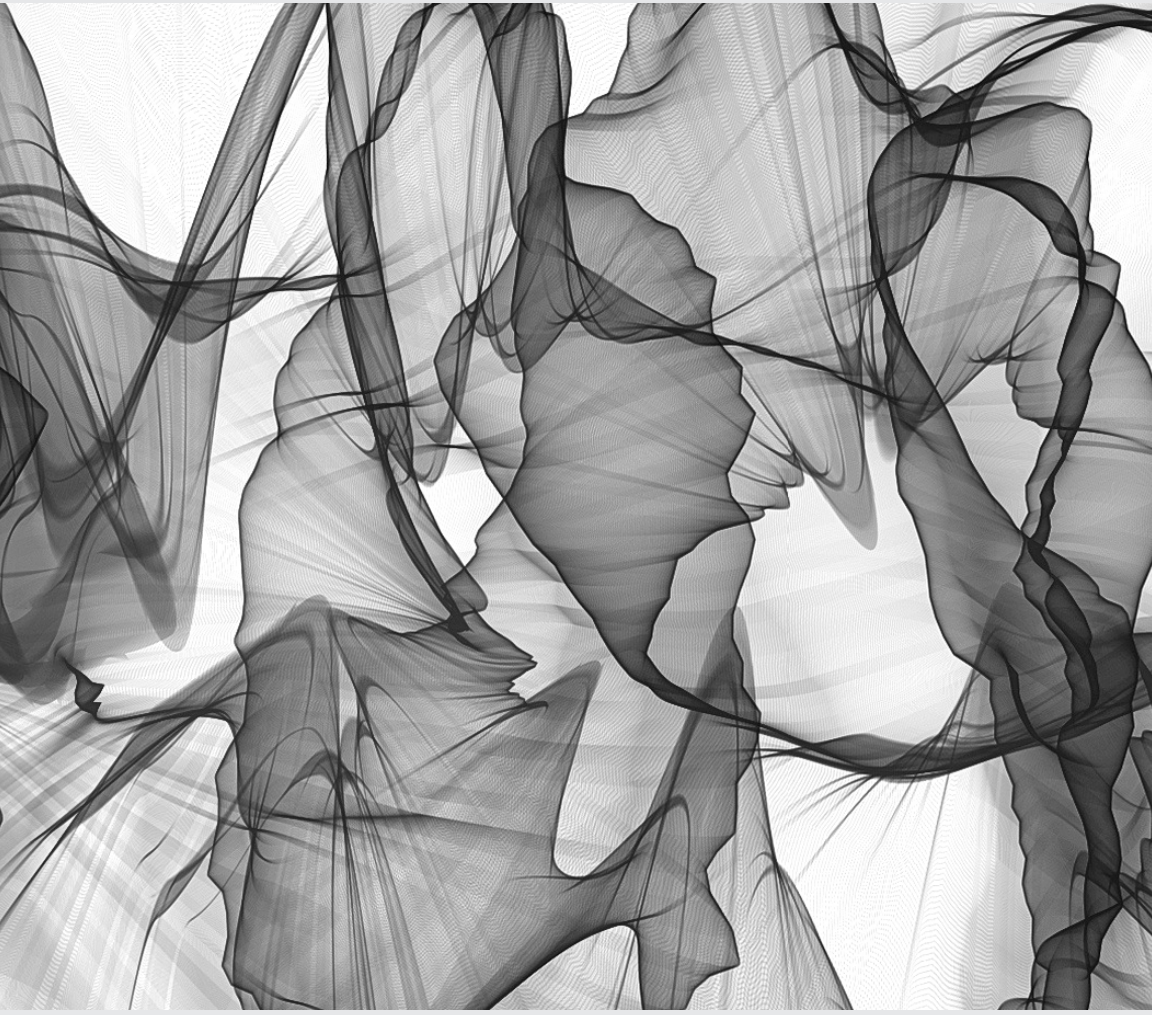
Journal of the Motherhood Initiative

Building Racial Equity in and Across Motherhood

Fall / Winter 2022
Vol. 13 No. 2



Denise Handlarski, Akanksha Misra, Margarita Levine, Jacqui Getfield, Pooja Bhatia Narang and many more

