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Article

From First to First: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color First-Generation Faculty and Administrator Narratives of Intersectional Marginality and Mattering as Communal Praxis

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Abstract: While the education of first-generation students (FGS) has garnered the attention of scholars, educators, and policy makers, there is limited dialogue on how first-generation faculty and administrators (FGF/A)—that is, first-generation students who went on to become faculty and/or administrators—experience higher education and are engaged in enhancing equity, inclusion, and justice. Intersectional approaches, which illuminate the nexus of race, gender, and class in education, are necessary for appreciating the complexity of FGF/A experiences and liberatory practices taking shape in higher education. Narrative analysis examining nine Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) FGF/A oral histories reveal how stories of mattering and intersectional marginality are sites of communal praxis that aim to dislodge systems of power, including racism, classism, and patriarchy. This praxis involves validating the complexity of students' academic and social lives and engaging vulnerability. The discussion encourages reflection of how communal praxis can be cultivated toward transforming the linked conditions of faculty and students.

Keywords: first-generation student; first-generation faculty; faculty of color; administrators; intersectionality; higher education

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1. Introduction

First-generation students (FGS) have increasingly enrolled in postsecondary institutions, yet they face a host of challenges and barriers throughout the campus context [1–3]. While the education of FGS has garnered the attention of scholars, educators, and policy makers in the U.S. (and internationally [4–7]), there is limited inquiry into the educational and professional experiences of first-generation faculty and administrators (FGF/A) and how their experiences may contribute to creating and maintaining inclusive and equity oriented education environments [8,9]. In other words, the juxtaposition of increasing FGS visibility and relative FGF/A invisibility in scholarship elucidates additional sites—including the experiences, insights, and positioning of FGF/A—where knowledge can continue to be excavated, examined, and archived for liberatory education purposes. Additionally, in light of the understanding that education institutions, as well as teaching and learning activities, are not neutral [10], we must pursue intersectional approaches [11] to highlight how race, class, and gender factor into FGF/A educational and professional trajectories. This approach is significant because although those who occupy first-generation status are a heterogeneous group, the complexity of FGS experiences can be overshadowed through a primary focus on class, especially when considering Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) FGF/A.

To fill these gaps in research, the current study used narrative analysis [12] to examine the experiences of BIPOC FGF/A—first-generation students who went on to become faculty and/or administrators. Specifically, the study focuses on the ways BIPOC FGF/A recall, reflect on, and narrate stories about being first-generation for FGS. In situating storytelling in the context of institutional agent and student interaction, narrative analysis offers an opportunity to both chronicle FGF/A experiences (storied contents of social life) and illuminate FGF/A pedagogies (story as pedagogy). This use of narrative analysis to examine FGF/A experiences contributes to powerful personal narrative accounts that predominantly comprise the emerging scholarship on FGF/A. A secondary, complementary aim is to uncover how racial and gender dynamics interact with first-generation status in order to gain a more complex understanding of BIPOC FGF/A experiences and practice. Coupled with a narrative approach that is context sensitive, these foci allow us to examine what narratives are offered and how they are shared in order to understand their potential for disrupting power dynamics.

To provide context for the study, I review the literature on first-generation students in the U.S. context and make three interrelated yet distinct interventions that offer complexity and new insight to the emerging area of research on FGF/A. First, the review of literature centers FGF/A experiences and clarifies the potential roles of FGF/A in FGS experiences. Second, because much of the literature lacks intersectional analysis, I make explicit the ways intersectional marginality contours FGS and FGF/A experiences alike. Because of my research focus, I draw on and integrate literature on BIPOC faculty and administrators who inform this discussion. Third, my review of literature creates space to understand FGF/A, and thus FGS, from a strength-based, power-infused perspective that acknowledges the assets of FGS and BIPOC FGF/A within the context of structural and cultural dynamics. This is important as FGS are too often conceptualized as the source of the problem (i.e., as having limited knowledge and resources) [6] that can lend to ill-informed policies that involve “fixing” FGS students to the neglect necessary institutional change, while also invalidating the wealth of knowledge FGS possess and can offer towards transforming education.

Building on the literature, I elaborate on this third point in a theory of communal praxis, which is based on the narratives of nine BIPOC FGF/A and is also informed by critical feminism [11,13] and perspectives in higher education [14,15]. In particular, I discuss how communal praxis involves attending to and countering forms of intersectional marginality that reproduce oppressive social and education dynamics experienced by students and institutional agents. This process engages a kind of remembrance that is tied to experiential knowledge of suffering [11] and draws connections to broader structural dynamics [16] to highlight FGS/F/A experiences. Communal praxis also involves affirming that students matter and bringing visibility to—and consequently dislodging—systems of power such as racism, classism, and patriarchy. My analysis and discussion illustrate communal praxis in action among BIPOC FGF/A, namely how stories offer a site for connection among varied campus constituents. The discussion and analysis also highlight how stories of mattering and intersectional marginality are sites of validation and collaborative praxis.

2. First-Generation Students and Faculty/Administrator Pathways

A first-generation student can be understood as an undergraduate whose parents have no undergraduate degree or higher, or an undergraduate whose parents have no higher education [3]. The first definition is the broader of the two since it encompasses undergraduates who may have a parent with some higher education (e.g., taken classes), but no degree or with a two-year degree. Based on this definition, FGS students (1) represent 56% of undergraduates in the United States [3], and (2) are predominantly students of color, namely Black, Latinx, American Indian, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander undergraduates in the United States [3]. Moreover, FGS are more likely to have lower socioeconomic status, illustrating the significance of attending to issues of both race and class in understanding first-generation educational trajectories. As such, understanding FGS education experiences is relevant for addressing contemporary economic and social conditions in the U.S., such as high rates of income inequality and persistent racial disparities [17].

