researcher

Within the study, the researcher had several roles. The researcher was raised by a single mother who did not attain her college degree, although she did attend a community college. During the researcher's childhood, her single mother attended community college for a few months before withdrawing. She then re-enrolled a few years later. Her lack of community college success was due to parental responsibilities, work, and other barriers. However, she never utilized the college's student support services. Through this study, single parents, faculty, and staff can take the proper steps to offer multiple services to satisfy single-parent, community college students' wants and needs to promote their academic success.

To maintain validity and credibility, the researcher conducted various methods to eliminate bias. One way was through member checks to ensure respondent validation was accurate (Maxwell, 2013). With member checks, the data was shared along with the researcher's own interpretations of said data with participants (see Appendix I). Additionally, the researcher was not researching her own setting. She did not want to uncover any potentially damaging knowledge due to any closeness in regard to the institution (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Therefore, through different modes of sampling, she found willing online groups that gave easy access to unfamiliar participants and initiated trusting relationships.

Limitations

Although it is the purpose of this study to identify perceptions of single-parent, community college students on student support services regarding their effectiveness and their association with marital status, gender, and race or ethnicity, certain limitations nevertheless existed. Limitations within a study inform readers how the information gathered can be extended through additional research studies to involve additional or extended factors, such as larger population size, different locations, and other varying factors (Creswell, 2014, 2019). Additionally, limitations inform readers that the current research study has an overall limited design (Creswell, 2014, 2019).

One of the study's limitations was that the focus group interviews had participants from different backgrounds. The participants involved in the focus groups were men and women of various races and ethnicities. The students' responses and demographic information could have resulted in mixed findings had the study been conducted from just one gender or race's point of view. Also, the researcher did not question participants about their relationship status or custody parameters. Participants could have had an unmarried significant other as well as different ranges of child custody.

Another limitation was introduced through data collection methods. There could have been some single-parent, community college students who responded according to what they thought the researcher wanted to hear in the focus groups. Some single-parent, community college students in the focus groups dominated the discussion, while others were more reserved. Also, the groups were only focused on a sample of the schools' population. Perhaps, with other

participants, the results could have differed depending on the students' needs. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom rather than in person. Had they been in person, the researcher could have easily identified body language to help the researcher deduce overall codes. Plus, the researcher would have had more control over the interview environment to assist with reducing distractions in order for there to be full participation.

Additionally, the number of participants in the focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews is a limitation. The size may limit the results of this qualitative study and may not represent all single-parent, community college students' perceptions of student support services. Also, the findings from the interviews may warrant additional research by expanding the interviews to include more participants or by taking a quantitative approach. Furthermore, the results cannot be generalized or considered universal for all single parents attending a community college. This study's results could vary if conducted with university students or from a different time period where student support services were more popular or, on the contrary, severely lacking or nonexistent due to COVID.

Then there is the limitation of time the participants spent at their community college using their student support services. If the students were enrolled for a few semesters compared to years, then it is more likely, for the students who were there longer to have utilized the student support services, which could affect their perception of them. Moreover, time spent on student support services could have given a more positive or negative review based on the services' management, policy, and procedures at the time used. For instance, a student could have been enrolled for five years at a community college and has used a tutoring center every year, but each year there is a new tutoring coordinator. This coordinator could have made decisions affecting the student's experience using the center, which affects their perception.

And lastly is the researcher's own bias that may have limited the study. During the coding or data collection process, the researcher may have been inclined to focus on details that others would have disregarded and vice versa. However, identifying the researcher's bias and using analytic induction and comparative analysis helped alleviate any judgments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

Experts have found single-parent, community college students essential to the U.S. economy (Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). If single-parent, community college students are financially stable or well off, they can rely less on government assistance and other financial services (Cerven, 2013; Hinton-Smith, 2016). By single parents having better jobs and higher salaries after earning a college degree, they are able to spend more money out in society to help the economy grow and thrive (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b). And evidently, single parents in the United States are enrolling in community colleges at an increasing rate (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). However, the graduation rate remains low due to the various obstacles single-parent, community college students need to overcome (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Previous research has demonstrated single-parent, community college students' main barriers tend to be attaining child care, balancing their daily lives with their education, and maintaining a sense of motivation to continue with their educational journey (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). Furthermore, single-parent, community college students tend to feel neglected by their institutions due to not being the traditional college student with regard to student support services (Graham & Bassett, 2012; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

Despite research identifying barriers and obstacles these parents face, there remains a gap in the literature. There is missing literature on how single parents view community college

services. Single parents tend to enroll in community colleges more than comprehensive universities, but for some reason, they are still having difficulty graduating, which may be related to student support services (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). However, research revolving around student support services and their use by single-parent, community college students is lacking because previous research has only focused on single mothers. Additionally, experts have primarily relied on quantitative methods. As a result, researchers have neglected to describe single parents' views of community colleges' student support services. Also, previous research fails to acknowledge if gender and race or ethnicity influence single-parent, community college students' use of student services. A few studies focus on gender, but only through the lens of single mothers. Single fathers are rarely studied in terms of student services. Furthermore, race and/or ethnicity are mainly mentioned only, again, through the lens of single mothers.

This study identifies the perceptions that single-parent, community college students have on student services while also determining if there are any point of view differences between single mothers and single fathers. The research also discovers differences in perception between African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Caucasian/White single-parent, community college students. The gaps in the literature have guided the researcher to the following questions for this qualitative study:

1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?

2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity?

3.   What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single

mothers and single fathers?

Chapter IV analyzes qualitative data collected through focus group interviews and one-on-one

interviews to answer the aforementioned research questions. The interviews conducted were

with current or former single-parent, community college students throughout the United States.

The data discussed within Chapter IV combines participants' voices from both the focus group

interviews and one-on-one interviews.

Analyzing the Methodology

Qualitative data is subjected to participants' experiences through open-ended questions

(Creswell, 2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). The participants mention

what the researcher interprets to analyze the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One participant

can recall an experience to different interviewers in the same way, but the interview outcome

through data analysis will differ among each researcher (Miles et al., 2020). During interviews,

including focus group interviews, the interviewee can realize during their storytelling something

else they may not have noticed during the actual event. The researcher, through member

checking during the interview, explains what he or she hears, which can guide the interviewee in

another direction (Miles et al., 2020). "Data are not being collected but rather coauthored"

shows the ebb and flow of the interview process, giving a unique data collection experience each

time (Miles et al., 2020, p. 31). However, for this study, the researcher ensured participants'

voices were being heard from the research and not her own. She reached out to the participants

after the interviews via email to give her perception of what was told during the focus group and

one-on-one interviews. Respondent validation was accurate through the member checking

emails where there was no negative feedback from the 12 out of 37 participants who responded (Maxwell, 2013).

Focus groups were used to answer each of the research questions. Additionally, one-on-one interviews were also utilized to find additional material excluded during the initial focus group interview. The participants of the focus groups were chosen on a voluntary basis. Participants were found online through social media, specifically Instagram and Facebook. As the focus groups occurred, the researcher took notes as well as recorded the interviews for future accuracy and transcription (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Audio recordings of the interviews were inputted into Otter.ai for initial transcription, and the researcher listened and fixed any errors in the transcription documents.

During the focus group and one-on-one interviews, participants were reminded that if any question made them feel uncomfortable or did not experience what the question was asking, they did not have to respond to the interview question and could opt out of the interview at any time. There were 37 participants with ten total interviews, inclusive of eight focus group interviews and two one-on-one interviews. The focus groups' sizes ranged between two and seven participants. Names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms, and students were referred to those names throughout this chapter, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Partial List of Focus Group and One-on-One Interviewees' Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Gender	Status	Age Range	Ethnicity/Race	Number of Children
Alice	Female	Part-time	32-40	Caucasian/White	3
Carl	Male	Full-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Damaris	Female	Part-time	32-40	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Denise	Female	Part-time	32-40	Hispanic/Latinx	1
Dominic	Male	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Effy	Female	Part-time	32-40	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Harry	Male	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Jaylene	Female	Full-time	41+	Mixed	4+
Jocelyn	Female	Full-time	25-31	African American/Black	2
Johnny	Male	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Jonah	Male	Full-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Jonathan	Male	Full-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Karla	Female	Full-time	25-31	Caucasian/White	3

Korra	Female	Full-time	25-31	Caucasian/White	1
Lindsay	Female	Part-time	25-31	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Martha	Female	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Mary	Female	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Michelle	Female	Part-time	25-31	Caucasian/White	2
Mike	Male	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	1
Rebecca	Female	Full-time	25-31	Pacific Islander	3
Rosa	Female	Full-time	25-31	Hispanic/Latinx	1
Ryan	Male	Full-time	32-40	African American/Black	1
Samuel	Male	Part-time	25-31	African American/Black	2
Sherry	Female	Full-time	41+	Caucasian/White	1

From the ten interviews, various codes emerged. After the focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducted, the researcher coded the transcriptions. The researcher also identified if any of the codes related to research questions two and/or three. Participant statements were coded using descriptive, in vivo, and theory-generated codes (Marshall & Rossman; Miles et al., 2020). Identification of keywords and subsequent alphabetic sorting of the codes aided in formulating themes. Sorting the codes alphabetically assisted the researcher in identifying a category that each code belonged to. The researcher then alphabetized the

categories to count how many of the codes belonged to each category resulting in an overall tally. The top three categories with the highest number of tallies were broken into clusters (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016). The clusters were separated based on positive and negative codes. For example, with research question one, the "staff friendly" code is seen as a positive attribute of the category "staff." However, "staff gave wrong advice" as a code was seen as a negative cluster. Therefore, the clusters with the highest tallies transitioned into the central theme identified for that category. Table 4 shows the most frequent codes found from the interviews per theme for research question one.

Table 4

Top Five Frequent Codes from Interviews

Theme 1		Theme 2		Theme 3	
Encounters and experiences with staff		Lack of services' promotion		Meet students' needs	
Codes	Number of responses	Codes	Number of responses	Codes	Number of responses
Helpful	22	Unknown services available	11	Flexible learning	17
Friendly	12	Increase marketing	10	Multiple modes of access	14
Available	9	Off campus services	8	Online programs	6
Not friendly	9	Services marketed by staff member	2	Convenience	6
Forced services	4			Recorded material	5

Themes were developed from codes through clusters. As previously mentioned, most of the codes showed positive and negative attributes, which helped separate them into "particular clusters because they seem to go together" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 82). For example, codes were

considered positive if they guided the single-parent, community college student to success. Codes were negative if they were seen more as barriers to graduation from the participants' responses. Based on what the codes had in common within each cluster helped create themes. The process was repeated for the top three categories, resulting in the top three to four themes for each research question.

Research Question #1

Research question one is an overarching question for the entire study. This question focuses on students in general, specifically single parents, and their overall perceptions of community colleges' student support services. Research question one asks:

What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?

The results of this question blend into the subsequent two research questions, which become more specific about race or ethnicity, and gender. As seen in Figure 3, the themes for each research question differ, with some themes overlapping.

Figure 3

Overlapping Themes
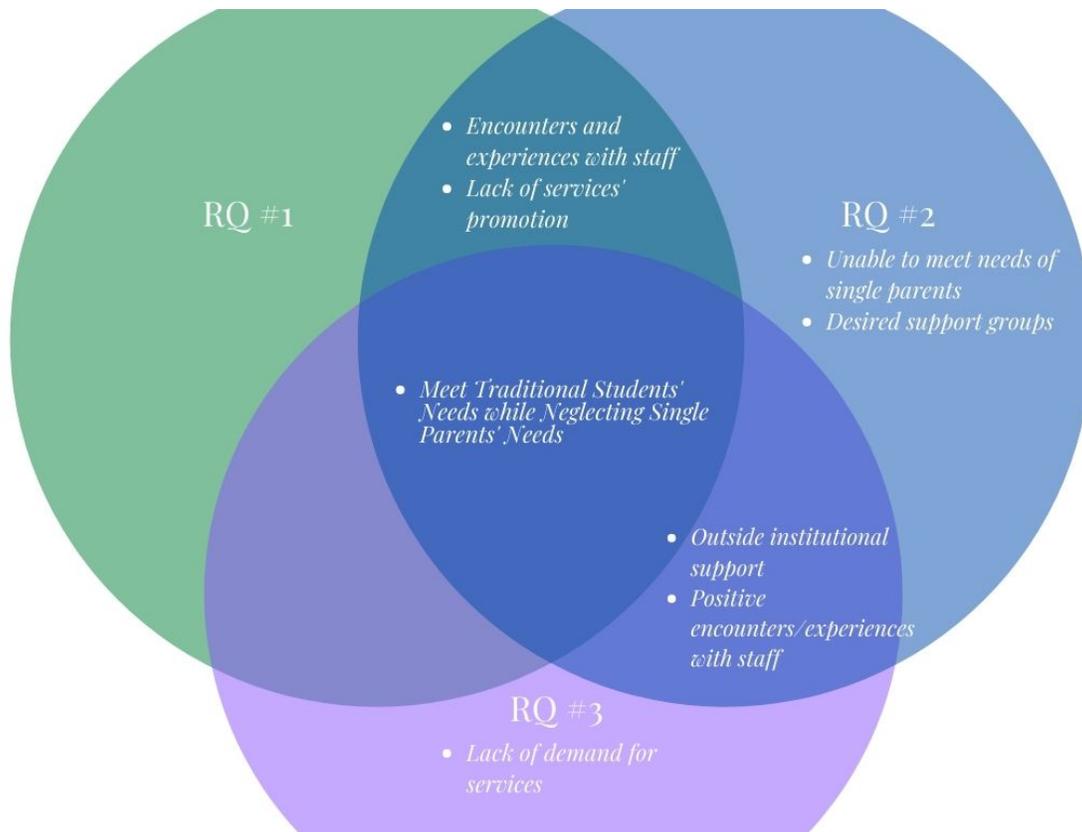
Hispanic/Latinx parents had different encounters and experiences with staff turning them and single mothers more towards the community for support. Furthermore, Hispanic/Latinx participants focused more on the negative qualities derived from their institutions than their African American/Black and Caucasian/White counterparts. Overall, single-parent, community college students felt their colleges could provide more resources and flexibility to feel acknowledged by their institutions. Additional information for each of the themes per research question is found in the sections below, where focus group and one-on-one interviews were quoted.

Encounters and Experiences with Staff

One of the top reasons for utilizing student support services at community colleges was single parents' encounters and experiences with staff members. A majority of single-parent, community college students found services to have helpful employees. They helped guide single-parent, community college students on what classes to take as well as explain material more skillfully through tutoring services. Participants mainly mentioned using advisement (n=3) or counseling services (n=3) and tutoring (n=4) when discussing the positive encounters and experiences. A few mentioned having negative experiences instead, while others noted different services such as daycare (n=4) and clubs (n=4), in addition to counseling and tutoring.