ZEINA OTAKY RAMIREZ, CARMEN M. DONES, AND CINDY N. PHU

Journeys of Healing and Self-Actualization: An Autoethnographic Examination of First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals in Higher Education

As mothers of color in higher education professional roles, we share our experiences of being first-generation college students and mothers of color, as well as, our resolve to unravel the perceptions of intersectionalities connected to our experiences. Mothers of color experience different forms of sexism than men and white women—and different forms of racism. We consider solutions to address racial and gender disparities around attrition, degree completion in a timely manner, and gaps between transfer aspirations and outcomes for diverse student populations. To address the need to explore shared first-generation experiences at community colleges and a state university, in this article, we discuss current research on first-generation faculty, staff, and administrators; highlight autoethnographic narratives of former first-generation college students of color who are now higher education professionals; and continue the critical dialogue regarding the need to better consider education generational status as it intersects with other non-traditional student identities to shape student and practitioner experiences.

Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge our First Mother, Mother Earth. We are thankful for the land, resources, energy, and life that we derive from our First Mother. We acknowledge our ancestors, particularly our mothers, and those who came before them. We hope to nourish all future generations through radical love, the passing down of our knowledge, and our passions for equity and advocacy. We acknowledge Matriarchal ways of knowing that value community and collective wellness, and rely on metaphorical and physical villages to maintain balance. In these communities,

the physical and spiritual are inextricably connected. Through the Matriarch, we will dismantle patriarchal and neoliberal capitalist ideologies that perpetuate racial and gendered violence. We acknowledge Larcenia Floyd, George Floyd's mother. The loss of any child to state-sanctioned violence is one loss too many. When George cried out for his mother, he cried out to all of us.

In light of recent events, we would like to acknowledge that at the time of editing this article, the Supreme Court struck down the protections of Roe v. Wade, which threatens reproductive rights for all women across the United States. We stand in solidarity with all female-identifying individuals, their reproductive rights, and bodily autonomy.

Through the framework of Critical Race Feminism (CRF)—which reifies our intersectional identities, anti-essentialization, lived experiences, and praxis—we highlight the ethnographic experiences of First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals (FMP) in higher education. Our journeys exemplify the intersectionalities (Crenshaw) and commonalities of being first-generation college graduates, Mother-of-Color Professionals, daughters of immigrant parents, and wrestling with the disconnect between institutional support on varying levels of the educational journey. Although some research covers the experiences of first-generation undergraduate students, there is limited research on first-generation professionals, especially mothers of color. Our purpose is to enact radical love through challenging the academic spaces of community colleges and universities to refuse the capitalistic, patriarchal isolation of individualism, and competition. Rather, we seek to hold space for each other through political acts of love to transcend systemic structures of oppression together with our intersectional identities in these spaces. We aim to start a discourse that is inclusive of FMP and that recognizes the impacts of familial and generational influences, our experiences in academia, and our desires for change; it is also a discourse that simultaneously advocates for our communities, junior faculty, university staff, and students. We wish to move towards a praxis that acknowledges the complexities of the lived experiences and journeys of mothers of color, faculty mothering professionals, and mothering students of color.

As FMP, it is imperative that we recognize the distinct disadvantage of navigating a complex institutional system as first-generation college students/graduates, who are "any student enrolled in higher education whose caregivers did not graduate from an American College or University" (Buenavista et al.). In addition, first-generation professional is defined as "any higher education staff, faculty, administrator, and/or scholar who was a first-generation college graduate" (Buenavista, Jain, and Ledesma). We extend the existing definition by adding the element of mothering—the term First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals (FMP) is any higher education staff, faculty, administrator,