It has been documented that FGS face a host of financial, social, and cultural barriers in postsecondary institutions [1,2]. These barriers include having to exert additional effort to acquire resources readily available to continuing-generation students [18], isolation [19,20], and difficulty identifying with the campus culture and community [21]. One reason for this difficulty is a cultural incongruence between colleges and universities that largely privilege independent norms and expectations and FGS who are often motivated and guided by interdependent norms, such as supporting family and community [22]. Additionally, Oldfield explains, "the problem is not that they cannot do the work; rather, it is their estrangement in their new surroundings" [23] (p. 3). In light of such experiences, it is not surprising that FGS are more likely than their continuing-generation peers to leave college without a degree [2,24–26]. Ultimately, this has consequences for the number of FGS who have the opportunity to continue on to graduate studies and a profession in academia or higher education leadership; to note, even those who do graduate from college are less likely to enroll in graduate programs [27,28].

The invisibility of institutional agents that are first-generation, specifically faculty and administrative leaders, contributes to social isolation and hostile institutional climates experienced by FGS. Indeed, faculty can serve as an important source of support for FGS [29–31] and FGF/A may be uniquely positioned to appreciate and intervene in the conditions of FGS [9,11]. For example, FGF can have different ways of knowing that meaningfully situate class consciousness in relationships with students, pedagogy, and research agendas [9]. Yet, FGF/A experiences have largely been neglected as a source of knowledge [9]. Of the extant literature on FGF, there is a primary emphasis on class [8] and the literature on FGA experiences is virtually nonexistent. Having successfully navigated postsecondary education as the first in their families, narratives of BIPOC FGF/A offer important insights into the institutional and social obstacles that can inhibit students' successful transition and persistence. Moreover, their experiences provide insight into the skills, assets, and strengths of FGS who are burdened with navigating institutions not designed for them.

Intersectional Marginalization

The navigational processes of FGS are complicated by the reality that the educational experiences of FGS are contoured not just by class, but also race and gender [20,32–35]. For example, first-generation women and BIPOC FGS experience greater challenges than their male and white counterparts as they navigate undergraduate and graduate education [19,20,32]. Jenkins and colleagues found "a strong interaction of generation and gender indicating that for the psychological well-being variables [i.e., sleep patterns, sadness, appetite, weight levels, general interest, self-views, suicidal thoughts, energy level, and feelings of restlessness], first-generation women were doing significantly worse [than both continuing generation women and all men regardless of generation status] and first-generation men significantly better than their non-first-generation counterparts [and first-generation women]" [32] (p. 138). They hypothesized that this may be due to the extra burdens of support that men culturally expect of women, and that first-generation men disproportionately benefit from the support of women.

For low-income and BIPOC first-generation students, challenges include raceclassist microaggressions, which are covert acts of racism aimed at BIPOC communities where the discursive practices are about both race and perceived class associations based on skin color [34]. An example of this is when a BIPOC student is believed to have not taken rigorous courses because they are also assumed to have attended a low-resourced school. These stereotypical assumptions reflect how intelligence is ascribed based on race and its association to class. These attitudes highlight raceclassism—the interconnectedness of racism and classism—and the collusion of whiteness and capitalism as systems of power that are foundational to U.S. education [36]. Raceclassist microaggressions exact an emotional toll that makes it difficult for students to envision success in higher education [34]. These kinds of experiences can socialize students into upper-middle class and white normative structures of higher education and encourage students to discard their communal assets. Raceclassist microaggressions also reinforce race and class boundaries in educational opportunity [36] by, for example, disrupting the formation of community among low-income and BIPOC first-generation students and their upper-middle class and continuing-generation white peers, faculty, and administrators [34].

The road to a PhD is also laced with the intersection of racism and classism in cultural norms and structures of higher education. These forces collude in the academic professional socialization of graduate students where both race/ethnicity and first-generation status play a profound role in creating hostility for BIPOC first-generation and working-class students [37]. Indeed, the invisibility of BIPOC first-generation students in graduate school and higher education more generally is contoured by both their treatment based on race and first-generation status [35]. Even with these additional barriers, there is deficient institutional support, particularly programs that recognize multiple marginalization as racially minoritized first-generation students [35,38].

These same cultural and structural barriers that FGS face become heightened when applied to BIPOC FGF/A experiences as "existing academic structures facilitate different realities and rules of the game for members of historically underrepresented groups as compared to those of their white, heterosexual colleagues" [39]. These factors, which neglect faculty members' multiple social identities (and thus axes of power that shape their experiences) contribute to social isolation in academia and shape the nature of faculty and administrative work [39–41]. BIPOC faculty experience epistemic exclusion where their knowledge is devalued [42], which then has negative implications for faculty diversity [43]. BIPOC Faculty—and BIPOC women faculty in particular—are presumed incompetent [39], held to different standards, and endure higher levels of surveillance, scrutiny, and critique by white colleagues and students alike [11,44–47]. BIPOC faculty also experience unjust expectations [40], including bearing the burden of diversity work on their campuses with little institutional support or recognition [48]. Race and racism are also significant in the experiences of BIPOC administrators, and the double burden of racism and sexism leads to a hostile campus climate for BIPOC women administrators [41,49]. When efforts are made to disrupt the status quo, such as questioning institutional practices or advocating for equity, they are met with resistance [48]. Or, for example, when BIPOC faculty introduce critical pedagogies in the classroom, they encounter critiques that question their authority and credibility [11,47,50,51]. Such experiences serve as reminders that institutions may espouse commitments to diversity, but expect BIPOC faculty and administrators to "[suppress] their racial, ethnic, gender, and political ways of knowing and being" [47].