One single mother, Michelle, had gone back to college to study Mortuary Science. She chose her program due to the flexibility of being entirely online. She also received a scholarship from the institution, which helped her choose which college she would attend. Unfortunately, during her college experience, the institution decided to suspend Mortuary Science indefinitely, causing Michelle to choose another focus. She recalled how helpful the advisor was in helping her choose a different program:

> With human services, I got on with the advisor, and she had me do a test. I was supposed to answer which one [statement] sounded more like what I was interested in. And in the end, it came up with this wheel, and it was all these different areas that I could and might succeed in that I could do, and she [the advisor] was like, 'do these sound accurate?' And that's how we got to Human Services.

Michelle did not know of other programs that satisfied her interests and was ready to give up on her education. But the advisor having an appropriate tool to help guide her to choose another focus was "worth continuing."

In addition to the academic advisement service, career counselors were also helpful in motivating single-parent, community college students. Career advisement and counseling help students achieve success through goal setting and providing resources to attain such goals (Brown et al., 2020; CCSSE, 2005; Graham & Bassett, 2012; McDonnell et al., 2014; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Dominic, a single African American father of one, expressed how his school had multiple counselors. His assigned counselor encouraged him every year to continue with his education. She motivated him to continue to learn for his career and was excited when his grades improved year after year. Dominic explained:

> She didn't have to always be by my side, but she would always get excited during every meeting, even the first few when I started getting better and better. So that's how I got better. It really helped me, and even my grades went up. And that's why I'm there.

The rest of the participants found the staff to be a motivating factor in helping them succeed in college. Single-parent, community college students expressed how the counselor or advisor was the ultimate factor in having a positive college experience. However, two single mothers explained in their focus group interviews how the counselor they were assigned to was not helpful until they were able to transfer to a different college or change counselors at their current institution. One participant went through four counselors until she could find the one she was able to connect with. Positive encounters and experiences with staff increased the odds of single-parent, community college students succeeding in their education through the guidance staff provided with the classes students should take and helping them identify their overall career options.

Meet Traditional Students' Needs while Neglecting Single Parents' Needs

Despite the experiences with staff members, participants noted that most student services were unable to meet the needs of single parents. Single parents' needs vary compared to the traditional community college student straight out of high school (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Even though the participants' community colleges were able to meet the general population's needs, single-parent, community college students expressed how they felt left out and misunderstood. They wanted to gain sympathy from their instructors and counselors to help with their success, such as with single mother, Damaris. While going to school part-time, she was also working two part-time jobs. As a result, she had difficulty managing her work schedule while taking care of her children and attending school. She remembered one experience when she needed to meet with her instructor for extra help on the course material. Damaris asked the instructor if she could schedule a separate time other than the provided office hours to meet with her. Damaris recalled:

And I had trouble with the instructors. I wanted to reschedule the office hours because I really need[ed] help with the material. The instructor said that it's not her problem and that I had to choose between being a successful career person or my family, but I couldn't do both. I dropped the class. But it was an eye-opener because that instructor wasn't the only one. There were other instructors that did something similar to that.

Meanwhile, another single mother, Jaylene, of mixed race, also found her community college to meet a student's needs in general, but miss out entirely on the needs of single parents. She chose her community college for financial and location reasons. Her institution connects with an organization that distributes scholarships for various programs, and the campus was about ten minutes away from her home. In addition, the college offered online classes, which

worked well with her schedule. Offering online classes and scholarships met the needs of a

traditional student, but she mentioned how her other needs went unmet:

> I think it's being a single parent like they're not going to send somebody to cook dinner
>
> for me so that I can study or, you know, take the kids to the park so they can study or
>
> something like that. But I don't know really what more they could offer single parents.
>
> I mean, they have groups for all kinds of stuff. So maybe that would have been [a]
>
> beneficial thing to have, like, "Hey, are you a single parent? Like, there's a support
>
> group of sorts where you guys can meet other single parents, and then maybe you can set
>
> up some things like that…I'll take the kids to the park, you go over to that little pavilion,
>
> and I'll watch the kids."

Other single mothers mentioned having a single-parent group as beneficial to their mental health

and single parents' needs when it came to their demanding responsibilities. A single father also

appreciated the group idea for men as well as groups per students' race. Community colleges

can provide tutoring and different options for attending class, but they do not help with the

responsibilities of being a single parent, making it difficult for single-parent, community college

students to succeed in their education.

Lack of Services' Promotion

Another participant noted the lack of promotion to use the services. Many of the

participants felt they did not always know what programs were out there to utilize because the

way they found out about the other services they did know was not through traditional means.

For example, Alice, a single 30-year-old mother of three, used CalWORKs during her journey

back to school. CalWORKs assists needy families participating in a welfare-to-work situation

for one to two years (Cerven, 2013; Monje-Paulson et al., 2019). By participating, recipients

earn funding for their bills, food, and schooling (Cerven, 2013; Monje-Paulson et al., 2019). While attending her community college institution, she was a part-time student, taking one class each semester for five years. It took her eight years to graduate with her associate's degree. Alice needed extra funding for school, and any program that helped single parents was one she sought to use, but when it came to the state-funded government program CalWORKs, she discovered it outside her institution. Alice shared:

> I learned about the CalWORKs program in the parking lot of my kid's preschool. One of the other ladies is one of the other moms. I didn't know she was at [my] school. I just knew her from dropping off the kids at preschool. And so, she was like, "Oh, I saw you. I saw you at the college yesterday." And then she was asking me questions, and she told me about it [CalWORKs]. I had no idea I was already on cash aid. And even my work did not tell me about it. So, I learned about it in the parking lot of the preschool when another mom told me about the program.

When asked what community colleges, in general, could do to improve their services for single parents, participants said to increase the marketing and promotion of the services they offered (n=13). However, single-parent, community college students were only aware of services that applied to the masses. A single mother mentioned how she received many emails from her college about events, resources, and financial aid that she found helpful. Still, she wanted more emails about organizations and funding that could help single parents and families. Emails about services that did not apply to the traditional student went unsent by administrators.

Mike and Samuel, two single Black fathers, were also unaware of the services offered at their community colleges, respectively. Both men have higher aspirations of succeeding in their careers, with Mike focusing on the financial industry and Samuel still undecided. When asked

about what services are provided at their schools, Mike expressed that a majority of services were unknown, except for online classes. "I'm not really sure or really active," he said, "I'm not sure what's going on at my college." Samuel was also unfamiliar with his school's services, besides tutoring and counseling. When asked what services he knew about, he said:

I don't know what else, discounts or library services? I remember that. But I don't really know other than the one I use myself. I use them in person. I don't know whether they [tutoring] has an online service. I don't know.

Single-parent, community college students perceived student support services at community colleges mostly positively when it came to staff members since many had supportive encounters and experiences (n=20). But services lacked the necessary promotion and marketing to alert single-parent, community college students of different services they qualified for. Additionally, single parents found community colleges were meeting the needs of students in general, but were leaving out single parents' specific needs, such as with Damaris having trouble with instructors' flexibility and Jaylene needing more parental support.

Research Question #2

After analyzing the first research question's themes, the researcher focused on any differences that emerged from the coding experience based on race or ethnicity. After the focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducted and the first research question was coded, the researcher added three additional sheets in the Microsoft Excel workbook to focus on question two, which asks:

How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity?

Based on the participants' demographics, the researcher labeled the Excel sheets "His-Latin," "White," and "AA," which represented Hispanics/Latinxs, Caucasians/Whites, and African Americans/Blacks, respectively. The researcher then deleted any interview data that did not correspond with the appropriate ethnicity or race. For instance, one tab only had codes from participants identified as Hispanic/Latinx in the consent form. All other data was deleted. The same process applied to the other two sheets.

Caucasians/White (n=5), African American/Black (n=24), and Hispanic/Latinx (n=5) races or ethnicity were chosen because most participants fell within those groups. After deleting the excess information, the researcher sorted the codes by category to create clusters. The top three categories were "Barrier," "Single Parent," and "Staff." Clusters were created from those categories by separating them into groups that showed similarities, as aforementioned with research question one, resulting in themes (Miles et al., 2020). Table 5 shows the top three themes from each racial or ethnic group.

Table 5

Emerging Themes per Race or Ethnicity

	Theme 1	Number of responses	Theme 2	Number of responses	Theme 3	Number of responses
Hispanic/ Latinx	Unable to meet needs of single parents	6	Outside institutional support	5	Encounters and experiences with staff	6
Caucasian/ White	Positive encounters/ experiences with staff	13	Meet needs of students	9	Lack of services' promotion	5
African American/ Black	Encounters and experiences with staff	20	Meet needs of students, but unable to meet needs of single parents	20	Desired single-parent support groups	10

The following sections delve deeper into each race or ethnicity to discuss the themes produced

from the data analysis. Some themes displayed overlapped since they were within multiple races

or ethnicity with similar experiences voiced during the focus group and one-on-one interviews.

Additionally, some of the themes were also produced in research question one.

Hispanics/Latinxs

Throughout the focus group and one-on-one interviews, Hispanic/Latinx participants

viewed community college services negatively. Latinx, single-parent students have similar

barriers that face other minority students, and for them to overcome the obstacles usually

depends on how and if their parents overcame obstacles (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-

Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Hispanics typically try to develop an independent, non-

minority mindset to show others how they are able to succeed without the same services that a

traditional student may need (McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016). But changing themselves through

code-switching and biculturalism to fit in with other students affects their self-esteem and ability

to graduate from higher institutions if they cannot succeed in the long run (Alessandri, 2017;

McGee, 2016; Naynaha, 2016; Reyes, 2022).

Unable to Meet Single Parents' Needs.

As aforementioned, single-parent, community college students' needs differ from the

traditional college student's needs (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). The needs vary

between single mothers and single fathers. Still, they relate to the barriers single parents face,

such as child care issues (n=4), time management (n=2), and parenting responsibilities (n=3)

(Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Reichlin Cruse et al.,

2019a, 2019b).

During her focus group interview, Damaris, the single Hispanic mother of two, expressed

how she felt the services offered at her college did not help her as a single parent raising her

children. She had trouble with time management, and she said the most challenging part of

going to school during the pandemic was managing her son's schooling. Damaris had initially

allowed her son to live with her mother while she continued with her own schooling, but as

COVID-19 spread throughout the nation, her mother felt it was best for Damaris' son to return

home. By him returning home, she tried to have them work together, but she lacked support

which the college could not give her. She remarked:

> So, it's a different support. And I think it's a different experience. Because right now
>
> like sometimes I'm like, I wish I can afford, like these other people that are here, which
>
> can afford a cleaning lady who can come and help me clean. I wish I can afford healthy
>
> food and be able to pack lunches on a weekly, you know, like Sunday, spend all day
>
> packing or cooking and packing. But even cooking is tiring. And so, I try to not

compare myself with other students. Everyone has their own resources. Everyone has

their different lifestyles. But when I hear them [students] complain, and they have a

house and cleaning lady and can go and buy food, healthy food made, instead of cooking,

that really gets to me…Like don't complain to me, just don't. And no kids! So, it's a

different type of support system, and I'm here alone.

Hispanics lacked the resources and support needed from their higher institutions, which created

additional issues with balancing their parenting responsibilities and coursework.

Besides Damaris, other Hispanic, single-parent, community college students also felt

their needs were not being met. Colleges were not accommodating to single parents' needs, such

as flexibility when scheduling activities or finding extra support for single-parent, community

college students. Latina single mothers wanted to be more involved in their schools. Still, it was

unattainable because the institutions' schedules conflicted with single-parent, community college

students' schedules as well as their other responsibilities, such as with Denise, a Latina mother of

one. She was eager to tour universities and plan more of her future educational career. But due

to her parenting responsibilities, she was unable to participate in college tours and other activities

as well as services because they did not accommodate single parents. She remembered how she

could not participate:

You take a course for seven days, or for all the tickets, two weeks or something like that.

Instead of taking it for a semester, you go spend it somewhere. Those were not

something that I could consider because I am a single parent.

Despite colleges not meeting their single parent needs, Hispanics mentioned how the

needs of someone cooking for them or babysitting their children did not seem realistic for a

college to provide. Their voices expressed how they understood what colleges could provide,

mainly services that applied to traditional college students, compared to what they needed when it came to day-to-day challenges. Possible services to help with those daily challenges mentioned by the Hispanic single mothers were book vouchers, support groups, and flexibility with time. Book vouchers would help with their expenses. Support groups included both single-parent, support groups and parent/family support groups. And flexibility with time referred to instructors giving extra time for assignments and online learning.

Outside Institutional Support.

Since Hispanic single mothers felt the services colleges provided were unable to meet their needs as single-parent, community college students, they looked elsewhere, which resulted in them finding support from outside their institution. Support would derive from family and other community members, such as their friends. However, some single Latina mothers saw themselves as independent and knew they might not have family or friends' support to fall back on. Denise had always wanted to go back to school. After high school, she initially wanted to go to college but became pregnant with her son. Since then, she worked odd jobs but found life becoming more difficult as the world became more expensive. Denise recalled, "But I just realized that without an education, it was gonna be hard to earn more money and be able to be self-sufficient and provide for my son and myself in the future." She depended on the program CalWORKs to help her reach her academic goals through financial means.

Effy, another single mother, had her support come from her family rather than the college itself. Unfortunately, her institution did not have many services that target single parents, which created multiple barriers for her to overcome. Luckily, she could rely on her family as her outside support system to help her finish her degree. She said:

There weren't a lot of supports, specifically for parents. I know that I had to rely heavily

 on my mom and my sister. As far as like, child care, and it was a really intense program.

And so, I spent a lot of time at the library. I was missing out on a lot of, you know,

putting her [daughter] to bed and taking her to school in the morning and those kinds of

things. My mom and my sister really took on a lot of that responsibility. Most of the

support came from off-campus, not necessarily on the campus itself.

Latina single mothers depended heavily on off-campus support rather than college support

services. Most of the participants' discussions revolved around how external support systems

helped them provide for their children while attending college through child care or financial

means, such as with Denise:

EOPS [Expanded Opportunity Programs and Services] and CalWORKs had work-study,

and a lot of the single parents had jobs together doing like counseling, like just kind of

like filing. And they also had scholarship opportunities. And the donors were really,

really trying to give to single parents when it came to scholarships.

Encounters and Experiences with Staff.

As with research question one, some Hispanic single mothers found the staff available to

them helpful, but others perceived staff members as obstacles. The split point of view, when it

came to staff, most likely depended on the service provided. It could have also been random

experiences based on the college and its community members, such as where the community

resembled and comprised of Hispanics and/or single parents. For instance, Damaris' community

college was in an affluent White neighborhood, while Denise's college resided in a primarily

Hispanic community. Damaris found the staff to be unsupportive and uninterested in her

struggles. At the same time, Denise was more grateful for the help provided by staff in the different programs she had participated in.