and/or scholar who was a first-generation college graduate that self-identifies as a mother.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Feminist (CRF) theory informs our work. CRF is an offshoot of critical race theory (CRT), which explores how race and power interact, particularly to challenge white supremacy. The core values of CRF incorporate many of the tenets of CRT, which include: (a) race is a social construct, not inherent to individuals, and racism is imbedded in American culture; (b) CRF is interdisciplinary; (c) different groups are racialized in different ways, while whites control power and access to resources; (d) The lived experiences of each researcher are a strength to the study; and (e) Alternative methodologies, such as counternarratives, exist in academia. Additionally, Adrien Wing argues that CRF includes the following tenets: (a) CRF embraces critical race praxis and theory equally, and practice is a central component; (b) CRF incorporates feminism's tenet of gender-based harm caused by patriarchal systems; (c) CRF rejects CRT's essentialization of all minorities, specifically because it centers gendered experiences, unlike CRT; and (d) CRF can be applied globally to challenge laws affecting women all over the world. CRF delves deeper and adds the dimension of intersectional identities of race and gender, whereas CRT falls short in only examining race. Within racial identities, gendered experiences vary, as do mothering experiences; CRT does not consider the unique racialized and gendered experiences of women as a whole, and only reifies Crenshaw's work on intersectionality (Otaky Ramirez 58). CRF critically examines how the intersectionality of racism and cisheteropatriarchy play a role in the marginalization of women of color. Because of its flexibility in defining experiences, CRF has been used to frame United States scholarly research on "abortion, adoption, affirmative action, divorce, drug use, gangs, criminal justice, constitutional law, employment discrimination, torts, domestic violence, sexual harassment, reproductive rights, family law, the Internet, and even tax law" ("Critical Race Feminist Theory" 352).

On a global scale, CRF is utilized to address conflicts of religion and custom, female genital mutilation, war crimes, infanticide, and many issues that women of color around the world contend with under religious and cultural oppression from patriarchal worldviews. Utilizing CRF to explore our lived experiences as FMP allows for us to examine our intersectional identities to include not only our race and gender but our mothering experiences, personal beliefs, educational as well as our social and professional identities. Our mothering identity is salient and embedded as a core value of who we are and the lens we utilize to examine this work (Otaky Ramirez 101). As practitioners, our experiences inform our work to create environments that

are supportive of students of color, particularly mothering students of color, pursuing higher education. This calls for a more in-depth analysis of what it means to be an FMP. As CRF practitioners, we challenge the essentializing and pathologizing of mothering experiences, and posit that there are systemic and structural issues that perpetuate the marginalization of FMP identities through patriarchal systems (Otaky Ramirez 135).

First-Generation Literature

Research shows that 34 per cent of the undergraduate population are first-generation college students in the United States. Back in 1999, Patricia Gándara and Jolley Maxwell acknowledged increasing diversity within higher education over the past thirty years; and not much has changed to the overall approach for students. In 2009, María del Carmen Salazar, Amanda Stone Norton, and Franklin A. Tuitt outlined promising practices for inclusive excellence in the classroom for faculty as a call-out for institutional change, but they also acknowledged that not all faculty will engage in this practice because they believe they already practice inclusiveness and/or claim that it does not fit into their curriculum. The failure of institutions to adopt support structures inside and outside of the classroom will lead to unchanged completion and success rates for students of color.

Shelagh Rose, Rebecca Colina Neri, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar argue that a guided pathways model grounded in "funds of knowledge" can improve student success in community colleges. We argue, the model can and should extend to universities. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar and colleagues describe "funds of knowledge" as follows: "The people's lived experiences and strengths that are related to the more familiar idea of social and cultural capital. "Funds of knowledge" include the skills, daily routines, cultural practices, work experiences, etc., that individuals accumulate throughout their lives" (64). Understanding the "funds of knowledge" students bring to an institution can better inform the institution on resources needed to support student success.

According to Carmen Dones, education is a promising opportunity for social and economic mobility for students who are generally low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented minorities. Lauren Falcon identifies the following obstacles facing minority university students: lack of college readiness, financial challenges, racial disparity, lack of self-esteem, and little family support. Moreover, she reports that low-income families may perceive college as a privilege for the rich and may view the decision to attend college as arrogant, all of which can have a negative impact on academics in higher education due to the perceived unattainability of a college education. Falcon also argues that first-generation college students can be successful through participating in college readiness programs, academic and social integration,

college culture assimilation, personal characteristics, and receiving increased family support (22).