These processes constrain and discount the kinds of work FGF/A—particularly those who are BIPOC—find meaningful, including challenging and pushing students in their development of critical literacies and agency [11,52]. Additionally, BIPOC junior faculty experience a pull between working to secure tenure and supporting minoritized students, a tension which is seldom recognized in the promotion process [50]. Yet, BIPOC women working in academia must frequently think not only of paving the way for themselves but also for their fellow faculty, administrators, students, and families: "[BIPOC women] must consider ... ways they can help pave the road for all students and faculty who follow. They heed their years of preparing for an academic career, including the accumulated fiscal debt resulting from their commitment to earn a PhD. Due in large part to cultural expectations and values, they must also weigh the impact of their decisions on their families" [39].

In sum, a critical rendering of the literature suggests that contrary to the assumption that their difference in demographics explain their outcomes or their individual traits put them at risk [6], FGS and BIPOC FGF/A are confronted by and chronically exposed to systematic forms of oppression. In particular, racism, classism, and patriarchy work to invalidate and disempower BIPOC FGS and FGF/A [11]. Grappling with this complexity of social experiences is necessary for affirming and cultivating the success of students from diverse backgrounds.

3. Communal Praxis

Guided by the narratives of BIPOC FGF/A, I offer a theory of communal praxis that is informed by both critical race and feminist discourse [11,13,53] and perspectives in higher education [14,15]. In particular, communal praxis involves attending to and countering forms of intersectional marginality. This process can be engaged by affirming that students matter and highlighting and consequently dislodging systems of power such as racism, classism, and patriarchy. While I discuss communal praxis in the context of stories in higher education settings, I also suggest that it can be engaged and enacted more broadly. Given the narratives that inform communal praxis, in this section I attend to the specificity of faculty and administrator stories that seek to disrupt oppression, although it is possible that stories shared by all institutional actors (e.g., students, staff, faculty, and administrators) have the capacity to be a catalyst for transgressing oppressive dynamics [54,55]. In particular, I advance that communal praxis is relevant in telling students' oral histories among BIPOC FGF/A, as such histories offer and emplace stories of academic and social life that give credence to intersections of race, class, and gender. For example, scholars have highlighted how BIPOC faculty counter-stories that expose racially exclusive hiring and promotion practices illuminate the ways that the ongoing unmet needs of BIPOC students are tied directly to the needs of BIPOC faculty [45]. Such stories are necessary for countering deficit and deterministic stories of BIPOC students and faculty/administrators. These kinds of disruptive stories acknowledge and, in doing so, intervene in institutional histories around race, class, and gender that normalize white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. Thus, when shared with students or any broader constituency, faculty and administrators' stories can become a site for understanding and connection.

Importantly, communal praxis centers and acknowledges the strengths and creative capacity of minoritized communities, including BIPOC, women, and low-income individuals. While BIPOC FGS/F/A may not start out with the same types of information, they nonetheless possess valuable assets and knowledge regarding the ways power operates, which are insights that those in power often lack and/or take for granted. BIPOC communities garner multiple forms of community grounded knowledge beyond upper-middle class and white cultural knowledge that is normalized in society. Indeed, cultural capital is just one of many forms of capital that make up community cultural wealth for people of color [53]. BIPOC FGF/A could be understood as having acquired knowledge regarding the culture of power along their educational and professional trajectories, while always being equipped with a range of community assets that enable one to navigate and intervene in the culture of power. This capacity is exemplified by hooks's explanation of the privileged position of BIPOC faculty when teaching issues of race and racism such that they can speak from the passion of experience, which refers to "a particular knowledge that comes from suffering" [11] (p. 91). This capacity is interconnected to a passion of remembrance that attends to the idea that narratives of experience are told retrospectively, and thus refer to the spirit of the memory that is felt and conveyed [11].

For BIPOC FGF/A, this passion of experience and remembrance can account for both experiences of intersectional marginality and mattering, and in doing so, can have transformative potential by attending to the complexity of our lives. Marginality involves feelings of isolation and mattering refers to situations where students feel valued and cared for [15]; however both ideas, as conceptualized here, also underscore dimensions of power that structure, give shape to, and make significant marginality and mattering. In particular, this conceptualization underscores an intersectional prism, which reveals the silencing mechanism of multiple oppressions, while underscoring this intersectional location as a site that can also bear transformative action [13]. These principles serve as a foundation for communal praxis, which situates stories and narrative as having the potential to be a radical, transformative, and coalitional praxis [13]. This kind of praxis can involve academic socialization that imbues critical race, class, and gender consciousness as well as engages critical remembering, which is contextual and counterhegemonic [16]. As such, stories not only trace marginalization, but work to heal [16,56]. When centering intersectionality, moreover, narratives can function to dismantle dichotomized roles of student and institutional agent (e.g., faculty, administrators), and consequently press upon the divisive structures of education informed by logics of racism and classism/neoliberalism. For example, neoliberal conditions, an artifact of classism, impinge on public commitments by viewing education as a private good for the wealthy as well as fracturing collective education processes [57–59]. Neoliberal dynamics also constrain an ability to meaningfully engage in professional work inspired by a commitment to equity [60,61]. As such, these conditions leave little room for vulnerability, empathy, solidarity, and collaboration and put a strain on the educational and professional capacity of students and institutional agents to endeavor towards a more humanizing education. Consequently, institutional agents and students are increasingly positioned at odds with one another, rather than collectively positioned in inquiry, understanding, and intervention around their conditions. In this context, communal praxis endeavors to dislodge what hooks [62] describes as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, which is entrenched in U.S. education.

Central to unsilencing and countering intersectional marginality involves attending to student mattering. Specifically, mattering has multiple dimensions [15]. The most elementary form is attention or the feeling that one commands the notice of another person. Importance is "to believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, and do, or is concerned with our fate" [15]. Ego-extensions refers to the feeling that one's success and failure is necessarily tied to another person's fate. Dependence is the idea that behavior is guided by both our dependency on others and other people's dependency on us. Communal praxis highlights how across all dimensions mattering can build community by emphasizing the significance of relationships among race and class as well as varied institutional actors. Thus, communal praxis suggests that telling/narration of stories about first-generation marginality and mattering can be understood as an act of affirmation and connection. Rendón discussed the importance of validation, explaining it as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" [14] (p. 44). As institutional agents, FGF/A can play a key role in validating FGS. This validation can take the form of affirming experiences, knowledge, and belonging. Beyond validating FGS, communal praxis also suggests that it is possible for BIPOC FGF/A to be and act in community with students.