Rosa, a Latina mother who lives in the southern United States, was appreciative of her college's staff members on some services but resentful towards others. One service she utilized was a group targeted explicitly toward first-generation students who spoke a second language. "They help with academic advisors, academic advice, so they help also with your schedule and things like that. I do have them in mind when I do need help," she said during her focus group interview. Meanwhile, she had a negative experience with the counseling service because she had trouble contacting her counselor, and she gave Rosa the wrong academic advice for her schedule. Her counselor had told her she was able to have a specific class on her schedule, but it turned out to be incorrect information because Rosa needed a prerequisite.

Each Latina single mother had some experience with a staff member, but the negative ones were more notable during the interviews. Hispanics found the staff helpful overall, but any negative experience encountered through a service made the parent perceive it as unfavorable and damaging. Services that had positive experiences resulted in the opposite, where Hispanics would return to the service repeatedly to take advantage of its benefits.

The Latina participants had high expectations of themselves and their colleges. If their college was not meeting their needs, they sought to have them fulfilled elsewhere. However, one bad experience resulted in a negative perception of the service for the rest of their college experience at that particular institution. Once support reached a certain limit from the community colleges, Latina single mothers sought help elsewhere while negatively perceiving support services from their college.

African Americans/Blacks

African American participants were more positive in their viewpoints about community college student support services than Latinx students. Despite the difference, Black students, like Hispanics, have obstacles to face throughout their education (Allen et al., 2018). They also try to fit in with their peers by attending school and actively participating (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). Researchers have found Black students attend college throughout and receive constant motivation from their family and friends (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). However, when it comes to the barriers they need to overcome, they are usually created from institutions and their own perceptions of their self-worth and ability to succeed (Allen et al., 2018; Lewis, 2016).

Meet Traditional Students' Needs while Neglecting Single Parents' Needs.

For African American participants, having their needs met as students differed from having their needs met as single parents. According to the literature, single-parent, community college students' needs include child care, class flexibility, and additional funding compared to the needs of a traditional community college student, which could include tutoring, financial aid, and ease of scheduling classes (Ekowo, 2015; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Radford et al., 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Wine et al., 2018). Jonathan, a single African American father, said community colleges should "have a platform where I can learn on my own, and then maybe meet up with a class later." Providing flexibility through online classes and other services allows single-parent, community college students fewer restrictions on their schedules and more leniency with time management.

Many single-parent, community college students mentioned returning or enrolling initially in college because they wanted a better life and more financial stability. The colleges chosen were close to their home or provided financial aid. Some participants chose online

programs to offer flexibility in their scheduling to complete assignments and exams when time allowed; those who did not have online programs mentioned that it would be ideal to have that option. African Americans believed that anything that could ensure their college experience to be successful while also being able to take care of their other responsibilities was beneficial and should be implemented into higher educational institutions, such as with Ryan, who shared:

> For me, I would say the college's services who have been able to help me out should continue and other colleges should try to emulate those things [counseling, extra opportunities for funding, and support groups]. Colleges should try to copy from one another.

> Another Black single parent, Mary, is a full-time student and mother of one. She decided to go back to school with the ultimate goal of earning her Master's degree in Business Administration. She wants to be financially independent and a financial coach. She stated how she did not participate in activities on campus because she had to take care of her child concurrently. But she also mentioned how online flexibility would benefit her and other single parents. She said:

> As a single mom, I found it very hard to physically go in the classroom. If an online platform was going to be used, then we'd skate through classes. We'd fix our time [management] and it would really be appreciated. Something else to consider is the fact that we have responsibilities we take care of. Because having to take care of your child and skipping school to work to have more money to go to college is possible with online classes. It would really pay off.

But community colleges were missing the option of online classes before the pandemic. African American, single-parent, community college students found that after the pandemic, they could

manage their class load easier with the help of online courses. However, online classes were targeted toward students in general and not necessarily single parents. Other Black participants mentioned flexible learning as a benefit towards earning their two-year degree. But these participants also failed to mention any service that was only for single parents. Instead, services mentioned that helped their success were general services available to all students, such as online programs, counseling, and tutoring.

Desired Support Groups.

As mentioned previously, outside support was seen as a significant benefit. Hispanic/Latinx, single-parent, community college students found help outside their institutions, such as through organizations or from family. African Americans, however, did not mention having support necessarily from others but craving it from possible single-parent, support groups.

One focus group, in particular, mentioned a few times how having a single-parent group would be helpful towards single mothers and single fathers respectfully. Martha, a part-time college student, expressed that she would be grateful if her college had a group for single mothers. She discussed:

> Being a single parent is not really easy; sometimes, it's devastating. You just want to fix yourself with school. Some of us do part-time jobs and want to fix yourself with your job, and you want to fix yourself with your kids. One of the things I think my school should do most, especially for women…is come up with a plan or open an organization for women to support women. I've met several single moms, and it's not really easy for them…we can come together, coming on strong, bringing more ideas, and improving the

school in terms of encouraging single parents. We can even support ourselves financially

through each other.

She continued by making it clear that she was advocating for women. However, one single

father, Jonah, disagreed with her only talking about single mothers. He countered:

I feel it's not just only for women. We men also go through a lot, so why not have it for

both? The males or females, basically everyone can get along, share ideas, share

experiences, so why must it only be for women? Carry us along, too, so we can help.

We also do a lot too. I don't really feel for women when it's necessary for us too. It

needs to be catered for men too, and you know, it's actually between a guy and a girl

before becoming a single mom or single father. So, by mercy, I feel this should be made

available for both males and females because there is always this awareness that is

majorly towards the side of the female instead of the male. So why not have a group

supporting both?

The conversation went back and forth between the two members, with the researcher concluding

that having a single-mother group, a single-father group, a single-parent group, and even groups

focusing on one race would be beneficial for students, especially single-parent, community

college students who can come together to help with child care, studying, and other

responsibilities that the college is unable to provide for.

Encounters and Experiences with Staff.

Lastly, Black participants had various encounters with staff members from different

services, mostly counseling (n=11) and tutoring (n=7). One positive experience came from

Ryan, who mentioned, during his focus group interview, how the counselor he was assigned to

for academic advisement was able to help him through his academics and finances by pushing

Ryan to apply for scholarships and grants. Ryan believed the extra help was due to him being a single father and an older student. He had mentioned how he did not experience any racial discrimination and how his counselor treated him as an equal.

Another student, Jonathan, also appreciated his time with the counseling service at his college. He found the counselor helpful in overplanning his schedule down to what a typical week would look like. Counselors who went above and beyond made an impression on Black single parents because the extra help was not warranted. As long as the counselor presented themselves as available, caring, friendly, and/or helpful, the student found the service positive and beneficial towards their success. Only three Black students, out of 24, found negative experiences with staff as their primary experience, which they associated with their race. These students emphasized how the negative experiences came from being Black rather than being a single parent. Participants perceived that they were not picked for some activities and were denied services due to their race. But none of those students followed up with the racism they experienced at their college since it was only a single incident for each student and not their overall experience. For example, Jocelyn, a single mother of two, recognized discrimination as a part of everyday life. She knew it happened regularly, but she was surprised when it happened to her. She recalled:

> I was put into this sports club, and there were two girls who were evil. They told me that I'm Black and I can't be a part of the group. I was like, are you for real? We are supposed to be supportive of each other. I felt bad. I just left, and the leader came, and I told her that she should do something and let me in. She refused, and I was uncomfortable. I didn't really tell anyone. I didn't want to deal with it.

Caucasians/Whites

There was approximately the same number of White participants as there were Latinx. The Caucasian single parents did not mention race as much as they did age. Age was more of a factor when it came to discrimination, but overall, these participants were discriminated against less than African American and Hispanic, single-parent, community college students.

Positive Encounters and Experiences with Staff.

Like African Americans, White participants also had positive encounters with staff members from various services. The popular services discussed the most among White participants were tutoring and counseling. Several single mothers talked about how their services' staff members were personable and helpful. One single mother, Sherry, mentioned how success coaches would inform students about her college's different services at the beginning of the semester. Plus, she had other positive experiences and encounters with her professors. She explained:

> My classes had success coaches come into the classroom, maybe that very first week of class, and just talk about the services that were available for us. And they had free tutoring as well. So, they would, you know, direct us to the right person that we needed to see. But also, we could just stop by our professors' offices when they had office hours, if we needed extra help or had questions.

Another Caucasian single mother, Korra, had similar positive experiences, except she experienced them with the counselor. She found her counselor to be friendly and dependable if she needed anything. The counselor accommodated Korra for being a single mother by making sure she stayed on track. Korra remembered:

With the counselor, she was very nice. She completely understood. Like when I first started school, I didn't take as many classes as I am now. And she worked with me. I actually picked up a couple summer classes that way; I wasn't falling behind. And she was just overall completely understanding of being a single mother and wanting to go back to school.

Other White participants had similar experiences where the staff helped give the single-parent, community college students the necessary resources they required. Sometimes there were personality clashes, but none of the participants mentioned any discrimination or hardship due to their race.

Lack of Services' Promotion.

Some White participants revealed that they were unfamiliar with all the colleges' services. Sherry was the only Caucasian student who said she had success coaches visit her classes. Other students knew of the general and more popular ones, but there was less marketing and promotion from their institution to put those services out there when it came to smaller ones. Alice said, "They [the college] could do more on promoting certain programs. Like I think they think certain programs are not as important because they're a lot smaller. Just because it's small doesn't mean it's not making a huge impact."

Other Caucasian, single-parent, community college students expressed something similar to Alice. When asked generally about what services their school had or thought of trying, several students said they were unsure what they wanted to try because they did not know which ones were available. White, single-parent, community college students knew of the general services for traditional students but wished their college also provided daycare and support groups.

Meet Students' Needs.

The last perception discovered by Caucasian participants is that the colleges were able to meet student needs. Michelle, a part-time student, explained more in-depth how her college was able to meet the traditional student's needs while also leaving out single parents. She recalled:

School-wide there's not a lot down there, and some things that my school offers…like what we have, it's not so much for single parents, but we have like family nights where the kids [traditional students] can come to school and watch a movie on a big projector. So that's cool. And then they do a trick or treat thing that the kids [traditional students] can do. It's not oriented in aspects, but to say that well…they just did a celebration for first-gen students. You know, you're the first generation to go to college. That's great. I'm glad, and I'm not taking that away. I'm glad that you're doing that. But where's the single parents? Where's the bring your kid to campus and let them see what they could be kind of stuff?

Other Caucasian participants explained accommodations given to them, such as assignment extensions, online classes, and easy access for help through an online chatbot. But the services mentioned were not targeted toward single parents. They were available to all students, therefore showing how community colleges were able to meet the needs of students. Many White, single-parent, community college students did not mention if their single-parent needs were neglected, but mainly focused on how student needs were met.

Research question two discovered White and Black participants to have similar views about community college student support services. However, Hispanic/Latinx, single-parent, community college students had a more negative outlook on community colleges, differing from research question one's themes. A majority of students, though, found the staff to be helpful

when it came to meeting their needs as a general student, such as through tutoring and counseling, but the flexibility of classes and services as well as the marketing of unknown programs that apply to single-parent, community college students are also desired qualities of community college's student support services.

Research Question #3

After comparing the diverse viewpoints, the researcher separated the coding by gender, single mothers versus single fathers. Research question three separated single parents by gender through the following question:

What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single mothers and single fathers?

The same process was applied as with the previous research question. First, the researcher disaggregated codes through Excel's filtering feature to delete data that did not match the appropriate gender for the Excel sheet. Then the codes were sorted by category to create clusters. She then identified the themes from those codes with the most tallies. Themes based on gender are found below in Table 6.

Table 6

Emerging Themes per Gender

	Theme 1	Number of responses	Theme 2	Number of responses	Theme 3	Number of responses
Single Mother	Positive encounters/ experiences with staff	22	Meet needs of students, but unable to meet needs of single parents	31	Outside institutional support	16
Single Father	Positive encounters/ experiences with staff	11	Meet needs of students	11	Lack of demand for services	8

Like the previous research questions and their foci, some themes were seen by both genders, while three themes differentiated the two. The following two sections investigate how single mothers and single fathers differed in their perceptions of community colleges' student support services. Themes were derived from focus groups and one-on-one interviews similarly to research questions one and two.

Single Mothers

Single mothers are seen as low-income, independent women who lack a higher education (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Crumb, 2021; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a, 2019b). While enrolled in college, these at-risk mothers tend to have a low graduation rate because of their demanding responsibilities (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Pizzolato et al., 2017). But in addition to their busy workload, they also fail to understand financial aid, time management, and the overall college system to succeed in the educational system (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Their primary focus is family, with work and

education coming in second and third (Gault & Zeisler, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Without easier access to helpful staff members and understanding professors, single-mother, community college students' success and motivation dwindle as other priorities take center stage (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Tehan, 2006).

Positive Encounters and Experiences with Staff.

Single-mother, community college students had positive experiences with staff, similar to the results from research questions one and two. Karla, a single mother of three, wanted to eventually get her bachelor's degree in Environmental Science. Her program had online classes, and the tuition was less expensive than other colleges in her area. She did not usually have difficulty with staff, but she attributed that to her cheerful demeanor. For example, she recalled a positive experience with one of her instructors:

> A few months ago, all three of my children and myself were sick. I emailed my professor, and he gave me a week grace period to turn in my assignments without docking my grade 10% as you normally would have done for late work.

Other students felt the staff, mainly counselors, instructors, and some tutoring staff, to be the most helpful. Also noted were the admissions and financial aid office staff. Single-mother, community college students believed the staff did what they could with the resources and knowledge available to them. Of course, this occurred when they went seeking the services. The services did not come to the single-mother, community college students. They needed to find out what was available to them.

Outside Institutional Support.

From the focus group and one-on-one interviews, outside support was defined as the support given off-campus. It can be provided by friends, family, and random people or

organizations. Single-mother, community college students found their needs met through external supports. If a service was not being promoted or lacking in nature, the single-mother, community college students found other resources available and at their disposal through their peers, child's school, and more. For example, Sherry had an autistic daughter whom she adopted. Sherry would provide daily care for her daughter before her child became a teenager, which prevented Sherry from attending school. She explained:

> She was admitted to a psychiatric residential treatment center, when she was 14, to get some extra help with some of those struggles that we were facing. And of course, it was a very difficult time in my life. Just dealing with all of that, and so now I no longer have her day-to-day care. And I had always wanted to go to college. I just love learning, and I'm always reading anyway. So, I decided to just jump in and see what happens.

> The extra help from outside resources allowed her to have spare time to attend classes.

> Another example is Lindsay, a single Latina mother. She's a mother of two and became

pregnant right before entering her local community college and was still in high school. She relied on her family to support her and her child since her boyfriend had left her to be alone to raise their daughter. While in high school, Lindsay said her school helped her manage her studies while also helping her as a single mother. They gave her a lot of support her senior year, such as with daycare. But when she enrolled in community college, they were not as supportive. She remembers:

> Mine pretty much had no support for anything. It [support] was all from my family. My parents watched my son and daughter, mostly my stepmom. She was a stay-at-home mom; thank goodness for that. But it [the college] really didn't offer me anything different than students coming in with no children.