Furthermore, Michael Stebleton and Krista Soria reveal that first-generation college students face specific obstacles more frequently than non-first-generation students, such as competing job and/or family responsibilities, weak English and/or math skills, inadequate study skills, and feeling depressed, stressed, and upset. For example, many Latino/a students attend college later in life, as they tend to work when they are younger in order to financially contribute to the family household. The conflict of prioritizing family values over academic values can be stressful for students, since they try to fulfill their familial obligations while contending with college ones. Low college completion rates for Latino/as have often been linked to low academic achievement as the causal factor. Nevertheless, Esau Tovar found that having supportive family and friends, receiving transition assistance from the institution, spending adequate time studying, and committing to the pursuit of a degree had a power influence on intention to persist to degree completion. When barriers were removed and interventions applied, Melinda Mechur Karp observed that students "enrolled in more terms and earned more college credits" (38).

Unlike most research attributing deficits in degree completion to the students, Arshad Ali and Tracy Buenavista explore the dialectical relationship between racism and capitalism as a contributor that shapes the outcomes of low-income students of color and the roles of schools in the reproduction of social, political, and economic inequities (1). We argue that better approaches to equity work can be done within the institutions to promote inclusiveness and a sense of belonging in higher education. Thus, discourse on the lived experiences of first-generation college students from an asset-based capital lens leads us to advocate to bridge equity gaps for degree attainment as well as social and economic mobility (Dones 45).

Mothering Literature

To date, no comprehensive research study has examined the intersectional complexities of first-generation mothers of color serving in community colleges and universities. Until the day that parenting is a gender-neutral concept, we must create a new standard to dismantle patriarchy within institutions of higher education through mothering solidarity (Phu 51).

To frame mothering solidarity, we must view mothering as a feminist act, as a social practice, and as inclusive. Mothers of color must nurture their children differently as they navigate the oppressive structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and other intersectional systems of oppression (Gumbs et al.; Phu). Together, mothering as a revolutionary praxis (Gumbs et

al.; Oka) and Chicana M(other)work (Cisneros et al.) provide the foundation to reframe and reimagine how institutions of higher education can view mothering as a social practice to create inclusive spaces on campus. To take it a step further, parenting practice and philosophies can help with the reframing of parenting for students of color by borrowing from critical race parenting (Matias) and parenting for liberation (Brown).

Liberation can occur only when mothers can depend on one another, be inconvenienced by one another, and be accountable for one another. The manifesto for revolutionary homemaking as a praxis includes fighting for reproductive rights, gender inclusivity, reclaiming communal caregiving responsibility, politicizing familial love, developing spaces for healing work as well as structures that collectively distribute essential goods, facilitating collective critical reflections, and decolonizing our relationship to the earth and everything in it. Furthermore, the Chicana M(other)work collective demands for higher education to be more inclusive of mothering students. In addition to creating inclusive spaces, healing is also part of the solidarity of healing mothers and parentings. To achieve liberation as mothers and parents, Trina Greene Brown calls for (re)connecting with self to heal, (re)connecting with children through conversations, and (re)connecting to community to "return to our ancestral roots of raising children in a village" (156). Finally, Cindy Phu argues that we must create a mothering-receptive culture and dismantle antimothering climates to increase the sense of belonging among mothers and families in white academic spaces (153).

Our Mothering Counterstories

In alignment with CRF, we utilized autoethnography as our methodological approach to share our counterstories as FMP. Autoethnography is a method to researching and "writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis 273; Holman Jones). This approach serves as our counternarrative to the dominant narrative. As authors of this work, we claim intersectional identities that are parts of a powerful whole. We share the following narratives with many common identities, including being FMP, doctor/as, advocates, and researchers. In 2017, we met through our doctoral cohort at California State University, in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program and realized then that our experiences as FMP allowed us to view the world from a unique and powerful perspective.

Our relationships with each other are also a counterstory that was formed within the academic space, where we came together collectively with love, support, and solidarity. The three of us finished our dissertation together during the pandemic as we navigated the merger of our familial, academic,

and workspaces. We spent weekends together on Zoom researching, writing, and supporting one another with micro-affirmation and the affirmation that we would finish the doctoral program together. This work is a triangulation of our independent dissertation research focusing on first-generation college students, women of color in leadership, and mothering students of color with intersectional mothering experiences as first-generation professionals of color in academia.