4. Methodology

This study is guided by the following questions: What are BIPOC FGF/A stories about being an FGS? How do race and gender factor into these stories? In what ways do these stories work to engage first-generation students? I used narrative analysis [12] to analyze stories as a site of production and contestation of cultural narratives. This analytic approach recognizes lived experience as (1) a site for understanding phenomena and (2) useful when the aim is to understand how and why a story is constructed and what it accomplishes [12,63]. These aims are appropriate given the context for the oral history interviews, which were an opportunity for inquiry into the ways BIPOC FGF/A engaged with and authenticated the meanings of first-generation college students. I first discuss the oral histories as the primary texts, followed by the context, which is relevant for the current analysis. This latter discussion is important because in narrative inquiry it is both the content and context of stories that matter. In this study, context considers the interviews (and how they were collected) alongside the context of race, class, and gender in higher education (via critical race and feminist theory).

The analysis draw on nine oral histories, which offer a window into the experiences and perspectives of BIPOC faculty and/or administrators across different academic departments and areas of control (e.g., academic, student, administrative affairs) at a predominantly white university. While narrative studies vary in number of participants, Wells [63] notes that five is an appropriate number. A majority (i.e., 5) of the oral histories that inform this analysis are from male faculty and/or administrators. While the analysis would benefit from more female voices, the underrepresentation of women, particularly BIPOC women, in these roles is consistent with gender disparities found in U.S. higher education [64]. Nonetheless, these oral histories remain important for providing insight into BIPOC FGF/A experiences. In regard to context, the oral histories were collected as part of a two-unit, first-year experience course focused on first-generation college students at the institution. The course was (1) taught by two FGF instructors of color, and (2) designed to support students by addressing FGS experiences and social supports on campus. Students enrolled in the course—all first-generation and representing ethnically diverse backgrounds—conducted oral history interviews in pairs with the intention that the oral histories would be archived at the institution. Oral histories, which were collected over three courses, focused on FGF/A social experiences and academic trajectories. As a researcher examining the oral histories, these contextual processes (that I was initially not a part of as they had occurred prior to the analysis) remained relevant for how I approached the analysis. In particular, when examined within this context, FGF/A narratives can be understood as authenticating meanings of first-generation college students by, with and for first-generation college students. In other words, the context of the class and the means for which the oral histories were collected: (1) offer faculty/administrators, whose lives are informed by being first-generation, an opportunity to share their stories (by); (2) yield insight into FGS narratives as co-constructed among FGF/A interviewee and FGS interviewer (with); and (3) make explicit the intended audience—that is, first-generation students (for). As such, this context offers a means to understand FGF/A narratives as a form of practice.

Narrative inquiry recognizes that interpreting texts has no finality [12] and that analysis is ultimately informed by the nexus of personal experience and theory [65]. My positioning as a female faculty of color who was an FGS shaped the analytic process, beginning with my interest in supporting FGS through critically informed research and practice. This positioning is also reflected in the intellectual genealogy of intersectionality theory and critical pedagogy, including critical race and feminist theory [56,66], beginning with the questions I aim to answer in this research. Such questions underscore an appreciation of the experiential knowledge of BIPOC communities as legitimate, valid, and critical to interrogating social inequality and power. Additionally, critical race and feminist theory would suggest that examining the storied content of BIPOC first-generation lives offers a site to understand issues of race, class, and gender in education. This is because stories are not only situated within—but interact with, by reproducing and remaking—social structure and culture, which are constantly under negotiation and struggle [66]. Therefore, I was not only concerned with the ways stories reflect lived experience and phenomena (i.e., FGF/A educational and professional experiences) [67], but how they can potentially shape phenomena (i.e., the experience of education for FGS) [56]. In regard to the latter, I gave analytical attention to how stories may expand the possibility for a more humanizing education institution for both authors and listeners. After transcribing the oral histories, the analytic process entailed multiple readings of the interview transcripts in order to note significant events, moments, and insights [68], followed by systematic analysis [69] that involved placing stories into social context. The following section offers analysis and discussion of FGF/A narratives, which are presented with pseudonyms.

5. Communal Praxis in Action

This section outlines the ways that the stories of BIPOC FGF/A engage communal praxis in action. First, stories validate FGS and acknowledge experiences of marginality and mattering in their trajectories. In particular, stories trace forms of intersectional marginality that produce complexities, dilemmas, and sources of strength involved in pursuing higher education as the first in their families. Second, stories engage vulnerability, which invite students to meaningfully collaborate with FGF/A in disrupting oppressive education processes.

5.1. Validating Complexity in First-Generation Trajectories

BIPOC FGF/A narratives acknowledged and made visible the key sets of challenges, forms of support, and tensions experienced by BIPOC FGF/A. Specifically, narratives addressed the complex forms of isolation experienced by FGS at the intersections of race, class, and gender as they pursued their postsecondary degrees and professions. In the process, they also highlighted the supportive roles of family and key institutional agents in counteracting institutionalized forms of minimization and marginalization.

Collectively, narratives underscored how BIPOC FGF/A academic journeys were fraught with uncertainty due to financial and social obstacles. Some were clear in highlighting that this uncertainty around being able to complete their studies was never a result of self-doubt in academic ability, but rather a question of financial stability and a sense of belonging in the campus context. For example, Owen, a faculty/administrator, explained that he had struggled academically "only in the beginning":

> And that was because I didn't want to be there. It wasn't because of the work. After first semester I didn't struggle at all and actually ended up graduating from my college with honors. So I feel like I got that part and I got excited by learning. I mean I sort of discovered a side of myself that I didn't know was there from an academic perspective.