Participants found a majority of services to be helpful throughout their college careers. Still, if there were any that were unhelpful or unavailable, single-mother, community college students ventured into outside services and resources for additional support to meet the needs not being met by community colleges.

Meet Traditional Students' Needs while Neglecting Single Parents' Needs.

As mentioned with research questions one and two above, meeting the needs of traditional students versus single parents differs, especially from the view of single-mother, community college students. Overall, community colleges provided extra support to students, but nothing particularly targeted single parents. One program a single mother mentioned was an extended opportunity program. To participate, students needed to have a 2.0 GPA or higher, less than 60 credits, and an income requirement. Since single-mother, community college students tend to fall within the low-income category, they can participate in the program, but it is not specifically for single parents. This organization's college separated characteristics from different demographic groups to help the masses, which was the case for Rebecca, a Pacific Islander single mother of three. Rebecca appreciated the program her school offered to help low-income families. It gets participating students "priority registration, and then they give stipends for your textbooks, and they give you notebooks and supplies for your classes that you registered for." The program also hosts workshops and provides tutoring.

Two other single-mother, community college students mentioned programs they utilized at their college. One program was explicitly for Hispanic Americans, where the group strives to help Latinxs in the community as well as on-campus, while the other was for first generational second language students mentioned previously. But the programs were not necessarily for single parents. Instead, they were targeted toward the traditional college student.

Single-mother, community college students in the different focus group and one-on-one interviews found that colleges are applying services to as many students as possible rather than small groups, just as in the first two research questions. Single-parent, community college students needed to have characteristics of other groups, like Rebecca, to access more services than the traditional student.

Single Fathers

There is a lack of literature regarding single fathers and their characteristics. There is much more literature that focuses on single mothers and their experiences. One reason is that single fatherhood was uncommon and is now an increasing population (Albert, 2018; Shipe et al., 2022). There are approximately 3.3 million single fathers as of 2020 (Shipe et al., 2022).

Like single mothers, single fathers' characteristics include having a low income, identifying as a minority, and having less education than married fathers (Albert, 2018; Shipe et al., 2022). Because of the stereotype that mothers should be the ones raising children rather than fathers, Shipe et al. (2022) find single fathers to have biased hurdles to overcome concerning societal prejudices. Additionally, Shipe et al. (2022) also explain how single fathers have poorer experiences with attending to their child's needs, such as missing pediatric visits, having child behavioral concerns, and increasing substance use by their children.

Positive Encounters and Experiences with Staff.

During the focus group interviews, it was revealed that single-father, community college students had more positive than negative experiences with staff and their services. They also found counselors and tutoring staff to be helpful in motivating students to continue with their education and show proper guidance by being available and caring. Harry, a Black single father of one, said the most impactful staff member in his educational journey was his academic

advisor. He shared, "my academic advisor calls to check up on me, educationally and personally. Pretty much everything. He's been supportive. He's always been there to support me whenever I need academic advice and also personal advice. It's been great."

Harry is not the only single-father, community college student to praise his counselor. Others expressed their counselors to be great motivators and an overall great experience. But other than counselors and advisors, professors were also honored by being accommodating to students even when it was not their regular office hours. For example, Carl, another African American father, said he was having issues with managing his schoolwork. Still, his professor was friendly and gave Carl tutoring advice on the curriculum for the class.

Meet Students' Needs and Lack of Demand for Services.

Aside from the positive staff experiences, single-father, community college students also felt their student needs being met by the services offered. One single father, Ryan, said, "There are lots of other services, and really, those are the few I know, but there are more services than that they offer, but I only use them if I need them." Single-father, community college students mentioned similar statements throughout the focus group interviews as Ryan. If the student did not need the service, then they did not go seek them out, but the ones mentioned the most tended to be for all students and not just single fathers. In addition, their colleges had flexible programs through online classes and provided easy access to services, such as workshops, tutoring, and counseling.

Single-mother, community college students explained how they needed help with child care the most, but single-father, community college students mentioned their children much less. This could be due to various reasons, as Livingston (2013) noted. The term "single father" is

vague, according to Livingston (2013), and can include fathers living with a non-marital partner or those who have shared custody.

Ryan did not know of the different services offered at his institution. However, he wanted to find more funding, but he was unaware of any opportunities at his college. He said during his focus group interview:

> If they could make available funding to support single parents, it would be nice. Or maybe I need to do more research and find out if there's that option available to me. But as of now, I know it's not available, and that will really help single parents.

Single mothers and single fathers both had positive experiences with staff members and felt their needs as a student were being met. However, single-mother, community college students needed more from their colleges' services to meet their single-parent needs, and if the colleges could not oblige, then they reached out to support services off-campus. Meanwhile, single-father, community college students were more focused on how the services at their college went unknown.

Conclusion

The results of the focus group and one-on-one interviews were summarized in Chapter IV. Coding and clustering the interview data to create meaningful themes presented a similar viewpoint among both genders. As for racial or ethnic diversity of the students, Hispanic/Latinx students were more focused on the negatives deriving from community colleges, such as support coming from off-campus rather than the institutions themselves as well as staff being unhelpful and giving an overall poor experience. Single-parent, community college students recommended community colleges enhance their services through additional flexibility, more resources, and increased promotion of such services in order for single-parent, community college students to

truly feel seen by their institution. They felt their institutions were focused on the traditional

college student instead of the single parent. In the following chapter, the information from

Chapter IV will be further discussed to identify barriers preventing single parents from

community college success and ways institutions can improve their services to meet single

parents' needs.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

Community colleges within the United States have increasing single-parent enrollment (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010). Despite the increase, community colleges continue to target most of their services toward traditional students, who live with their parents, are not employed, and/or do not have any dependents (Pujar et al., 2018; Shenoy et al., 2016). Single-parent, community college students then have more difficulty graduating, affecting their overall completion rate, which remains low (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010).

Single-parent, community college students face various barriers, preventing them from fully succeeding in college than traditional students who have fewer obstacles to overcome (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Single-parent, community college students need to balance their education, parenting responsibilities, and work duties, which can positively or negatively influence their college success (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Smith, 2019a, 2019d). Community colleges have implemented student support services to help families and traditional students, such as child care and tutoring, but still, some single-parent, community college students remain at risk of dropping out (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

Although previous research has been published concerning single parents and their community college success through student support services, a majority has focused on single mothers through quantitative methods (Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-

Smith, 2016). In addition, any student support service previously studied has revolved around

child care for single mothers, with the other services offered to students, in general, remaining

ignored (Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Also, single

fathers are a critical aspect of single parents and their success, but researchers have failed to

study this demographic for unknown reasons. Overall, single parents' perception of student

support services has been nearly forgotten. The research questions explored in this qualitative

study were:

1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single

   parents?

2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race

   or ethnicity?

3. What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between

   single mothers and single fathers?

Chapter V clarifies the results of this study and how they connect to Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016,

2017) Persistence Theory. Additionally, the chapter offers recommendations for future research

and implications for professional practice.

Summary of the Results

This qualitative study identified how single-parent, community college students perceive

their institutions' student support services with regard to marital status, race or ethnicity, and

gender. Due to previous literature comprising of quantitative methods, qualitative research was

utilized to identify the participants' perceptions. Qualitative methods were ideal for giving the

researcher a glimpse into what participants thought regarding student support services (Creswell,

2014, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, focus group and one-on-one interviews were executed to determine single parents' perceptions of community colleges' services.

The researcher interviewed single-parent, community college students from around the United States. After the interviews were completed, the transcriptions were coded and analyzed to identify participants' viewpoints of the different student support services at their institutions based on their marital status, race or ethnicity, and gender.

Participants were gathered via social media. A post was uploaded to Instagram and Facebook to solicit parents (see Appendix K). Emails and direct messages were sent to the researcher from potential participants, to which the researcher then reached out to each parent to find a possible meeting time. Thirty-seven participants were interviewed through focus groups, with two volunteering for one-on-one interviews. The interviews were held virtually through Zoom. Semi-structured interview questions were used (see Appendix C). The interview questions mainly focused on student support services to answer research question one. The qualitative data collected was analyzed through multiple lenses based on participants' demographics to answer research questions two and three.

The ten interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 75 minutes in length. The audio files were transcribed, and the transcriptions were reviewed on Otter.ai. After ensuring accuracy, the researcher read the transcriptions multiple times and coded for themes. All participants' voices were coded first and then distributed into different clusters based on what the codes had in common. The clusters evolved into themes, and then the process was repeated, but only for participants of a certain race or ethnicity. After those were also coded, the transcriptions were coded again but based on gender. Therefore, some codes and themes overlapped throughout the different racial and gender variables, as seen in Figure 3 (p. 67).

In this research study, the variables of marital status, race or ethnicity, and gender were connected to the participants' perceptions of student support services. Marital status and gender pertained to the parent identifying as a single mother or a single father. Race or ethnicity was derived from participants' background, which resulted in five participants identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, 24 participants identifying as African American/Black, and five participants identifying as Caucasian/White. The other three participants were either Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, or of mixed race. How each group of single-parent, community college students perceived student support services depended largely on their experiences while attending their institution. The themes extracted from the participants will be discussed in this chapter through their experiences, previous literature, and Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory.

Encounters and Experiences with Staff

Encounters and experiences with staff was the first theme noted throughout the research questions. During the interviews, participants mentioned mainly positive experiences, but there were some negative ones among Latina single mothers. Tutoring and counseling were associated with students' motivation and success. Both services resulted in positive and negative experiences. Meanwhile, other negative encounters were through child care and school clubs/organizations. The negative experiences motivated single-parent, community college students to find other means of support or a new institution, such as with the Hispanic participants.

Single-parent, community college students' experiences with staff were mainly positive. Participants described faculty and staff as helpful and caring. They were also personable and

helped motivate the single-parent, community college students to finish the semesters successfully as well as enroll initially. For instance, single mother Sherry said:

> I just stopped by to see what the requirements would be [at her college to enroll]. And you know how difficult this process might be to get started with college as a single mom. And they [admissions staff] were just very helpful and walked me through every step of the way. My overall experience was just very positive with them.

Another single mother, Mary, had explained her positive experiences with staff were "good in giving knowledge of current trainings and workshops." Her college had knowledgeable personnel to provide students with resources and guide them to various opportunities.

The literature concerning single-parent, community college students and their encounters with staff is focused on guidance. Overall, previous research has found single-parent, community college students need student services to promote academic success (Breen et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2020; Pierce, 2015; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Smith, 2019a). But there was rarely any mention of how staff providing a positive experience promotes student success, other than with counselors and advisors. Studies have found advising and counseling to increase retention and persistence among college students through their helpfulness in understanding how students balance their academics with their life outside of school (Brown et al., 2020; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). Additionally, counselors have encouraged single-parent, community college students to have relationships with faculty and staff to attain success (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006).

Similarly, Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory described the experience of self-efficacy as developing through their educational experiences. Not necessarily from

experiences and encounters with staff, but he described how students' self-efficacy could dwindle throughout their college experience if they developed a weakened sense of confidence or lack of motivation (Tinto, 1975, 2016, 2017). Faculty and staff can inspire and boost students' confidence through their positive relationships and encounters with single-parent, community college students, similar to Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Model of Retention seen in Figure 1 (p. 18). By doing so, single-parent, community college students are more likely to persist with their education resulting in graduation (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory and the literature regarding counseling and advising align with single-parent, community college students' success developing from positive encounters and experiences with staff. Previous literature discussed students in general, but now the literature can include single-parent, community college students and other services, in addition to counseling and advising. All in all, this study finds single-parent, community college students to normally perceive student services positively based on their experiences and encounters with staff.

Conversely, perceptions of student services based on race or ethnicity differed with Hispanics/Latinxs with regard to encounters and experiences with staff. This mainly occurred with their experiences with child care, counseling, and interactions with professors. At the same time, however, African American and Caucasian participants had only positive experiences with staff.

Compared to the literature, the services, based on Latina participants' perceptions, mainly fell in line with the belief that child care was not available enough or of high enough quality. Previous research has found child care to be extremely important to a student-parent's success (Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin

Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). However, participants had mentioned the child care service at their institutions had long waiting lists, was non-existent, or was inequitable to single-parent, community college students by staff. Long wait lists or frustration with non-existent child care at colleges were also noted in the literature (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012). Child care provides parents with consistency and extra support for student parents to focus on their schooling while being satisfied that their child is with reliable caregivers (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a).

For example, the inequity to single-parent, community college students brought about by staff was not mentioned in the literature. But single-mother Damaris experienced a discriminating encounter with her son's daycare staff. She recalled how the staff gave special treatment to others compared to herself. She said:

> I needed to take an exam, and I told them [the daycare] these are two exams that I need and would like to study for during summer; can I have extra hours for my son? And she said, "Well, you have to bring proof. And you have to bring a letter stating where you're going to be on campus, who is going to be supervising you during these hours that you're going to be studying, and what time." I said okay. I can probably get an instructor or counselor. I mean, it wasn't embarrassing to ask, but I'm like, okay, and she gave me an example…So, it was all carefully planned, right? And then I see some international Japanese parents come in. And they said, "I need some extra hours for my child in daycare." And she didn't know how to speak English. And the [daycare] lady said, "Okay, it's okay. You don't have to worry about it. Just say that you need to take some English learning conversation classes. And that's it. We'll just put that down." And it was right after we met. And I was like, did this just happen? She's giving me the go-

around to get some hours for exams that I really need to take, and for this person, she

just wanted some extra free hours, and she's [from the daycare] like, "Yeah, it's okay.

Don't worry about it." And I left there crying because I knew what happened. You

know, it's like, wow, I'm a student. I do need the hours, child care hours. This is a stay-

at-home mom who just wanted her child to have some social interaction, which is okay.

But the treatment and the difference really got to me. At the time, I was like, is this really

happening. Am I imagining things, or how do you classify this experience?

Due to the damaging experience from her college's child care, Damaris resulted to family

support to care for her son, venturing away from the college's service altogether. Staff

encounters influenced Latina, single-mother students' academic success. Damaris was almost

unable to take her exams due to the difficulty the staff member provided by giving her obstacles

and additional paperwork to complete that other parents did not have to submit. Participants

wanted services to be improved upon for the schools that did have child care by allowing

additional flexibility permitted by staff members.

Other researchers found similar results for student parents regarding child care, but not in

terms of staff encounters. Instead, they discussed how without proper child care, student parents

felt they were not going to be able to succeed in their educational journey (Lindsay & Gillum,

2018). They also explained how colleges were not acknowledging their student parents' children

with regard to student services (Beeler, 2016; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Despite the similar

nature in recommendations about improved child care, previous studies did not mention the staff

of the child care facilities, while Hispanics of this study focused on it.