We carry first-generation traits—such as overworking, perfectionism, anxiety, as well as real and perceived fears over our professional careers—and carry them into our writing, presentations, and collective action. With first-generation awareness, we as coauthors have a special understanding to support one another in unique ways, such as community writing, friendships, affirmations, and validations. Racially and ethnically, we are diverse and have a rich ancestry that cannot be silenced in our work against oppression and racialized and gendered violence.

Carmen: Mothering as a Dean of Academic Affairs

My collective experience of being a Latina/o first-generation student, daughter of an immigrant parent, and mother of color came with many challenges and added responsibilities of setting a good example, apportioning time and duties, and managing self-guilt while navigating complex institutional practices and procedures. As an embodiment of relations, this work refuses isolation and disconnection to reconnect and reclaim who I am and my connection to my community, ancestors, First Mother, and the knowledge that emerges within and across these spaces and relations.

My journey began with having to self-learn to navigate a complex institutional system. My parents married young, and neither of them completed high school. They never encouraged college in the home because, I presume, they did not know enough about it. Being lower-middle class, they expected their children to obtain employment after high school, as opposed to attending college in order to contribute financially to the household. Like one of my older sisters before me, I obliged and found jobs to help support the family after high school. My sister worked in a dental office and brought me in for employment when a position opened up. Because I was consumed with working, college did not resonate with me until my mid-to-late twenties. By then I had moved out, married, and had children of my own. Stebelton and Soria identify prioritizing family as a barrier to college. In my case, it was two-fold: first as a daughter and then as a mother. Nonetheless, my education was shaped by my experiences growing up.

I was the middle child of five siblings—two older sisters and two younger brothers, of which only one other attended college. My eldest sister received a scholarship to the University of Southern California (USC) but did not follow

through on accepting it for no other reason than she did not know how to navigate the system. She ended up at a community college, where she ultimately stopped out, only to enroll in a private for-profit university, where she eventually achieved her bachelor's degree. Since she was the only one before me to attend college, I turned to her for navigational support, even though she had never really learned the system. So, essentially, I had no one to guide me and thus had to figure it out on my own.

As a first-generation college student, I navigated the educational system by trial and error. I made the same mistake as many others. I started one semester and stopped out. However, when I decided to return the last time, I was committed and ready to take college seriously. As I reflect back, one challenge that could have made me stop out again was when I needed to breastfeed while taking a class. Although I explained to my male professor that I recently had a baby and might have to leave early, he never offered accommodations or advice on where I could pump. As a first-generation college student, I did not know where to obtain information on lactation facilities and did not know how to ask for it. Needless to say, I suffered through the class but achieved a high grade. That experience taught me to acknowledge mothering students in my class syllabi and in orientations. In addition, I advocated to create a comfortable lactation space that is accessible to students and identifiable on the college campus map. I often wonder how many mothers were pushed out of higher education due to the apathetic nature towards amenities necessary for mothering students. Moreover, attending college as a night student, childcare services were not an option for my other two children.

Having to spend time away from my young children to go to work and college full time was stressful. I was riddled with self-guilt, but that is what motivated me to do well this time around. I was not going to waste the valuable time that was taken from my family. Although the support from my husband was strong, I turned to the college for academic advisement to stay the path. When I consulted a counselor at the community college, he nearly derailed my path by insisting I consider a different major. Since dental hygiene was not a major available at the college he worked in and nursing was, he convinced me to take the nursing path instead.

As a vulnerable first-generation student, I complied. Well, sort of. I mapped out the prerequisites for the dental hygiene program and the nursing program, which were nearly parallel, and decided to pursue both paths. I figured if I did not get accepted to the dental hygiene program, nursing would be my alternative. Furthermore, this counselor never provided information on support programs, such as childcare, scholarships, or special programs, which I am certain I would have qualified for. That said, while I attended classes during nights and on weekends, few options for support services were actually available. As Mechur Karp observes, providing resources to remove these

types of barriers will allow students to persist. Nonetheless, I learned to navigate the system and completed my program of study while setting a good example for my children.