In identifying such challenges, the narratives work to contextualize FGS education experiences within broader social and structural forces that can potentially constrain degree attainment. Financial and social obstacles are mutually reinforcing, and the need to work is a barrier to being more engaged on campus [19]. These are also burdens not shared and, therefore, not understood by continuing-generation peers and institutional agents; an experience that added to the isolation FGS already experience on campus [19,20]. While identifying potential constraints, the narratives also conveyed the capacity of FGS to persists. Significant to their persistence, as identified in FGF/A narratives, were family and select institutional agents as key forms of support.

5.1.1. Family

Virtually all oral histories addressed aspirational and emotional support from parents and siblings, which acknowledges the significance of nonmaterial resources families direct to FGS [70]. Owen recalled that when he had "quit" school and returned home in his first semester, his mother was instrumental in providing him with the perspective necessary to persist. Owen's mother had counseled him, "As hard as that feels to you to everybody back here, you're the luckiest person they know." He continued, "I didn't feel a pull for them saying to me 'Come back.' In fact, they were saying, 'Don't come back to this. There's something bigger that's waiting for you there.'" Owen's story gives credence to the aspirational capital of first-generation students and students of color whose parents' sacrifices are grounded in their capacity to envision and hope for a reality for their children that is different from their own. These stories counter the idea that family hinder first-generation student success. Additionally, such stories communicate to first-generation students that their success matters and measures beyond their own outcomes by realizing the hope of a community.

Family dynamics are complex, however, and narratives addressed the ways their pursuit of higher education shaped familial relationships and feelings of connectedness. BIPOC FGF/A oral histories highlighted guilt, sadness, and tension with their sense of disconnection to family and home created by their higher education schooling. Victoria, an administrator, shared:

> I had to overcome just a strange sense of guilt you know because you're the first one of your family that's kind of going in this direction. And so you almost feel selfish for doing this. Yeah because you're leaving them behind and you know they have needs and yet you're here. And that's a challenge.

As noted in several narratives, these needs involved the significant roles played by first-generation students in their families in providing financial (e.g., sending money back home) and social supports (e.g., translating for parents, helping with and counseling younger siblings). Highlighting these kinds of responsibilities honors the roles and cultures of FGS that are often discounted by institutional norms that reinforce, privilege, and reward independent norms and expectations [22]. Additionally, such stories encourage reflection on FGS' roles within the family, which helps to process and lessen guilt experienced by FGS [71] especially in the context of institutional norms that otherwise can discourage it.

Related to these socialization processes is the potential of losing one's self entirely. Owen shared a fear of growing apart from his family and home:

> Owen: I don't want to be able to come back home and not be somebody who the people who I love recognize. So I want to grow, I want to learn, I want to be better at some things, but I don't want to change.
>
> Student: Yeah.
>
> Owen: That was the family pull more than anything else, like I still want to be lovable to them. And I still want them to know that I'm a part of this family and I haven't gone away and apart from this.

Owen's comment speaks to the awareness that education can potentially change a person in ways that make it difficult to connect with family. Socialization not only involves acclimating one's self to the norms of a new environment, but also the possibility of stripping parts of the self that do not conform. In this instance, there is a race and class dimension, where Owen, like other BIPOC FGF/A represented in the oral histories (e.g., Mary, Victoria), later share that joining same-race cultural student groups on campus helped in maintaining a sense of connection. "One of the things that was I really was afraid of was that if I get too much education, I would stop being Black enough. I sort of had to find my tribe. And so that for me was a really important calling, [and] community to have". Owen expressed finding a community within the campus that affirmed cultural integrity was important to maintaining his identity and community. These ideas around the association between race/class and achievement do not come from cultures of BIPOC and low-income communities, but rather from white upper-middle class institutional practices and norms that socially isolate as well as culturally alienate [72,73]. In this context, BIPOC FGS find meaning, purpose, and community in same-race and minoritized peer groups, all of which support the memory of and connection to family.

Still, many also described a sense of disconnection and dislocation from their home communities in pursuing postsecondary degrees. Even with the support of their families, FGF/A experienced some isolation in navigating higher education as both students and professionals. Navigating higher education involves decoding hidden norms that function to exclude FGS and BIPOC in order to disrupt the construction of their outsider status. Victoria, who likened attending college to learning a new language, explained:

> You know if I say to them [my parents] I'm the vice provost, they're like, what does that mean? So to them there is a real disconnect with the language and the culture and what does it mean that you are a professor and you have tenure? . . . And so you [not] only have to educate yourself and try to learn a whole new thing but then you have to educate them and help them to understand what you're doing. And that's a constant struggle. I've been out of college for a long time and that tension is still part of my life with my parents particularly.

This sense of estrangement is marked by physical and cultural distance produced by demands of postsecondary institutions and higher education careers that rarely lead them back home. As Sofia, an administrator, described, "I never moved back. I lived in like all five corners of the U.S., four corners and the Midwest. I'm a nomad. You know for years, they just thought I was going to school. They really don't understand it, but they're very proud of me and they know that I have a big job." As described by FGF/A, the tensions that come with pursuing higher education linger long after completing a baccalaureate degree. Importantly, as noted by BIPOC FGF/A narratives, these tensions are reified by the dimensions of power embedded within higher education institutions. In articulating the complexity of FGS/F/A education experiences in the context of family and community, these stories remember, affirm, and build upon connections between higher education, family, and community in ways that counteract the displacement of BIPOC FGS/F/A by higher education institutions.