Meanwhile, African American and Caucasian, single-parent, community college students

had positive encounters with staff, such as with counseling and tutoring, where participants

mostly said the service was beneficial to their education. One such positive encounter with staff was through the tutoring service, a traditional service that was not targeted to single-parent, community college students but to all students. Samuel, an African American single father, found tutoring helpful during the pandemic. He recalled:

> I used workshops and tutoring during COVID. I have attended both, and it's really been awesome and great. I was starting college, and I wasn't sure I could cope. So, tutoring really helped me with getting used to everything, so that was awesome.

The same was found among White participants. Korra had said, "A lot of my courses have tutors, or the professors will sit down one-on-one and help you, which makes it a little bit easier, especially for certain classes that I was not very good at, like accounting."

According to the literature, single-parent, community college students clashed with tutoring services due to institutional barriers preventing them from using the centers (Coronel, 2020; Wahl, 2018). The prevention was caused mainly by conflicting schedules, but participants in this study did not mention their schedules as an issue with tutoring services. Instead, participants commented how tutoring was always available, whether online or in person. The staff members were usually helpful with tutoring, and some would come to classrooms to promote the tutoring service, like with Sherry who reminisced:

> My classes had success coaches come into the classroom, maybe that very first week of class, and just talk about the services that were available for us. And they had free tutoring as well. So, they would, you know, direct us to the right person that we needed to see.

Caucasian students also had positive experiences with counseling. In addition to providing success coaches, Sherry's college had personable counselors ready to help students as needed. She recalled:

> I would say that's also a factor in my experience; when I was first starting, my advisor was very personable, and, well just personal. She wasn't a business person. She wasn't a professional. She was kind of like my mentor, a friend, somebody that wanted to see me succeed. So, she listened to what I was talking about my life, what my needs would be, and then she said, "Sure, we can make this work, and this is how you can do it. This is what you can do." And so, it felt like she really understood what my needs would be.

Black, single-parent, community college students felt the same about their counselors, such as single father, Johnny. He said, "I would say the counseling services have been very beneficial because whenever I needed advice or I needed help, I would actually come to them, and it was always my favorite experience because my counselor was so nice."

The positive experiences voiced during the interviews by White and Black, single-parent, community college students added to published literature since little was mentioned beforehand specifying these races and their experiences with staff. Previous literature instead found tutoring challenging for single-parent, community college students due to institutional barriers of parents not being able to bring their children to tutoring (Coronel, 2020; Wahl, 2018). But there was no mention of tutoring staff and their influence on Black and White, single-parent, community college students. In addition, studies found counseling to benefit all students and that counselors and advisors helped balance schedules (CCSSE, 2005; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014;

Schroeder & Terras, 2015). But there was not much literature about these two races and their perceptions of the counseling staff, but rather students in general.

Single-parent, community college students frequently recognized advisement and counseling as constant motivators to continue their education. They stated how counselors and advisors were able to help single-parent, community college students with their academic schedules and promote confidence in balancing their responsibilities. Both single mothers and single fathers had similar perceptions about student services, including counseling, since they experienced positive staff encounters. Single mother Alice first had negative experiences with her counselor until she was able to connect with the right counselor, which motivated Alice to increase her persistence. She recalled:

> I had to find the right person, like you go to meet with a counselor you're assigned to based on your last name. It doesn't always work out. Because…I don't know why…it's just, you have to be able to mesh with that person because you're going through serious things in your life. Like this is important. I don't want to just go through the emotions of like, okay, yeah, green checkmarks. Like, no, no. I need to understand what I'm doing. How am I going to get there? Why is this meaningful? And so, it took me four counselors to find the right counselor that worked for me. Now to this day, we still stay in contact; she's still a positive influence on me. I still ask her questions. So, like, counseling is great and all to mark off the green checkmarks. But like, I need more in-depth than that because I need to understand what I'm doing. Like you could put the green checkmark, but tell me why or how or what, you know? So, I think counseling services for me were super beneficial, but not until I found the right counselor.

Furthermore, single-father, community college students had positive experiences with counseling staff as well. Jonathan discovered his counselor to be helpful even with the small matters that made a difference. He mentioned:

Counseling services have really been awesome. It really helped me make my schedule. I just had to show everything I had and always do, like in my typical week for him [the counselor]. And then he helped me do the whole thing, and it really relieved me. Like I was really relieved when he helped me plan it all.

Researchers previously found advisors and counselors critical regarding students' persistence and retention (Brown et al., 2020; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). In addition, counselors helped students cope with parenting and their education demands, which was also noted by participants of this study (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006). Unfortunately, the literature did not identify single parents during their findings of advising and counseling but focused more on all student parents. But now, the literature can also state how the perceptions of counseling staff from single mothers and single fathers aligned with the research on how advisors and counselors are motivators for single-parent, community college students' persistence. This study points out that single-parent, community college students had a positive point of view of their interactions with counseling staff, such as through the beneficial conversations to help the student with their mental health and academic achievement.

Overall single-parent, community college students perceived student support services as providing helpful staff members, to mainly tutoring and counseling services, and providing encouragement and motivation to students. However, some negative encounters were experienced by Latinas, which deterred them from utilizing the same service again. In this

qualitative study, single-parent, community college students associated staff as physical support available to provide inspiration relating to Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory, including self-efficacy and how relationships can be built upon to increase completion rates. However, the participants' voices provided more in-depth perceptions concerning race or ethnicity since previous studies focused on single parents as a whole. Additionally, encounters and experiences with staff increased the body of knowledge to include specific demographics and their relation to student services staff.

Students' and Single Parents' Needs

During the focus group and one-on-one interviews, another theme that emerged was how single-parent, community college students stated that their institutions were able to meet their needs as a student but were less successful at meeting their needs as parents who were going to school. Colleges offered tutoring, counseling, and financial aid targeted at traditional college students. But colleges were failing at helping single-parent, community college students through institutional barriers, such as inflexible scheduling, lack of child care, and other obstacles affecting educational attainment. Single-parent, community college students felt community colleges were more concerned with their young students without familial obligations than their single-parent population. Therefore, single-parent, community college students felt neglected regarding their parental, mental health, and flexibility needs.

As mentioned in Chapter II, financial insecurity and time demands are barriers for single-parent, community college students to attain their degrees. Financial insecurity is regarded as an obstacle for single-parent, community college students since they have difficulty being able to afford their education along with their other expenses (Hinton-Smith, 2016). Researchers uncovered an issue with single parents making more money while attending college, which was

increasing their income could hurt their financial aid leading them to drop out of college (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). Participants from this study discussed finances, but not as much as expected. Some participated in CalWORKs, but there were no complaints about how it hindered their education. They found this service helpful when considering their financial situation, which was the opposite results from previous literature. Alice commented, the "CalWORKs program did the best they could do to support us." Alice also explained how eventually, CalWORKs was not needed anymore due to her finding a job. The situation was similar to the literature, but the outcome was different, as Alice clarified:

> When I went back to school, in the beginning, I was on CalWORKs. And so, I was able to enter their program because they don't have a unit requirement. You know, there's no requirement other than you're receiving cash aid. And so that helps a lot. But I was only in it for, I think about, a little less than two years. Because then I went back to work, and I didn't even qualify anymore, which was great. But then that was my only support program, so I lost that.

Alice was able to support herself, but the extra CalWORKs monies would have been beneficial to continue to have. All in all, some single-parent, community college students mentioned interest in increased financial aid and additional scholarships or grants, but financial insecurity was not presented often as an obstacle to completing or continuing with single parents' education. Only a handful of single-parent, community college students discussed needing or wanting additional funding. Single-parent, community college students had a range of financial support from government aid, scholarships, and grants provided by outside organizations and/or their institutions. Damaris claimed:

I would have liked to learn more about opportunities because I found out that some people were on welfare. And you can get free food and free money. And I'm like what, I didn't know that! And I'm here working my ass off. I had two jobs, one full-time job, next shift, graveyard shift. And then I had a job on campus at a little office, a women's center.

Furthermore, single-mother, community college students were immersed with some organizations on campus; however, the organizations did not target single mothers to help with scholarships and other single parents' needs. Instead, these programs were targeting other student body characteristics, such as language needs, income status, or race. Therefore, single-mother, community college students could utilize these outside organizations because some of their other characteristics fell within the participation criteria. When colleges implement services, it seems as if they try to target as many student groups as possible, which sometimes, but not always, encompasses single-parent, community college students depending on other characteristics they may possess.

Time demands, on the other hand, were explained by some participants as an obstacle. Participants had talked with their professors about allowing them flexibility with office hours, assignments, and attending classes and events, with varying degrees of success and difficulty. Single-parent, community college students juggled taking care of their child, working, and going to class, which lengthened students' overall time spent at their institution. One single-parent, community college student took five years to complete her two-year degree, while another took eight.

Tinto (1993, 2016, 2017) created the Persistence Theory to demonstrate how a student's persistence is more influential to their success than retention. He presented information on how

higher education institutions were focused on retaining students, but it did not necessarily lead to graduation and completion of degrees (Tinto, 2016, 2017). To increase the persistence rate and, therefore, graduation rate, colleges need to focus on self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and the belief that the curriculum learned has value (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). During the focus group and one-on-one interviews, participants did not mention that any of them had dropped out of college. Single-parent, community college students were either still enrolled in college or had recently graduated. Nevertheless, a few discussed barriers with some of the classes or assignments affecting the satisfaction of their needs and, therefore, persistence to graduate. Their self-efficacy was threatened, endangering their academic success (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Additionally, single-mother, community college students wanted more means of support than what colleges could provide. They mentioned conflicting obligations based on time demands, such as with Latina mother Denise, who had to choose between events and activities she wanted to participate in and her child. Denise said:

> The one that I couldn't participate was where they had like tours, showing you different campuses, for like universities. They had one where it was, you know, San Diego State, or somewhere up north. And they had also some classes, and I think it was during the summer, I don't remember where, but you take a course for seven days, or for all the tickets, two weeks, or something like that. Instead of taking it for the semester, you go spend it somewhere. Those were not something that I would consider because I am a single parent.

Denise chose her child, which aligned with the literature. Hispanics are family-oriented and need to be close to their family (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn,

2017). Going to an event for a few weeks was not an option for the parent because her child came first.

Another instance demonstrating Latinas as family-oriented was through their choice of outside supports. Most chose family, primarily due to how their community college did not have the services to meet the need of child care. Effy stated, "I know that I had to rely heavily on my mom and my sister…my biggest support was mostly family support." Lindsay also showed family orientation by commenting that she "had no support for anything. It was all from my family. My parents watched my son, mostly my stepmom; she was a stay-at-home mom, thank goodness for that." Therefore, it is perceived by Latina single mothers that colleges are not accounting for their children when planning events and services for single-parent, community college students, leaving their single-parent needs unmet.

Flexibility within community colleges was noteworthy with regard to online learning and scheduling of classes to help with time demands. Previous literature discovered African Americans take advantage of various services offered (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). For example, African American students will take on leadership roles and immerse themselves in different organizations to help promote their success (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016). Alternatively, Caucasian students had positive experiences with staff, and they felt their needs were being met, generally speaking.

In relation to the literature, time demands differed in definition. Throughout the literature, time demands were considered to be a balancing act where students could not perform well academically due to the stress brought on by how many responsibilities they carried which demanded their time (Gault & Zeisler, 2019; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). But participants defined time demands in the case of not having enough time to do everything.

This study points out that time demands were less of an emotional burden and more of an emotional disregard towards single-parent, community college students. Participants did not discuss stress often and related their time to scheduling conflicts where they wanted to do one thing but could not because of their child or work. Time was not on the participants' side.

Gathering Support for Unfulfilled Needs

Lastly, single-parent, community college students discussed their different unfulfilled needs to which they gathered support from external sources if needed. For single-parent, community college students, as a whole, and White, single-parent, community college students, the services lacked promotion. However, Hispanic, single-parent, community college students found outside institutional support, while African Americans differed and wanted support groups. Single-mother, community college students also sought outside institutional support, while single-father, community college students lacked demand for services.

Single-parent, community college students explained missing opportunities for financial aid and other services serving parents and families because their college did not market these services to students, such as the government assistance program CalWORKs, which pushed them to seek help elsewhere. One parent, Jaylene, mentioned how colleges need to be more communicative:

> I think, often we don't know what we need or what we want, especially like when we're going with something. So, I said that it may be that they [the college] did offer something that would have helped me during my time there, but they just didn't know it. You know, the bigger issue was just them being more, I guess, open about what the college has to offer in terms of service.

Participants were not always aware of what programs there were to utilize. For example, some colleges would promote large services to all students and leave out more applicable services for single-parent, community college students. This led students to find out about services elsewhere, which made them lose various opportunities and resources, such as with Alice, who explained:

> They have a whole marketing department, and they have an on-campus newspaper. They have all these things to do all this excellent marketing, but they only do it on things that are going to be like really popular, right? Like they could do more on promoting certain programs. Like I think they think certain programs are not as important because they're a lot smaller. Just because it's small doesn't mean it's not making a huge impact.

Studies prior have not mentioned a lack of services promotion with regard to single-parent, community college students. Instead, researchers explored how institutions cut programs for single-parent, community college students to utilize, affecting their success (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012). This could be an additional topic to study on whether the reason for the lack of promotion of services is because they have been made unavailable by higher institutions. If not, and the programs and services are available, what is the reason behind the lack of promotion?

Nevertheless, single-parent, community college students generally perceive services they qualify for within their community colleges to lack promotion, causing detrimental effects on their self-efficacy and sense of belonging. Self-efficacy is developed through support services during students' early years in college (Tinto, 2016, 2017). Without services to join and be encouraged through, self-efficacy decreases (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Therefore, colleges need

to provide single-parent, community college students resources for support to reduce some of the struggles they endure (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017).

Moreover, without promoting services, single-parent, community college students can feel ignored and left out. Participants commented how they did not feel acknowledged as single parents, which reduced their sense of belonging (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Michele stated:

> I don't think there's a lot of acknowledgment. There are people out here who have to bring their kids with them to class if they do it in person…You can find teachers that get it and understand because they've been there. But like school-wide, there's not a lot down there, and some things my school offers it's not so much for single parents.

Participating in activities, going to class, and networking with others through the different services form a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2016, 2017). However, without marketing, services remain unknown. As a result, single-parent, community college students turn elsewhere for their sense of belonging, which varied among racial and ethnic groups, except for White single parents. They utilized the services as much as possible and found a lack of promotion of services as well.

One external source single-parent, community college students turned to was the ideal possibility of having single-parent support groups organized at their institution. A few had a club already established, but many did not. They felt these groups would be supportive by not only providing child care, but also by creating opportunities for mental health discussions, such as through talking about the struggles single-parent, community college students face and possible solutions. For instance, several African American participants mentioned how these groups would benefit single-parent, community college students' mental health, balance

responsibilities, and help with schoolwork. Jonah described how groups could provide

motivation. He explained:

> Maybe it is possible for moms and dads, in a way, and people who know each other to
>
> support each other and motivate each other in groups. Being in a club and meeting on a
>
> whim can create a whole community in a way.