Immediately after achieving my degree in dental hygiene, I worked in private practice while continuing my education at a local public university to earn my bachelor's degree. Upon completing my degree, I was recruited to teach dental hygiene classes at my alma mater. As I continued to work in private practice, I concurrently taught college classes and earned my master's degree. After completing that degree, I obtained a full-time tenure-track faculty position and became the program director for the dental hygiene program and the department chairperson for the health sciences division. It was evident that academia was the path for me. Hence, I chose to pursue my doctorate in education—and although I did not need this degree for my position, I sought the tools to be an efficient and effective leader.

As the dental hygiene program director, I was able to diversify the program that had historically lacked people of color. It was my responsibility to recruit faculty and students and mentor them through the process of applying to the program. For students, I held information sessions, personally called them, and brought in college support and resource experts from CalWorks, counseling, federal outreach and student services programs, and financial aid to provide information to students. This gave students an opportunity to build connections with various leaders heading the support structures on campus. Patricia Pérez and Miguel Ceja found that having faculty, staff, and administrators who reflect the student body is an invaluable resource towards student success. By the time I moved on to becoming an administrative dean for the college, I had accomplished diversifying the dental hygiene program with 50 per cent people of color and transforming the program from an associate's degree level to a bachelor's degree level in the community college, furthering equity for underrepresented minority students by providing them an opportunity for social and economic mobility. Sharing similar life experiences as the students—such as being a first-generation college student as well as a mothering student, working full time while attending college, and having an immigrant parent—, the push now is to get the students to achieve higher degrees and employment opportunities beyond private practice, such as in academia.

I credit my achievements to having mentors throughout my academic journey as a student, professor, and administrator. My mentors have been instrumental in guiding my trajectory as a leader. As such, I share my journey as a form of advocacy and justice for women and mothering students in academia. In the words of the late Mary Church Turell, "And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long." As

a result of my experiences, I currently mentor other Latina first-generation college and graduate students.

Zeina: Mothering as an Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Student Conduct

In reflecting on my mothering and professional journey, it can be described as an anomaly. How does an Indigenous Palestinian girl with Lebanese nationality—whose father was born in a refugee camp, whose grandmother was illiterate, and whose mother barely completed eighth-grade—become a university administrator with a doctorate degree in higher education? My life journey has been one of many challenges, as I have faced anti-immigration and anti-Palestinian attacks as well as racial and gendered violence. My mothering journey was one of unexpected pregnancies, starting at the age of twenty-one. I was the first in my family to marry a non-Arab person—he is Mexican American and has been my life partner for over twenty-two years. The language of shame or "haram" was evident in the Arab culture that wanted me to assimilate but not fully, especially as it pertained to women. As an immigrant, whose family subscribed to the American Dream, high educational aspirations were seen as a way out of poverty and to upward mobility. Not only did I complete my higher education journey, but I also excelled, as did my two younger sisters. With tenacity and courage, we navigated higher education as first-generation college students in spaces that were not made for us.

At twenty-one years old, I had no business raising a child; but the universe had its way, and I had three children in four years. I became the guardian and keeper of beautiful mixed-race babies. As a spiritual being and humanist, I cannot deny that having my children at such a young age did not have an immense impact on where I am today and what my values are. While pregnant, I continued my higher education journey as a first-generation college student. I was eight-months pregnant with my first child when I became a full-fledged American citizen. I was nine-months pregnant with my second child when the Twin Towers were attacked, and the anti-Muslim/Arab sentiment was palpable. I was afraid to leave my apartment, since I was pregnant and could potentially face violence. By the time I had my third child, I knew that my life was going to center on justice advocacy for women. My undergraduate degree was in art and focused on gendered violence. My passion for women's advocacy is the thread that runs through my educational, professional, and spiritual journey.

Balancing family and school was always a challenge, and my priorities always shifted (Stebleton and Soria). I graduated eleven years after I began my bachelor's degree, with my kids in tow. My three children were almost school age, and it was time that I financially contributed to our family. After a failed attempt to start a career in the art industry by working at an art museum, the

commute and mothering of three little ones took its toll. I decided to reassess and found work at the local university in administrative support. I justified taking on this role by how close I would be to my children's school. It was then the universe made its own plans, and I changed my career trajectory. As a university employee, I took advantage of the employee benefits program and pursued my Master of Arts in educational leadership. During this time, I worked for amazing women and mothers, who created safe and inclusive spaces for mothers.