5.1.2. Institutional Agents

The narratives of BIPOC FGF/As made note of the ways institutional agents were both discouraging and supportive. Many oral histories recounted the importance of caring institutional agents that made efforts to create opportunity. Stanton-Salazar describes institutional agents as "high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" [74] (p. 1066). These instances of mattering from institutional agents were discussed as defining moments in education pathways. One administrator discussed how institutional agents provided support at various moments in her life. One of these times was during her undergraduate education, which she struggled nine years to get through due to financial difficulty: "My English professor found out I couldn't afford to go . . . so he called me that night and he said my wife and I want to pay for two classes for you. You need to finish, you need to keep going." Similar to the non-material forms of support provided by family, these types of experiences helped with persistence by counteracting forms of marginality such as discouraging counselors, unapproachable teachers/professors, and alienating social milieus of postsecondary institutions [21,23]. In providing this kind of support and encouragement, institutional agents also validate students academically and interpersonally [14].

Others shared stories about how institutional agents helped to make explicit and curb the culture of power that operates to exclude first-generation and BIPOC students from post-baccalaureate education. Adriel, a faculty member, discussed the ways select institutional agents intervened in his path by providing graduate school knowledge:

> . . . I remember him telling us like basically if you apply to a graduate program you're going to have to have a CV . . . . How do you know the unspoken things if you're not in the circles where they're being spoken? So I wasn't in those circles where people were talking about oh this is how you do this. This is what they want. And so without you know certain people intervening for me at different moments I would have failed probably in a lot of different ways.

In a context where graduate education is oriented towards continuing generation students, first-generation students experience challenges navigating the system of graduate school education [19,20]. Adriel and others illustrate how if not for the intervention of institutional agents, the unspoken, taken-for-granted forms of information will perpetuate the exclusion of first-generation students from college and beyond. As such, narratives draw attention to the ways institutional agents can impart intellectual capital and institutional resources for FGS [30].

Beyond providing specific forms of knowledge regarding the culture of power, FGF/A narratives highlighted the significance of institutional agents in reinforcing or disrupting a hostile campus culture. For example, Victoria discussed intersections of race and gender in demonstrating the roles of faculty:

> What I wasn't ready for is being the only female, being the only Latina in many of my classes . . . being treated differently and having professors not really connect with you and feeling a bit invisible. That was hard. And so I think that part of the reason I started as a physics major and then I went to business and then I ended up being a Spanish major . . . because the Spanish department was the only place that I really felt like I belonged.

An academic community that affirms race, class, and gender as well as their intersections helps to combat the potential disconnections experienced among BIPOC FGS by becoming family and home while away at college. Additionally, Shanice, an administrator, explained that the faculty she developed relationships with "were normally the ones that reached out." In highlighting these kinds of experiences with institutional agents, FGF/A narratives suggest that community can be created in and to counter invalidating campus environments. Additionally, these kinds of stories represented in the oral histories illustrate how institutional agents can be both sources of marginality and mattering.

Collectively, experiences of marginality and mattering were recalled as a source of motivation for BIPOC FGF/A's own professional practice committed to "paying it forward" (Adriel) by themselves carrying on a tradition of explicating higher education's hidden norms while simultaneously imparting social capital and disrupting the reproduction of cultural capital as a mechanism of race and class exclusion. Embodying the sentiments among FGF/A narratives, Sofia shared:

> When I think of first-generation students, I don't have to imagine it right? I think of like the worst scenario there is somebody like me who doesn't know anything. You just go through and you just like kill yourself trying to do better, it could have been so much easier. So I definitely, I'm grateful that so many people around me rallied. I also know that there was a lot that I missed. . . . So I think about those all the time because you just don't know what to ask. So my job is to ask and to tell you to ask.

For Sofia and other FGF/A represented in these oral histories, a commitment to FGS is informed by their own experiences and a collective memory of what it means to be a first-generation student. These memories involve the struggles and triumphs of first-generation students, the sources of marginality and mattering, and the ongoing negotiations and commitments of occupying higher education institutions in positions of relative leadership and authority.

The will and capacity to remember such experiences offers a source of strength and insight [11,16]. When asked "Would you say that the financial struggle helped you in the long run? Like it made you stronger and more confident going forward?" Oscar reflected:

> At the time and even later when you're in a better situation, it does make you appreciate things and look at life differently. And helped me better see the suffering of others.

He added, "It was a struggle. I would say it definitely helped me make me a better person. So it wasn't easy. You know like just the limitations. But at the same time it made me, helped me grow." These stories affirm how remembering first-generation experiences is valuable, affirming, and a source of knowledge. Likewise, these stories highlight that memory serves as a source of connection both to past experiences that shape first generation student trajectories as well as among those who occupy first-generation status in a collective pursuit of (re)making meaning of their education and lives. As the next section will illustrate, this remembering is a praxis that engages vulnerability in order to reconstruct higher education as a space for community building.

5.2. Engaging Vulnerability

BIPOC FGF/A narratives engaged vulnerability by normalizing self-doubt in the psychology of all students and yet not minimizing the tangible ways these materialize for FGS and BIPOC FGF/A due to systems of race, class, and gender. In particular, narratives involved stories of ongoing struggles as FGF/A. Moreover, they modeled and affirmed the value of risk taking. Indeed, many advised the importance of risk taking, while others exemplified this in their storytelling and demonstrated what risk taking could look like in practice.

Even as narratives affirmed the academic ability and forms of nonmaterial resources of FGS, some FGF/A shared that their academic journeys were fraught with self-doubt. Some narratives conveyed that everyone has doubts, but that some people are simply better at hiding this. For example, it was in this context that Shanice explained:

> Don't be afraid to ask questions. Ask them often because you are never the only person who wants to know the answer to that question. It's just normally most

> people sit back and either wait for it to fall out of the instructor in conversation or someone else to raise their hand first.

This kind of discursive move both acknowledges feelings of isolation and self-doubt, as well as works to counter assumptions that FGS are incapable of performing academically and do not belong in higher education. Additionally, this narrative also centers the collective value of FGS agency for educational learning in settings that take for granted the hidden curriculum. Like other narratives in this section, it underscores vulnerability as a desirable and shared trait among both faculty and students.