Most of the Black, single-parent, community college students promoting single-mother groups,

single-father groups, and groups based on race were women, but Jonah was the only man

interested in having support groups. Unfortunately, according to Lewis (2016), Black men tend

to decline to find additional support due to the effects the support could have on their

masculinity.

Despite this noteworthy recommendation by single-parent, community college students to

have support groups, previous literature did not discuss these groups as a community college

service. Instead, researchers found mental health and child care to be solved through counseling

and daycare (Brown et al., 2020; Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017;

Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder &

Terras, 2015). Participants in this study seemed to be looking for support groups as a social

outlet as well as a supportive community.

Alternatively, for Hispanics, if their institution could not provide the proper services to

help single-parent, community college students, they would then seek out family and outside

organizations for assistance, usually with child care and finances like Damaris, who was

struggling with school and the services, specifically the staff, as mentioned before, so she sent

her son to live with her mother. She remembered:

I only had daycare. But the people, the staff, were not friendly. And it was interesting to

see how the staff treated minorities. They had a lot of trouble with the staff. I ended up

taking my son out because he was being bullied at two. And no one was doing anything!

And it was really affecting him and his ability to develop. So, he ended up going with

grandma because grandma was now being supportive now that we were away for a year.

She was like, "Oh my gosh, my grandchildren." He stayed with my mom for a year until

I figured things out and tried to have a safe environment for my kids.

The literature confirmed it was customary for Latinx students to depend on family (Ryan

& Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). In addition, researchers found

Latinx students to mirror their parents' use of resources (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally,

2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Rather than searching through their institution for services that fit

their needs, Latinx students would rather venture to community members, family, and friends for

help as their parents would have, as they mentioned during the interviews (Ryan & Ream, 2016;

Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017).

Meanwhile, single-mother and single-father, community college students differed in

satisfying their unfulfilled needs since single mothers were more susceptible, in this study, to use

outside support. Outside support included single-mother Sherry, who had an external

organization provide extra help to treat her autistic daughter. Also, Lindsay, who relied on her

stepmom for child care, looked to these supports because their colleges could not fulfill a need.

However, the results from single-mother, community college students about outside support

were not a complete match to the literature since other studies found mothers to use the services

within and outside their college as long as the need was present (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021;

Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Tehan, 2006). This study indicates that single-mother, community college students found outside support more useful than community colleges' services.

On the other hand, single-father, community college students recalled how the services were not especially needed, showing a lack of demand among the 20 male interviewees. Mike expressed, "There's extra online sessions. I know them very well and am active. But I'm not really sure or really active with other services. I'm not sure what's going on at my college," showing how he used the service he needed with online classes, but otherwise was not much involved.

Previous research did not identify a connection between single-father, community college students and student services. In addition, there were not many studies focusing on single fathers at community colleges. Therefore, this study concludes and adds to the literature that single-father, community college students gather support as warranted to fulfill their needs but relatively do not perceive to have a demand for student services to help achieve their academic success.

The lack of demand relates to Tinto's (1993, 2016, 2017) belief that the curriculum learned has value to create persistence. Although the services are not always instructional in nature, if single-father, community college students found them invaluable and therefore not needed, they would not seek to use the service. Students need to appreciate the service and what the service provides to find value similar to subject matter and curriculum in the Persistence Theory (Tinto, 1993, 2016, 2017). Tinto's theory presumes that if the curriculum lacks value, then the student's persistence can decline and lead to dropouts. The same can be found with services. If the service lacks value, then the student's use of the service declines, which leads to not using the service at all.

Conclusions

The research questions investigated in this qualitative study were:

1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?

2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity?

3. What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single mothers and single fathers?

Single-parent, community college students' perceptions of community college student support services varied. In this qualitative study, focus groups and one-on-one interviews were examined to identify the differences in perception between single mothers and single fathers as well as between Hispanic/Latinx, African American/Black, and Caucasian/White students. Single-parent, community college students' perceptions of student services were affected by their experiences with staff. Additionally, the services were not well known among single-parent, community college students, and if they were, they were mainly focused on traditional college students, neglecting single parents' needs. Furthermore, Hispanics found support outside of the college, and African Americans were adamant about needing single-parent, support groups.

Perceptions from Single Parents

Single-parent, community college students in this qualitative study perceived community colleges' student support services to have positive encounters and experiences with staff, meet traditional students' needs while neglecting those of single parents, and lack promotion of their services. Researchers agreed with single parents in previous literature on how particular services need better management, such as child care, and that counseling and tutoring promote student

success through positive experiences with staff (Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a).

Experiences and encounters with staff from services utilized by single-parent, community college students need to be positive. Through positive encounters, single-parent, community college students continuously feel comfortable using the service, promoting the student's success. Previous literature does discuss services and their overall helpfulness individually, but there is a lack of information on how staff encounters influence single-parent, community college students' success through staff encouragement. Researchers had discussed other means of support, but not the reasons for venturing to those other support systems other than the college did not have some type of service (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012). For instance, if a community college did not have child care, a single mother would go to family or friends instead. However, there could have been other reasons for finding other support systems, such as negative encounters and experiences with staff.

Additionally, previous literature focuses on the different services overall, rather than the components of the service, which can influence the single-parent, community college students' encounters. The positive experiences discussed in the literature mostly revolved around counseling and how the relationships between staff and students promoted motivation and encouragement to succeed (Breen et al., 2015; McDonnell et al., 2014; Perry et al., 2020; Pierce, 2015; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015; Smith, 2019a). But this qualitative study's participants add to that theory of how relationships are dependent on the experiences single-parent, community college students have with the service's staff. The experiences with staff influence single-parent, community college students' perception of student services as a whole

positively, except with Hispanic/Latinx participants, which resulted in an opposing point of view.

Secondly, single-parent, community college students perceived student services as neglectful. Literature and participants' perceptions aligned with how single-parent needs were mainly ignored since colleges focused on traditional college students (Cerven, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). Single-parent, community college students have various requirements regarding their parenting responsibilities and balancing their education and work duties (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Standard services were offered and utilized on campuses targeting traditional college students. But participants rarely mentioned services that just targeted single parents and their particular single-parent needs that differ from the traditional student, such as child care and support with managing their varied responsibilities. Participants felt neglected by their institutions. This qualitative study identifies the perception of neglect, which was not seen in previous literature regarding financial insecurity and time demands that are barriers for single parents to achieve community college success.

Instead, participants described their unfulfilled needs, which differed from the literature since previous studies found parents to comment mainly on their financial insecurities from lack of funds and unfavorable time demands from managing too many responsibilities, which varied from this study's definition (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). The unfulfilled needs described by this study's participants mainly consisted of how resources and services targeted all students and not just single parents. Colleges should market programs and services to single-parent, community college students in a targeted way. There were also some organizations in which single-parent, community college students did not qualify to participate, but traditional students did.

Additionally, they mentioned institutional barriers from time demands conflicted with their academics. But the literature's time demands and the participants' time demands were slightly different, with the literature explaining that single-parent, community college students had too many responsibilities to participate in activities, clubs, and events, while this study found time demands to mean scheduling conflicts (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). Participants needed flexibility with office hours, assignments, classes, and more because they had other responsibilities to attend to. Single-parent, community college students did not note that they had too many responsibilities per se but instead did not have enough time to do everything they desired.

To help with the unfulfilled needs of single parents, students ventured into external sources. One reason was the perceived lack of services' promotion. Single-parent, community college students found out about services from other students, or they went unknown throughout their time at their institution. Services not being marketed enough to single-parent, community college students were found similarly in the research in relation to government aid programs, such as CalWORKs (Cerven, 2013; Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). Community colleges need to increase their marketing efforts for all services, including those marketed to smaller demographic groups, such as single parents, to increase students' interest in supportive services and thus their overall completion rate. In addition to perceiving services as lacking promotion, single-parent, community college students also recognized colleges' services to neglect single parents' needs and influence students' success through encounters and experiences with staff.

Perceptions with regard to Race or Ethnicity

The ethnicities and races studied were Hispanic/Latinx, Caucasian/White, and African American/Black, single-parent, community college students. Each group of students perceived

community college services similarly to single parents as a whole from research question one. One example is with Hispanics who perceived services as unable to meet single parents' needs. Hispanic, single-parent, community college students were also found to have negative encounters and experiences with staff, which, when combined with colleges not being able to meet the needs of single parents, resulted in Latinxs requiring outside institutional support.

Latina single mothers' perception of community colleges being unable to meet the needs of single parents did not necessarily mean that colleges were unable to meet the needs of traditional students. As aforementioned, single-parent, community college students, as a whole, believed that colleges met the needs of traditional students. But Hispanics focused mainly on how their college was unable to satisfy the responsibilities required by their ethnicity, such as parental duties and balancing their school and life workload. Latinas understood what colleges could provide, but they desired more through book vouchers, support groups, and flexibility.

When faced with a choice between caring for their children or participating in events and activities provided by the college, Latina, single-mother, community college students typically choose to care for their children. Responsibilities that depended on family aligned with the literature on how Hispanics are family-oriented and need to be close to their family (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Latina single mothers did not feel acknowledged as single parents, nor were colleges accounting for their children when scheduling activities, events, and services for single-parent, community college students. Overall, their needs as single parents went unmet.

Secondly, Hispanic single mothers were the only group to perceive staff negatively. While single parents and other racial groups came across positive encounters with staff, Hispanics mostly received negative interactions. As a result, these negative experiences had a

lasting, damaging effect, guiding Latinx, single-parent, community college students to venture away from the services towards other means of support, such as family and outside organizations. The negative experiences faced by Latina single mothers did not relate to any defining factor. Instead, Latinxs could have received negative experiences due to other unmentioned reasons, such as the location of their institution. For example, one single mother attended college in a more affluent area that did not have many minority residents. She mentioned negative experiences with staff more often than other Latina single mothers attending college in regions similar to their background. However, it is unclear whether the area was influential on this perception.

Compared to the literature, Latina single mothers' perceptions were unique in nature. The literature mentioned similar experiences about the services but had no mention of race or ethnicity of the participants nor their experiences with staff. On the contrary, the services that had a negative experience were based on being a student parent and just the colleges' disregard for various services, such as lack of funding for child care (Beeler, 2016; Dunst, 2019; Graham & Bassett, 2012).

Moreover, due to services not being able to meet the needs of single parents and the negative encounters experienced with staff, Hispanic single parents ventured to find outside assistance to help with their college success. The external resources consisted of parents, siblings, and organizations, which relieved single parents of financial worries and child care. The participants' experiences validated previous studies about Latinx students relying on other support means, specifically family (Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Hispanics were also known to follow their parents' resourcefulness regarding other support systems, which was reflected with Hispanics in this study (Ryan & Ream, 2016).

Next, Black, single-parent, community college students and White participants perceived student services with regard to their race similarly to single parents in research question one. African Americans saw services as gateways to positive encounters with staff and neglectful concerning single parents' needs, producing the desire for support groups. Caucasian participants matched the themes of single-parent, community college students in general, perceiving services as lacking promotion, meeting the needs of students, and creating positive encounters and experiences with staff. There was no literature concerning student services and their relation to White students. Even literature about the cultural norms of White students was absent since that race encompasses multiple cultures. This qualitative study did not specify White students' ethnicity beyond the Caucasian race, such as through identification of students being Irish, British, Canadian, etc.

Additionally, African American participants had positive encounters with staff, primarily through counseling and tutoring. Single-parent, community college students described how the staff was motivational and encouraged students to continue their education to attain their degrees. Staff provided academic advice through friendly interactions with participants, with single-parent, community college students commenting on how they were comfortable talking to their counselor or advisor. However, Black, single-parent, community college students and their encounters with staff were hardly mentioned in the literature. On the contrary, literature focused on counseling and tutoring as helpful to all students (CCSSE, 2005; Duke-Benfield et al., 2018; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Pierce, 2015; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al., 2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015). This study points out that African American/Black, single-parent, community college students found services helpful due to their favorable experiences with staff.

Likewise, African American participants were notably missing concerning single parents'

needs in the literature. They also perceived services to meet the needs of traditional students, but

not single parents. During the interviews, Black, single-parent, community college students

discussed services beneficial to all students. The participants failed to mention services targeted

toward single parents, which were also conveniently left out of previous studies. Previous

studies only noted how African Americans were willing to use any service that allowed them

extra support to succeed according to their culture (Blake, 2018; Lewis, 2016).

And lastly, support groups were much desired by African American participants. Other

races also suggested having support groups as a meaningful support service to help guide their

academic journey and relieve demanding responsibilities. The recommendations of having

single-parent, support groups add to the body of knowledge, noting how single-parent,

community college students need to feel a sense of belonging among their peers, especially with

other parents, to remain confident in their self-motivation for their education, relating to Tinto's

(1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) Persistence Theory. African Americans perceived support groups to

be supportive of child care and mental health. Besides Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) theory,

support groups were not found in previous studies as a service colleges would provide. Rather,

to satisfy child care and mental health issues, researchers recommended counseling and daycare

services offered by colleges (Brown et al., 2020; Crumb, 2021; Graham & Bassett, 2012;

Kruvelis et al., 2017; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a; Sakai et al.,

2014; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

The perceptions among the different races varied in some aspects but were alike in many.

The perceptions of student services among Hispanic, Black, and White single parents did not

necessarily result from their race or ethnicity. Instead, they showed the difference in perceptions

based on the variations between cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the difference in perceptions did not result from their race or ethnicity since participants did not mention ethnicity and race as to why they perceived services a certain way, except for Latina single parents, as sometimes the negative experiences with staff derived from discrimination. This study took different pieces from other studies' results to identify a new theory of how these students' perceptions were influenced by their cultures. Higher educational institutions then need to research the cultural aspects of their student body to recognize how their services affect student success, especially among single parents. All in all, single parents viewed community college services with regard to their own race or ethnicity mostly through their encounters and experiences with staff, their utilization of outside supports, their desire for single-parent groups, and their fulfillment of their needs as single parents and students.

Single Mothers' and Single Fathers' Perceptions

Single mothers and single fathers were relatively similar in their perception of student services. Single-mother, community college students saw student services as able to meet students' needs while neglecting single parents resulting in the use of outside institutional support. Also, services provided positive encounters and experiences with staff members. Single-father, community college students' interpretations were the same, except with regards to needing outside support. This study actually found single-father, community college students to lack demand for services instead.

The perception of meeting students' needs was the same for both single mothers and single fathers. Single-mother, community college students, however, also perceived services not to meet the needs of single parents, while single-father participants rarely mentioned their single-parent needs. As previously mentioned, both single mothers and single fathers found their

student needs to be met through traditional services offered to all students. However, services were not targeted to single-parent, community college students, which resulted in unsatisfied single-parent needs. Previous research discussed needs for single parents, in general, were neglected, but it did not separate the single parents by gender. Instead, researchers stated single parents, overall, experienced financial insecurity and time demands as barriers to their needs to attain their degrees (Dunst, 2019; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016).