Sadly, I also worked for a female identifying administrator who exemplified the worst traits. I spent several years in an administrative support role while completing my master's degree working for a female-identifying administrator who upheld white supremacy and had no empathy for the plight of mothering professionals. She did not care that I had to drop off three kids no earlier than 7:30 a.m. because of childcare constraints and had a thirty-minute commute to get to work with a start time of 8:00 a.m. In Los Angeles, a thirty-minute commute can easily become a sixty-to-ninety-minute one on any given day. I had to build a thick skin and learn the language and game of the oppressor through code switching. Andrew Molinsky's work on cross-cultural code-switching defines it as "the act of purposefully modifying one's behavior in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior" (624). This administrator would not engage via conversation but sent lengthy emails criticizing my judgment, work ethic, and expectations. She always assumed the worst. I swore to myself that anyone who called my children "constituents" must not be human. Although I wished to quit, I had financial obligations and a degree to complete. The constraints on parents—particularly mothers—to remain in unhealthy work environments to provide for their children is structural in nature, as it upholds patriarchal oppression and white supremacy. It was at that time in my professional journey that I decided to never work for a supervisor who did not have children, male or female. The trauma, microaggressions, and gaslighting this individual caused hindered my ability to trust my judgment as a professional and has taken years to heal (Otaky Ramirez). When I left that role, I left with an electronic folder of emails in case I ever needed to file a lawsuit or take part in one.

Since I left that role, I have been fortunate to work for supervisors and administrators who value my skills and ability to bring my lived experiences to inform my work. They have supported my educational endeavours to attain my doctoral degree. It is through my doctoral work that I continue advocating for women of color, particularly student affairs professionals (Otaky Ramirez). Currently, I report to an administrator who understands the structural and systemic issues that continue to hinder equity for all students of color, including parenting scholars. The university I work at engaged in extensive research and

is currently developing identity-based resources centers, including the Thrive Center, which supports parent-scholars, transfer students, and first-generation college students, to name a few. Additionally, I serve and am one of the founding members of the Parent-Scholars Workgroup, which attempts to improve the visibility and support for parenting students at the university, both in the classroom and through support services.

I would be remiss to not highlight the impact COVID-19 has had on my work and personal life. Since the onset of the pandemic, my now college-aged children had their own challenges. During the pandemic, my youngest barely graduated high school due the virtual classroom environment. My oldest child had to step away from her visual and performing arts program because she is a tactile learner. And my middle child worked as an EMT while attending college full time. With one of my children being an essential worker, it brought another layer of challenges into our home in terms of health and safety. While managing all the personal challenges, though, the professional work never ceased for me or other mothers. Parents are collectively exhausted. Many colleagues began to experience burn out and have since left the university for better opportunities with less stress and more money. The great resignation has taken a toll on many.

With COVID-19 came a revolution of social and civil justice movements that have been long overdue. George Floyd's death was a catalyst for several uprisings. During the spring of 2021, for the first time in my life, I saw an influx of Palestinian activism and support against Israeli apartheid. For the first time, all the trauma of being a Palestinian refugee, an Arab without a motherland, was cemented and centered. The crimes of humanity against Palestinians were finally at the forefront. For the first time in my life, my voice was not silenced out of fear of retribution by those who carry anti-Palestinian sentiments. Through the connections I share with my sisters in my doctoral program, Dr. Phu and Dr. Dones, and with my amazing professors and mentors, Dr. Buenavista and Dr. Jain, this is the beginning of a journey of liberation, healing, and self-love. I am now beginning to understand the power I have inherited from my ancestors as an Indigenous Palestinian women of color, mother, sister, daughter, partner, and advocate.