While two FGF/A talked about feelings of being an imposter, they also qualified this in the context of power. FGF/A expressed marginalizing experiences as having racial, class, and gender dimensions. As one example, Antonne, a faculty/administrator, who openly discussed encounters with racism and heterosexism, also confided his feelings of being an imposter in his faculty role. Antonne elaborated on the importance of faculty getting to know students:

> Yeah I'm worried about stumbling. . . . I'm worried about looking like a professional. Every professor goes through this. So by having students within their class who they become acquaintances with, not friends, then that makes it a lot easier.

While noting that this worry is one that all professors confront, Antonne continued to discuss the burden of race for BIPOC individuals who have assumed positions of authority or leadership:

> For the dominant group there's this sense of entitlement to it [degree/credential]. Whereas for me, growing up there was always that fear that someone's going to discover me . . . So that fear of always falling or failing was always part of my experience. . . . So my compensation for that is, that I'm always super well-prepared.

This narrative underscores the ways systems of power subtly work to undermine BIPOC FGF/A's sense of worthiness; however, it also leaves room for BIPOC FGF/A agency. As a result, it imparts a form of racial socialization common among BIPOC communities that acknowledges the significance of race and class in first-generation trajectories. Beyond this, by emphasizing student–faculty relationships, it highlights the roles that students can play in combatting these minoritizing forces. As such, it underscores the collective power and agency of students and institutional agents.

In illustrating the tolls of race and class on BIPOC FGF/A, other narratives discussed the skills that are developed in order to cope with navigating a profession in higher education. For example, Sofia described "code-switching" as a response to racist, classist, and sexist expectations that keep BIPOC FGF/A, especially BIPOC women, from being taken seriously by their colleagues:

> I've been in places where I couldn't really be myself. So I had to figure it out, right? In order for people to take me seriously, if I walk into a meeting with the president or my boss, I have to code-switch. I have to behave the way that they expect me. But then when I leave there, like I'm meeting with you, I have a certain way that I interact with you and maybe another way that I interact with [instructor of FGS course] because of our comfort. But if the president was here, I wouldn't be a different person, but I would be showing that differently . . . So you have to learn the different languages.

To this she added:

> You have to really be okay with really celebrating yourself. . . . Sometimes when they introduce me I'm like, "Who is that? Oh yeah that's me." You're like a different person. So you're talking about multiple identities. Yeah I'm like, "Oh that person sounds amazing."

The examples provided in Antonne and Sofia's narratives illustrate that for FGF/As of color, a profession in higher education involves ongoing negotiations of belonging, self-affirmation, and self-love. In sharing such experiences, FGF/A impart lessons that imbue race, class, and gender socialization that acknowledge the material and psychological burdens of navigating higher education institutions that are entrenched in racism, classism, and sexism. However, these stories also reveal the resilience, capacity, and authenticity of FGF/A, who are committed to sharing, honoring, and reshaping the complex realities of being first-generation in higher education.

This capacity to learn with and for students is underscored by FGF/A with the audacity to act in community with students. Adriel, explained that he is always trying to learn better teaching techniques and strategies. Adriel described risks he has taken in the classroom:

> Yesterday I went into class and said, "We're going to blow everything up we're going to start from scratch. We have the syllabus but let's see what would you want. What do you all want to do for the rest of this term? How do you want to divide, design the rest of the assignments and the grading?" And we figured it all out.

As noted in research [40,41,44–47,50,51], the professional and personal risks are greater for BIPOC faculty who are often held to different standards and endure higher levels of scrutiny. Despite dilemmas encountered by BIPOC faculty, Adriel explained that what would be learned would be worth the risk, acknowledging that it could have turned out to be a "disaster":

> I'll know what didn't work or why it didn't work. And I think learning those things kind of empowers me to take those chances because if I don't take a chance, it won't have the potential for a big pay out, like what if I stumble upon something really amazing here. Yeah I think it's worth it.

Being vulnerable with students is to acknowledge the ways all parties (i.e., faculty, administrators, and students) are collectively learning and in community when engaged in this process together. The narratives presented by BIPOC FGF/A are examples of communal praxis as they engage vulnerability amid a racist, sexist, and classist system, which obscures these vulnerabilities. In revealing these vulnerabilities, stories reconstruct education as a space for authentic participation where students and faculty/administrators can enter as whole beings.

6. Discussion

It was argued that "education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor" [11] (p. 14). This involves striving to create participatory education spaces where both teachers and students not only learn academic knowledge, but also learn how to live in the world [11]. The narratives of BIPOC FGF/A illustrate that this is possible when the complexities of students' lives are honored and affirmed. Specifically, when such stories address racism, classism, and patriarchy, they validate the ways these forces contour, but do not determine, students' and institutional agents' lives. As illustrated by the oral histories presented, this liberatory possibility is also claimed in highlighting that BIPOC and FGS desires, thoughts, and actions matter. Likewise, stories of mattering pay tribute to, and highlight for FGS, the many sources of support they both possess and may cultivate in their own educational pathways. Thus, these stories serve as an archive of both systematized forms of oppression and fractures in these conditions that allow for liberatory potential. This historical record also chronicles the capacity, agency, and self-determination of FGS and BIPOC FGF/A, and as such offers a critical remembering of FGS and FGF/A lives that is both contextual and counterhegemonic [16]. These experiences that are at the exact intersections of racism, classism, and patriarchy hold power as a point of connection among faculty and students, while also being a source of knowledge into possible institutional interventions [9].