Furthermore, encounters and experiences with staff were similar for mothers and fathers. They both had positive interactions with staff, mostly in tutoring and counseling. Despite the support, the previous literature did not identify single-parent, community college students in their findings of the different services and their relationships with staff (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006). Their positive experiences add to the literature with regard to community colleges and single parents. This study points out that participants had beneficial encounters with staff of student services, which helped in achieving success.

Since single-mother, community college students perceived student services not to meet their single-parent needs, they ventured elsewhere to family and outside organizations, as mentioned previously in research questions one and two. As a result, external support was able to fulfill needs that colleges were unable to satisfy. Compared to the literature, though, single-mother, community college students usually would use both outside and on-campus services as long as there was a need (Beeler, 2016; Crumb, 2021; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Tehan, 2006). A few single mothers in this study mentioned using both as well, but most noted more often the use of outside services.

Single-father, community college students' lack of demand for services was expressed throughout the interviews. Many fathers recalled how they were unaware of the services but, at

the same time, were not actively seeking to satisfy any unfulfilled need, demonstrating a lack of demand. Previous literature was missing concerning single fathers attending community colleges in general. Hence, the perception of single-father, community college students having no demand for services adds to the body of knowledge.

Identifying the perceptions of single-mother and single-father, community college students with regards to student support services concluded that single parents want to be noticed. First, they desire positive experiences through respect and helpfulness from the staff they interact with. Second, they want their single parent needs of flexibility and help in managing their schedules to be acknowledged by their instructors and counselors. Third, they require more services targeted toward them to make completing their degree easier. And lastly, they want recognition from their college and peers through single-parent, support groups. Having a cheerleader encouraging them to the finish line helps alleviate the institutional barriers and obstacles single-parent, community college students encounter, pushing their persistence to an associate's degree.

Overall, single-mother, community college students slightly differed in perception from single fathers of community colleges' student support services. Both genders had positive encounters with staff and found colleges to be able to meet their needs. However, single mothers' single-parent needs felt neglected, leading them to seek support outside their institution, while single fathers had less demand for services in general. The emerging differences in perception between single mothers and single fathers regarding community colleges' student support services demonstrated single mothers require more assistance from various support systems while keeping their single-parent needs at the forefront, while single fathers displayed more independence.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is vital to continue studying single parents since they affect the economy through their increase in spending and decrease in government assistance (Dunst, 2019; Hinton-Smith, 2016; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2018, 2019a). Although this qualitative study focused on their perceptions of study support services, further research on other components can help increase single-parent, community college students' graduation rate.

Gender, marital status, and race or ethnicity were the main factors of this study concerning the research questions. Another characteristic, which should be noted, is participants' ages. Single-parent, community college students tend to be over the age of 24, and many of the participants identified themselves as being over 25 (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013). Age was commented on among older individuals than the traditional college student. Some commented how they felt like an outlier compared to the rest of the students they saw on campus. Focusing on the perceptions from the different ages of the participants or asking single-parent, community college students their thoughts on how age influenced their success would have been an interesting factor to analyze further.

Another characteristic to examine is full-time students versus part-time students and whether there is a difference in perception with regard to student support services. Full-time single-parent, community college students may have extra support systems at their disposal and most likely experience student services more often than part-time single-parent, community college students. Attending school part-time is a characteristic of being a single parent (Beeler, 2016; Cerven, 2013; Kruvelis et al., 2017; Milli, 2020; Reichlin Cruse et al., 2019a). It would be informative to discover if part-time students had a more pessimistic view than full-time students or vice versa, causing the discrepancy in perception of services. Also, finding if some services

were more compatible with one status than another could help improve the overall service by applying specific standards to the particular needs of both types of students.

Additionally, having other students who were not Hispanic/Latinx, African American/Black, or Caucasian/White could alter the perceptions of student services results. Different cultural norms among Asian participants, Middle Eastern single parents, and other cultures may result in more or more minor themes focusing community colleges to invest their efforts in improving various services than with the current study's population. There is little research concentrating on student services from the perspectives of different races and ethnicities. However, some studies found students in general to use services based on their cultural background, such as with Black students who tended to want leadership opportunities through the use of services and Hispanics who followed in their family's assumptions concerning the use of services (Lewis, 2016; Ryan & Ream, 2016; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Tello & Lonn, 2017). Generating the ideal service from each race and/or ethnicity can help staff and other parts of the services apply focused methods to help single-parent, community college students succeed.

In this study, single mothers explained how they needed help with child care the most, but single fathers mentioned their children much less. This could be due to various reasons, as Livingston (2013) noted. The term "single father" is vague and can include fathers living with a non-marital partner or those who have shared custody (Livingston, 2013). In this study, a single father was defined as a male figure that cares for child-age dependents and is unmarried (Miller, 2010). This study did not limit participants' relationship status as long as they were unmarried. Additionally, the percentage of child custody was not disclosed from any participants, which could have varied, showing the differences in circumstances to attend school and manage their

time effectively. Having done so could have changed the results of perceptions since having 100% child custody could affect single-parent, community college students' finances and time demands.

And finally, community colleges were missing the option of online classes and services before the pandemic. African American, single-parent, community college students found that after the pandemic, they could manage their class load easier with the help of online courses. However, in the literature, most students generally declined in their academic success due to not having a prior online learning experience and lack of social connections (Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2021; Prokes & Housel, 2021). Studying a different population of single-parent, community college students who attended community college before the COVID-19 pandemic or students at universities could provide an alternative viewpoint of how services fit while in person and at a higher education level.

Implications for Professional Practice

Previous literature analyzed single mothers and their use of services through quantitative methods (Crumb, 2021; Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Hinton-Smith, 2016). However, the conclusions from this qualitative study will be helpful to community colleges and other postsecondary institutions aiming at increasing their graduation rate among single-parent, community college students. In addition, understanding the perceptions of what single parents need can help community colleges improve their services and add additional ones targeted toward single parents.

Some recommendations from single-parent, community college students on doing so include investing in their child care service to decrease wait times and improve the overall customer service. The previous literature also mentioned long waitlists among single mothers,

which caused them to waste their time and money as well as add additional stress and frustration to their busy lives (Beeler, 2016).

Additionally, providing staff with professional development to cater to and understand the needs of single-parent, community college students regarding schedules, flexibility, and responsibilities can help with single parents' completion rates. Researchers found students who have positive relationships with faculty and staff are more encouraged and have boosted academic success since those relationships help provide guidance and coping mechanisms to alleviate the stress of various demands of single parents (Graham & Bassett, 2012; Tehan, 2006).

And ultimately, establishing student support groups for single parents can relieve mental health issues, eliminate babysitting problems, and find a sense of belonging among students. According to Tinto (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017), a sense of belonging is necessary to achieve persistence. Tinto (1975, 1993, 2016, 2017) recommends colleges implement a sense of belonging by ensuring there is an inclusive network for students to belong to, as well as having problem-based learning and cooperative assignments for students to interact with their peers.

Single parents can also benefit from this study when considering their college enrollment. Identifying their student and single-parent needs can help with the selection process to help prepare the student on whether they can succeed at a particular institution depending on any foreseen barriers, such as institutional barriers. For example, institutional barriers, such as a school's location, schedule of classes, and enrollment policies, can impact a single parent's community college success if these variables do not align with the student's responsibilities (Saar et al., 2014; Wesley, 2018). Additionally, they can use this study's criteria for a successful college experience in their college search, whether at a community college or university.

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Appendix A

National Institute for Health Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Viviana Bravo** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 10/24/2017.

Certification Number: 2541556.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

VIVIANA BRAVO
NNU GRADUATE EDUCATION, 623 S. UNIVERSITY BLVD. NAMPA, ID 83686

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Viviana Bravo, a PhD student, in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the effectiveness of student support services on single parents. Through this study, it will be concluded how single parent community college students view student services in relation to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of Northwest Nazarene University students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, acknowledging your participation within this study, which will include the following procedures.
2. You will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire.
3. You will be asked various questions regarding your use of services offered on campus.

These procedures will be completed at your designated school site and will take a total time of about one hour.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, recordings, and documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Department and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help institutions create new services and improve upon those existing services.

E. PAYMENTS

Each participant will receive a raffle ticket to win a gift card for $25 as an incentive to participate.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. Viviana Bravo can be contacted via email at vbravo@nnu.edu, via telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ (C) or by

writing: ████████████████████████. You can also ask questions to her Dissertation advisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hlcurtis@nnu.edu or ████████████.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be video recorded in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio recorded in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	**Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix C

Focus Group and One-on-One Interview Questions

Questions	Note	Observation
1. Why are you a student? What is your academic goal? Professional goal?		
Follow-up:		
2. Why did you choose this school site to attend?		
Follow-up:		
3. What services are provided in your class? Do you use them and find them helpful?		
Follow-up:		
4. What services are offered at your community college?		
Follow-up:		
5. Give an overview of how you interact with the services your college offers.		
Follow-up:		
6. *If used service: Did your use of [NAME OF SERVICE] affect your self-efficacy? (Explanation of self-efficacy will be provided.). If so, how?		
Follow-up:		
7. What has been your experience with the counselor?		
Follow-up:		
8. How has counseling helped you manage your schedule?		
Follow-up:		
9. Have you participated in campus activities? Which ones? What was your experience?		
Follow-up:		
10. While using the student support services, did you feel a sense of community or a sense of belonging? What made you feel this way? How did the service(s) provide this sense?		

Follow-up:		
11. What is your reasoning as to why you do or do not use some services?		
Follow-up:		
12. Do you find that your institution motivates you to continue with your courses? In what way? Why or why not?		
Follow-up:		
13. How does being [ETHNICITY/RACE] influence your use of student services?		
Follow-up:		
14. Did the [SERVICE]'s staff influence your decision to use or not use [SERVICE]? If so, how? Did any feature about them make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable using the service? If so, what feature?		
Follow-up:		
15. Does your college acknowledge you as a single parent? In what way?		
Follow-up:		
16. What can colleges do to help meet your needs as a single parent?		
Follow-up:		
17. Which service did you use the most and why? Why did you find it valuable?		
Follow-up:		
18. What services do you wish your school offered? How would they help you?		
Follow-up:		
19. Is there anything you'd like to add?		

For one-on-one interviews, the questions were focused on specific responses from students to elaborate further on their experiences with the student support services at their particular institution. Through these interviews, the researcher hoped to gain additional theory or in vivo codes as well as get a better understanding of the student's experience(s) using the service(s). If the student gave little information on the above questions but was overwhelmed by other group members or lacked time to share their experience in the focus group, the researcher reached out to the student, if they volunteered, for a one-on-one interview to gain more insight into their narrative.

Possible Questions – The researcher will first restate what the student said during the focus group interviews to begin the conversation, which may lead to any of the following questions:

- How did the experience with [SERVICE] develop over your time at [INSTITUTION]?

- What actions from the [SERVICE] affected your perspective positively/negatively?

- How did you learn about [SERVICE]?

- What were your first impressions of [SERVICE]?

- What were your impressions about the service's staff?

- How did using the service affect your well-being? Academically? Emotionally? Etc.

- If you could, would you continue to use the service? Why or why not?

- What positive/negative experiences did you have with any of the services? Explain.

Appendix D

Permission Letter from IWPR

Keri Potts · 12:32 PM · KP
Re: Permission to Use Figure
To: Viviana Bravo

Hi Vivian -
You are approved to use this as long as proper citation is provided (i.e. naming IWPR and the report title as the source.) Thank you. Keri

See More from Viviana Bravo

This e-mail message (including any attachments) is for the sole use of the intended recipient(s) and may contain confidential, privileged, and/or proprietary information. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or copying of this message (including any attachments) is strictly prohibited.

If you have received this message in error, please contact the sender by reply e-mail message and destroy all co[...]ssage (including attachments).

Screenshot

Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Approval

Submittable

Dear Viviana,

The IRB has reviewed your protocol: 04032021---Single parents, race, and community college success: A qualitative study. You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

Northwest Nazarene University

Bethani Studebaker

IRB Member

623 S University Blvd

Nampa, ID 83686

REPLY   VIEW SUBMISSION

Appendix F

Online Informed Consent Form for Online Focus Group Interviews

Online Informed Consent Form

Viviana Bravo, a Ph.D. student, in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the effectiveness of student support services on single parents. Through this study, it will be concluded how single parent community college students view student services in relation to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of Northwest Nazarene University students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

* Required

1. Email *

    _____

Procedures

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to submit an Informed Consent Form, acknowledging your participation within this study, which will include the following procedures.
2. You will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire, which is attached to this consent form.
3. You will be asked various questions regarding your use of services offered on campus.

These procedures will be completed at your designated school site and will take a total time of about one hour.

Risks/Discomforts

1. Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, recordings, and documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Department and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help institutions create new services and improve upon those existing services.

Payments

Each participant will have a chance to win a gift card for $25 as an incentive to participate.

Questions

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Viviana Bravo can be contacted via email at vbravo@nnu.edu, via telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮C) or by writing:▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You can also ask questions to her Dissertation advisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hlcurtis@nnu.edu or ▮▮▮▮▮.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

Consent

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

2. Name *

_____

3. Phone number *

_____

4. I give my consent to participate in this study. *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ No

5. I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be video recorded in this study.
*

Mark only one oval.

( ) Yes

( ) No

6. I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio recorded in this study.
*

Mark only one oval.

( ) Yes

( ) No

7. I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study *

Mark only one oval.

( ) Yes

( ) No

Demographic Information	This type of information will be used to analyze similarities in responses based on demographic information.

8. College Currently Attending *

_____

9. Any additional colleges attended in the past three years (2018-2021) besides the one mentioned above?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. How long have you attended your current institution? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) 0 to 6 months

   ( ) 1 year

   ( ) 2 years

   ( ) 3 to 5 years

   ( ) 5+ years

11. Are you a full-time or part-time student? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ( ) Full-time

   ( ) Part-time

12. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Female

◯ Male

◯ Prefer not to say

◯ Other: _____

13. Age *

Mark only one oval.

◯ 18-24

◯ 25-31

◯ 32-40

◯ 41+

14. Ethnicity/Race (Mark all that apply.) *

Check all that apply.

