

RQ1: In what ways are community college students making decisions about their academic majors and/or potential careers?

- **In what ways are students' intersecting identities relevant to their academic majors/ careers decision-making process?**
- **What is the role of family, friends, and institutional agents (primarily faculty) in this process?**

Ashante Lee

Ashante is a twenty-year-old, undecided student, of African American descent, currently in her first term at PCC. Ashante is also a single parent and has an infant daughter. She cites her daughter as the primary source of motivation for her enrolling at PCC. Ashante says, **"Well, I came to PCC because of my daughter. I need a better future for her, and so she can go to college as well. Because my dad didn't go to college, so I was like, why do I need to go? I'd rather make money but... so try it out. And I tried it out and it was like, Oh man."** Ashante is at PCC with the hopes that she can stop living paycheck to paycheck and earn a degree that pays her between 40 and 50 thousand dollars a year. Ashante considers herself to be from the "bad part" of Pasadena. Although she is proud of the hood she comes from, she wants to be able to provide a better life for her child. When discussing where she grew up, Ashante says, **"Scary, I had my first drive-by at like six... We all ran. We all were safe, but... It was a crazy experience because you didn't know what was going on; you just got told, "They're shooting, run." And then, we just ran. And I was at practice, actually. So it was... It was crazy. And then you lose a lot of friends to gang violence, drive-bys, a lot"**. In total, Ashante has lost about fifteen friends/family members to gang violence.

Although Ashante has a powerful motivation to be in school, her journey thus far has been tough. Between a very demanding schedule and the difficulty of her classes, Ashante feels very overwhelmed. Since she is a mom, Ashante's days are full, her school schedule alone (she works on campus) goes from 7 am-6 pm. When she gets home after she finishes with her mommy and household duties, she is finally able to do homework. Anything that is not urgent falls off the priority list for Ashante. For instance, when discussing why she has not made it to the career center yet to discuss her major she says **"I literally have to write what I have to do now, because it's easier for me that way, and I'm changing my ways of doing that, or I'll just procrastinate. So it's like I have to write, like "Okay, I got to do this today, I got to do this today, I got to do this today."** And I have to learn like, for example, I waited last minute to wash, so I was washing for three hours, chasing my daughter around the thing, so it's like, "Oh my god, next time I can't let this pile up, because then that sets me back, from studying, from doing all this." So I have to have my agenda, and plan out everything."

Besides all her responsibilities, Ashante admits that college is just more complicated than she expected. She explains, **"Like it's a lot. It's not high school. High school, you are able to get away with a lot and finesse... Finesse, I mean, I was able to pay people to, or have people do my work for me. Or just get along with the teacher and just... like my math, I'm really bad at**

math so I would just come into class, be on my phone, and I'd pass because he liked me... But here it's like, you have to really... I regret doing that, but you have to really work for it. Study a lot. I literally have to go to tutoring almost every day because of math. Yeah".

As previously mentioned, Ashante has no idea what major she should pursue. Ashante began school with a vague interest in the health sciences, but she is not sure what field this entails. In high school, Ashante took a medical billing course. So she thinks this could potentially be a possible career path for her. Ashante says, **"...in high school I took medical coding and billing, and so I like the medical... I don't know, I'm stuck between medical and psychology..."**.

Moreover, Ashante says, **"I always wanted to do medical health field because I like helping people. I always thought about either counseling... What's it called, a therapist? A family therapist, because I'm big on family"**. When I asked her why the decision to choose a major is difficult for undecided students, she said, **"Why? Because there's a lot, there's so much that you can do that you realize, "Oh, this is what they do?" Because like nursing, or medical field, there's administration, there's medical coding, there's so many other things to do other than like, "Oh I'm just going to be a nurse." It's not just the nurse and a doctor, how you would think. You could do x-ray technician, you could do phlebotomist, there's a lot into it."**

Since her mother and brother attended college, I asked Ashante if she had sought out any help from them to decide on her major. Ashante right away explained that she does not rely on her mom for any assistance with school because, in the past she was very critical of her. Specifically, Ashante said, **"Because I think a lot of parents mentally put their kids down, and they not knowing, and they think it's like, "Oh, I don't need the push, I don't need the encouragement." Yeah, it's nice to say things, but... My mom would sometimes say things that put me down, so I shut it down, and once you say something to me, the conversation's done, like "I don't want to talk anymore, just forget it, have a nice day... I had my mom tell me I might as well go to the military if I'm not going to succeed in school or whatever. Or talk to me like I'm slow, or I'm special."**

Ashante plans on seeking out support from different people at the institution to make a decision on her major; however, she is worried about where she will find time to do so. In the next two weeks, she has an appointment with a counselor to make her educational plan. Through this process, she hopes to get some more clarity in how to choose a major. Additionally, there is an event at the career center that she is looking forward to attending that could also help her explore potential majors. Yet she is anxious about a last-minute emergency happening with her daughter, which could derail her plans. She says, **"Yeah, because what if I take the wrong step? What if I don't take the right steps that I need to get to know about the major? Like what if I don't go to the event? And if I don't go then, it's like I'm not going to know more about that career that I want to do."**

Ashante would also love to get guidance from her faculty, but given her experiences with her math professor, she thinks this would be very unlikely. During our interview, Ashante discussed at length some of the negative experiences she has had with a math faculty. Ashante says, **"she**

taught a lesson in five minutes, and it's like, "Okay." And if I asked her to explain it, she'd be like, "Well, come to the front." Like I'm halfway to the front already, but that doesn't help me if I'm asking you. She just... She'll be like, "My other class understands it." But it's me, and I'm asking you for help, and yeah. So some teachers don't understand that, if the whole class is asking you for help or do more examples, but you're like "Figure it out on your own," that's not helping us. And by saying, "Oh you should've known this in high school or elementary," well a lot of these schools didn't teach us that. A lot of stuff that we need now, they didn't teach us. In high school, I didn't have to do essays." One comment, in particular, has affected Ashante. According to her, her math teacher "**micro aggressed**" the entire class by remarking that when she teaches at another university, "**that's her real college class.**"

Nonetheless, Ashante hopes the administration at the college is actively working to have faculty at the college that can better guide students. She says, "**I think they can have people that can relate more, that have been through it. Because sometimes they hire people that haven't been through it, and they're like, "Well I don't know this," and it's like well how can you help me, how are you supposed to mentor me? That's why I think Ujima's good, because they can relate to us, colored people.**"