Engaging vulnerability offers a strategy to resist dominant practices within higher education that create division, competition, and isolation for students and faculty alike. For example, institutional agents who embrace the challenge of being vulnerable with students may be able to reclaim the dialectics of learning in ways that humanize teacher and student. First-generation faculty who reveal themselves to students can potentially make the institution less hostile for low-income, working-class, and first-generation students [9]. The narratives also highlight the ability to validate the strengths born from the burdens of intersectional marginalization in ways that does not minimize race over class. Beyond this, the practice of engaging vulnerability enables learning with and for students in order to manifest the collective meaning of being first-generation in higher education. The meanings evoke the diverse voices and complex experiences of FGS that are too often silenced and delegitimized in higher education [14]. Additionally, narratives of BIPOC FGF/A both contextualize FGS success within students' ethnic/racial community and communicate that students' success is embodied as an extension of faculty and administrators' own journeys. Here, BIPOC FGF/A place themselves at the forefront of collective efforts to reimagine higher education as spaces for FGS. Integral to this understanding, BIPOC FGF/A narratives not only communicate the significance of relationships within and across ethnic/racial communities to FGS success, but also the need for collective engagement and understanding among institutional agent and student.

Collectively, the telling of stories that convey intersectional marginality and vulnerability are invitations to students to be in community. A communal praxis can counteract a normative culture found among many colleges and universities that privilege individualism [21] and reinforce meritocratic and race-evasive ideologies that discount various ways economically and racially minoritized students and institutional agents must labor in the interest of institutional equity [11,61,75]. Communal praxis also strives to create a validating institutional context, which Rendón and Muñoz describe as places where the institutional agent "affirms students as persons, not just as students. [Institutional agents] do not detach themselves from students" [76] (p. 19). Establishing authentic relationships involve holistic student support that values minoritized student backgrounds [77], which garner a wealth of knowledge [53]. In engaging authentically and affirming the knowledge that minoritized students possess, communal praxis is radical in its attempts to dislodge power dynamics and prescribed relationships among institutional agents and students. As such, communal praxis can be cultivated toward transforming the linked conditions of faculty/administrators and students.

The analysis BIPOC narratives has implications for higher education that involve leveraging institutional mechanisms to strengthen social connectedness, belonging, and resilience among FGS and increasing visibility of FGF/A generally and BIPOC FGF/A in particular. FGF/A narratives can be sites for authenticating FGS validation in recognizing multiple forms of oppression. This validation is important given that first-generation college students occupy multiple socially marginalized positions such that they are more likely to: (1) have racially minoritized identities, (2) be immigrants and non-native speakers, and (3) come from lower-income families [2,78–80]. While class-based analyses have illuminated important insights into the academic and social experiences of first-generation students and faculty [8,9], the narratives represented in this analysis underscore the value of frameworks that meaningfully situate FGS experiences through multiple (vs. single) dynamics of power (vs. identity). Focusing on these forces ultimately highlight the need for systemic and institutional change in order to intervene in the ways they constrain FGS and BIPOC FGF/A. Given that the analysis is focused on the U.S. context, it would be worthwhile for future research to examine the need for, potential, and nature of communal praxis outside the U.S. context and the kinds of structural and cultural constraints that bear pressure on it as well as activate it.

Finally, this study calls for the use of narratives and stories in higher education research, pedagogy, and learning. In practice, faculty and administrators can begin by reflecting on the ways story work is always being engaged, specifically how their actions tacitly reinforce or disrupt oppressive narratives that maintain systems of power [54,55]. Faculty and administrators can disrupt banking logics that dominate education [10,11] and bridge the gap between students and institutional agent by making positioning(s) explicit and by drawing emphasis to student knowledge in their learning. For example, this could be incorporated through a welcome email that offers one's own experiences with higher education generally or with course content specifically, during a course or talk that reveals motivations and desires as they relate to higher education or specific content, or by providing students opportunities for narrative reflection and/or scaffolding in critical storytelling. This last suggestion offers an opportunity for faculty to understand and appreciate the knowledge students bring so that they can be meaningfully incorporated into the learning environment. Moreover, it is critical that institutions embed institutionalized support for both FGF/A and FGS in ways that leverage FGF/A knowledge for FGS success. Broader institutionalized changes are necessary as the forces that shape intersectional marginalization will not resolve on their own [81]. These practical examples are just a few possibilities to both offer a site for possible connection and a means for (co)constructing and (re)writing what it means to be first-generation.

7. Conclusions

Standlee explains that "silencing of a population or group can be an act of violence—a means to take away individual voice and with it, the right to self-definition" [82] (p. xxix). The current analysis intervenes in this kind of violence with the use of narrative inquiry to examine oral histories of BIPOC FGF/A to gain insight into experience and practice. In examining FGF/A narratives, the study contributes to the scholarship that primarily emphasizes FGS. Making FGF/A visible and heard challenges the ideas that FGS are not successful and have no place in higher education. Additionally, focusing on BIPOC FGF/A underscores intersections of race, class, and gender and highlights that those who occupy first-generation status are not a homogenous group. Moreover, by situating storytelling in the context of institutional agent and student interaction, the current narrative analysis chronicles the storied contents of life and illuminates story as pedagogy. This pedagogy involves validating the complexity of students' academic and social lives and engaging vulnerability. Through BIPOC FGF/A narratives, we can better understand and authenticate meanings of first-generation college students by, with, and for first-generation college students.

Being in community can radically transform educational institutions. Amplifying the voices of BIPOC FGF/A is a means to validate FGS experiences; their narratives mark the past as relevant to the knowledge students bring to higher education context and learning, thus they meaningfully situate FGS as active agents within the present, and they serve as a guidepost of possibility for potential futures. By acknowledging the significance of intersectional marginalization, these perspectives are vital to affirming that students matter. FGF/A narratives illuminate how stories are sites where systems of power are dynamically engaged and resisted. As such, stories operate like testimonies of Latinx graduate students and faculty and have "served as a powerful tactic not only to reveal practices of subordination in academia but also to create a space that allows Latinas/os to heal from those experiences" [56] (p. 18). Within the dominant paradigm of higher education, healing involves establishing affirming, validating, and empowering relationships fractured by systems of racism, classism, and patriarchy.

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