☐ African American/Black

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native

☐ Asian

☐ Hispanic/Latinx

☐ Pacific Islander

☐ White

Other: ☐ _____

15. Number of Children *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) 1
    ( ) 2
    ( ) 3
    ( ) 4+

16. Born in the U.S. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Yes
    ( ) No

17. Highest Level of Education *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Middle School/Jr High
    ( ) High School Diploma
   ( ) Certificate
    ( ) AA/AS Degree
    ( ) Other: _____

18. Would you be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview for a further
    explanation beyond the focus group interview? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ( ) Yes
    ( ) No

Appendix G

Facebook Groups Approval
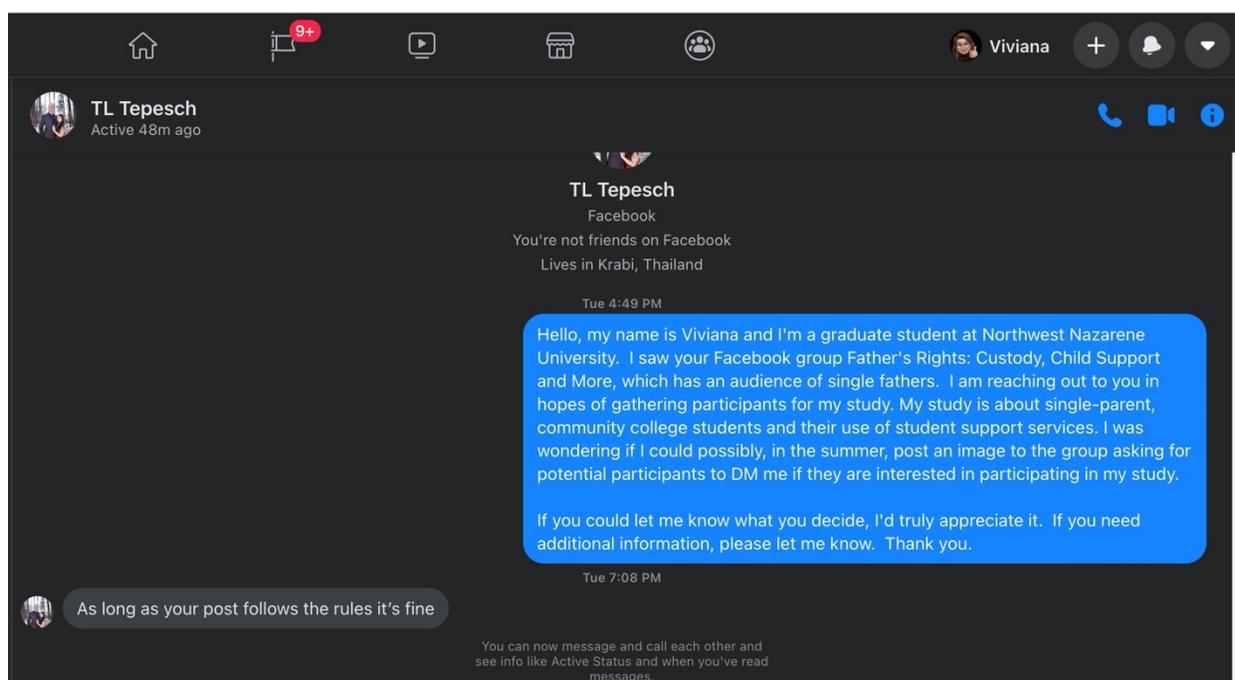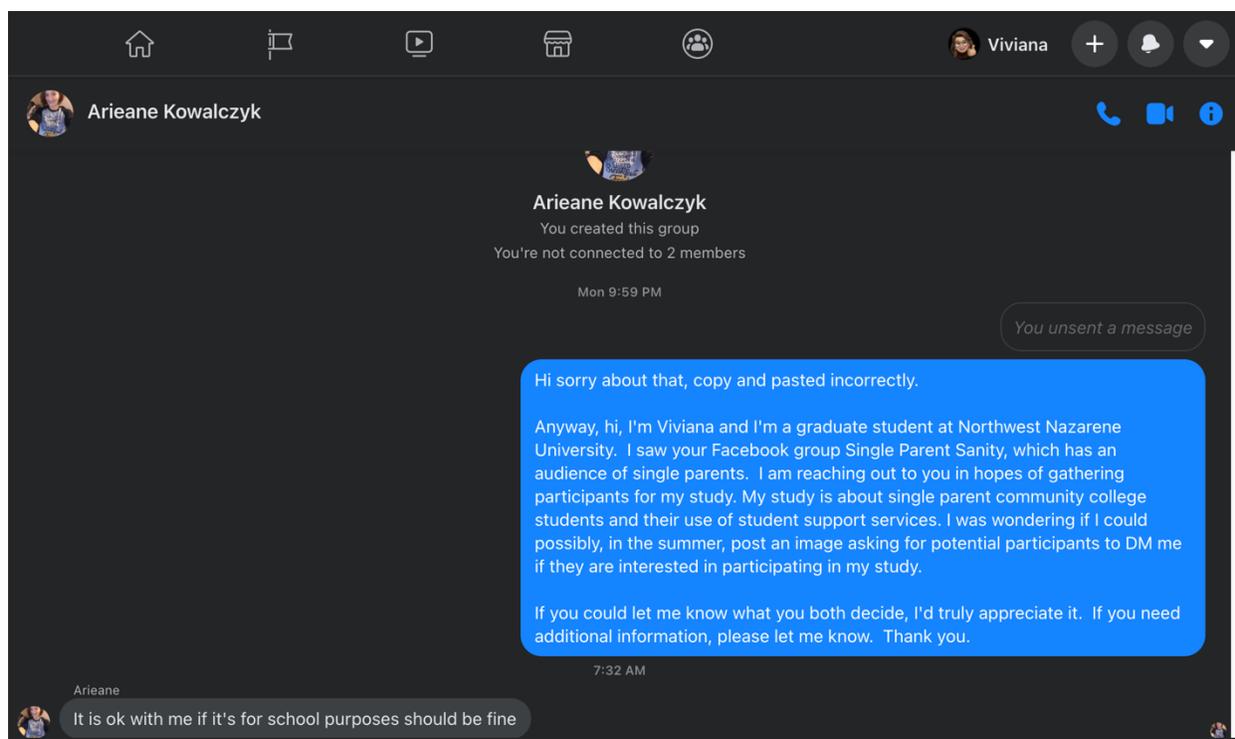
Appendix H

Introductory Presentation for Focus Groups

Welcome!

Single parents, race, and community
college success: A qualitative study

The researcher

- Viviana Bravo
- Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, ID
- vbravo@nnu.edu
- ████████████

About the study

I'm conducting a research study related to the effectiveness of community college student support services on single parents. Through this study, it will be concluded how single parent community college students view student services in relation to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status.

VIVIANA BRAVO
NNU GRADUATE EDUCATION, 623 S. UNIVERSITY BLVD. NAMPA, ID 83686

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
Viviana Bravo, a PhD student, in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the effectiveness of student support services on single parents. Through this study, it will be concluded how single parent community college students view student services in relation to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of Northwest Nazarene University students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES
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C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
1. Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, recordings, and documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Department and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS
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E. PAYMENTS
Each participant will receive a raffle ticket to win a gift card for $25 as an incentive to participate.

F. QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the researcher. Viviana Bravo can be contacted via email at vbravo@nnu.edu, via telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

writing: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You can also ask questions to her Dissertation advisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hlcurtis@nnu.edu or ▮▮▮▮▮▮

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   Date

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be video recorded in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   Date

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio recorded in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   Date

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

2

Online Informed Consent Form

Viviana Bravo, a Ph.D. student, in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to the effectiveness of student support services on single parents. Through this study, it will be concluded how single parent community college students view student services in relation to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better serve and meet the needs of Northwest Nazarene University students.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.
* Required

1. Email *

    _____

Procedures
If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to submit an informed Consent Form, acknowledging your participation within this study, which will include the following procedures.
2. You will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire, which is attached to this consent form.
3. You will be asked various questions regarding your use of services offered on campus.

These procedures will be completed at your designated school site and will take a total time of about one hour.

Risks/Discomforts
1. Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researcher is requesting demographic information. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, recordings, and documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Department and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal-wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

Benefits
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help institutions create new services and improve upon those existing services.

Payments
Each participant will have a chance to win a gift card for $25 as an incentive to participate.

Questions
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Viviana Bravo can be contacted via email at vbravo@nnu.edu, via telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮C) or by writing▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You can also ask questions to her Dissertation advisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hlcurtis@nnu.edu or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

Consent
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY
You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at Northwest Nazarene University.

2. Name *

    _____

3. Phone number *

    _____

4. I give my consent to participate in this study. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No

5. I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be video recorded in this study. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No

6. I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio recorded in this study. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No

7. I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No

Demographic Information	This type of information will be used to analyze similarities in responses based on demographic information.

8. College Currently Attending *

    _____

9. Any additional colleges attended in the past three years (2018–2021) besides the one mentioned above?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

10. How long have you attended your current institution? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ 0 to 6 months
    ◯ 1 year
    ◯ 2 years
    ◯ 3 to 5 years
    ◯ 5+ years

11. Are you a full-time or part-time student? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Full-time
    ◯ Part-time

12. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other: _____

13. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-31
- ○ 32-40
- ○ 41+

14. Ethnicity/Race (Mark all that apply.) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latinx
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- Other: ☐ _____

15. Number of Children *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4+

16. Born in the U.S. *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

17. Highest Level of Education *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ Middle School/Jr High
- ○ High School Diploma
- ○ Certificate
- ○ AA/AS Degree
- ○ Other: _____

18. Would you be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview for a further explanation beyond the focus group interview? *

Mark only one oval.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

Appendix I

Member Checking Email Template

Thank you for participating in the focus group interviews. To ensure accuracy, I present you
with a summary below of your experiences from the student support services at your community
college. Please, as time allows, answer the following questions to make sure your voice is heard.
Member Check Questions:

1. Please share your thoughts on the accuracy of the interpretation of your responses during
   the focus group interview/one-on-one interview.

2. Do you have any comments or objections to the interpretation created thus far?

3. Is there anything else you would like the researcher to know?

4. Would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview? (An additional gift card
   will be presented to those chosen.)

If not interested in a one-on-one interview, please answer the following additional questions:

1. Can you further elaborate on _____?

2. Can you explain what you mean when you say _____?

3. Can you please give an example of _____?

Appendix J

Email Instructions for Focus Group and One-on-One Interviews Template

Dear Participant,

Thank you for volunteering in this research study. Your participation is valuable in influencing how single-parent, community college students are included in relation to the student support services they use at their higher educational institutions. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge community colleges can utilize to increase and improve single-parent, community college students' retention and graduation rates. Our interview will be approximately an hour in which I will ask a series of questions about your experience with student support services at your college institution.

Before beginning our interview, please complete the consent form permitting me to record our interview. If you feel uncomfortable being on video, you can still participate as long as I receive permission to record you audibly. After receiving the consent forms, we will begin the interview. If you decided during the interview to opt out of the process, please let me know as soon as possible to excuse you. Due to the safety of all participants and the researcher, the focus group interviews will be held over Zoom. During the Zoom interview, please remove all distractions nearby. [Zoom invite information will be inserted here.])

If you have any questions about the interview process, consent form, or anything else, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Viviana Bravo

Appendix K

Social Media Outreach Posts and Description

FOR A STUDY INVESTIGATING SINGLE PARENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

A researcher (me!) is looking for community college single-parent students to participate in a research study using focus group interviews.

Who do I need?

- Participants who are 18 years or older
- Speak English as your first language
- Be a single parent currently enrolled at a community college OR was enrolled in a community college in the past three years

WIN AN AMAZON OR STARBUCKS GIFT CARD!

Contact for more information:
vbravoennu.edu or DM

For Instagram and Facebook:

"I'm currently looking for participants to participate in a research study about how community colleges' student support services affect single parents with regard to their ethnicity/race, gender, and marital status.

You'll be the perfect participant if you have been enrolled in a community college within the past three years and are a single parent with one or more children under the age of 18.

You'll be asked to participate in a focus group interview online. A $25 Amazon or Starbucks gift card will be raffled in each focus group interview. The focus group interviews will consist of four participants, giving you a 25% chance of winning a gift card.

If you're interested, please send me a DM or email me at vbravo@nnu.edu. Let me know if you have any questions."

Appendix L

Zoom Instructions

Participants will be invited to a Zoom meeting via the email you provided. When you see this email, click the link under "Join Zoom Meeting." This link will open your browser to ask permission to open the Zoom application on your computer. If using a tablet or phone, the link should open the Zoom application automatically.

Please make sure to have downloaded the app to your device before the interviews begin. Also, make sure to set up your account and profile.

If you have any questions or have technical difficulties, please email me before the interview at vbravo@nnu.edu.

Appendix M

Face Validity Feedback Form

Face Validity Feedback Form

Thank you for participating with the face validity of my interview questions for my dissertation. My study is looking into single parents' perceptions of community colleges' student support services with regard to the marital status, ethnicity/race, and gender of the student.

Directions: For this form, you, the expert, will be reading the following interview questions to then rate their relevance to my research questions and theoretical framework. Please be as objective and constructive as possible in your review.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to email me at vbravo@nnu.edu or call me at ▓▓▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓▓.

* Required

1. Email *

_____

Do the interview questions relate to the following research questions and theoretical framework?

Research Questions:
1. What are the perceptions of community college student support services from single parents?
2. How do single parents view community college services with regard to their own ethnicity/race?
3. What differences in perception emerge regarding student support services between single mothers and single fathers?

Theoretical Framework: Tinto's Persistence Theory
● Self-efficacy
● A sense of belonging
● The belief that the curriculum learned has value

2. Interview Questions *

Mark only one oval per row.

	The item is not relevant.	The item is somewhat relevant.	The item is quite relevant.	The item is highly relevant.
Why are you a student? What is your academic goal? Professional goal?	◯	◯	◯	◯
Why did you choose this school site to attend?	◯	◯	◯	◯
What services are provided in your class? Do you use them and find them helpful?	◯	◯	◯	◯
What services are offered at your community college?	◯	◯	◯	◯
Give an overview of how you interact with the services your college offers.	◯	◯	◯	◯
*If used service: Did your use of [NAME OF SERVICE] affect your self-efficacy? If so, how?	◯	◯	◯	◯
What has been your experience with the counselor?	◯	◯	◯	◯
How has counseling helped you manage your schedule?	◯	◯	◯	◯
Have you participated in campus activities? Which ones? What was your experience?	◯	◯	◯	◯
While using the student support services, did you feel a sense of community or a sense of belonging? What made you feel this way? How did the	◯	◯	◯	◯

service(s) provide this sense?				
What is your reasoning as to why you do or do not use some services?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Do you find that your institution motivates you to continue with your courses? In what way? Why or why not?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
How does being [ETHNICITY/RACE] influence your use of student services?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Did the [SERVICE]'s staff influence your decision to use or not use [SERVICE]? If so, how? Did any feature about them make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable using the service? If so, what feature?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your college acknowledge you as a single parent? In what way?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
What can colleges do to help meet your needs as a single parent?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Which service did you use the most and why? Why did you find it valuable?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
What services do you wish your school offered? How would they help you?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

3. Overall feedback, comments, questions, etc.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____