Cindy: Mothering as an Associate Professor in Speech Communication

As I have navigated my mothering journey professionally and educationally, I continue to carry my family-inherited war traumas, intergenerational traumas, and my own educational traumas. I am an Asian American daughter of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant refugees from Vietnam. While my parents worked tirelessly to provide for our family, I was primarily raised by my maternal grandmother. In balancing my work and motherwork, I continue to recognize the intergenerational labor of my grandmother, mother,

godmother, and the community of caretakers that supported me. I want to honour their mothering practices, the community of love they provided, as well as the multitude of sacrifices that they made to raise me and my sister in a foreign land where they barely spoke the language.

I struggled throughout my education, as English was my third learned language; Chinese Trieu Chow and Vietnamese were the languages used in my home. My encounters with language barriers and the struggles of navigating white academic spaces were part of my first-generation college student experience. Although I graduated with a speech communication degree, my success was in large part due to my participation in the university's speech and debate team, where I found my voice and made life-long friendships. I am now a tenured speech professor at a community college where I was formerly both director of the speech and debate team and coordinator of the speech tutoring center. After ten years away from education, I decided to pursue my doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy while I was pregnant, and I started the program when my child was four-months old.

My mothering journey began with a miscarriage. To this day, I carry the sadness at the loss of my first child. After a year of grieving, mourning, and coping, we were able to conceive my second. He has brought so much love and joy to my life, but the beginning of my mothering experience during graduate school while teaching full-time was isolating. When I was accepted in the program, I did not disclose to the director of the program that I was pregnant for fear that they would change their mind about my acceptance. Because of this fear, I did not explain that I had missed the meet-and-greet orientation meeting as I was going into labor during that time. Additionally, I was still breastfeeding early in graduate school, and I exclusively pumped milk for my child throughout the first year of the three-year program—before class, during the breaks, and after class at 10:00 p.m. As a first-generation college graduate student and faculty member at my college, I was not aware of the Title IX pregnancy and parenting student rights and protections.

As a coping mechanism, my family has always emphasized keeping the peace and avoiding unnecessary attention. I have always prided myself on being different from my family, yet in the most vulnerable moments of my needs for lactation accommodations, I kept my silence because of my fears of judgment, exclusion, and the perception that it may tarnish my professional reputation. The key that changed my deficit-thinking was representation and critical race love (Buenavista et al. 238). There was an Asian American advisor—who would become my mentor, dissertation chair, and life-long friend—announced during our formal orientation meeting that she was mothering an eighteen-month-old. She was also a first-generation professional and became my advocate and pushed me to request lactation accommodations, which completely changed my trajectory towards becoming an advocate for all

mothers, especially mothering students of color at the community college.

Without this advisor, I would have continued my struggles in silence and potentially dropped out of the program. In disclosing to my cohort that I was mothering a four-month-old, I found community with the first-generation mothers of color classmates—two of whom I am writing this article with: Carmen and Zeina. They have been there from the beginning with their solidarity, community, and mothering words of wisdom. As a new mother navigating academic spaces, my mothering peers provided me with love, affirmations, micro-affirmations, and support that we would start and finish the program together. Their support included gentle reminders about assignment deadlines, taking notes for me when I had to miss classes, creating flexible schedules in group projects together, showing empathy for when my child was sick or hospitalized, and most importantly sharing their own vulnerabilities with their mothering journey because they were also my peer-representation of successful working mothering students. Five years after my son's birth, my mothering journey continues as I am currently pregnant with another child.

I continue to do the motherwork necessary to support my child, my feminist fathering husband, as well as my family, community, and villages of support. I present my dissertation work, discuss the needs of mothers, hold space for collective communities to support motherwork, and push for positive social change for mothers. I am an active member of an international association that focuses on the needs of maternal action and scholarship. I am building a mothering-receptive community on my college campus and helping to open its first family resource centre. With a collective group of mothers working at my campus, we developed a support committee for parenting students that provides professional development workshops for faculty, organized workshops for pandemic parenting needs, secured funding and grants for parenting students, helped to develop a family resource center, and launched our first parenting student graduation celebration festival to recognize parenting students with their families and children.

When we collectively heal together from family-inherited trauma, intergenerational trauma, and/or educational trauma, we must also critically examine how the intersection of social categories—such as class, race, place, age, and citizenship—produces individual experiences of privilege and oppression as they pertain to xenophobia and how this positions Asian American elders and women within systems of vulnerability, oppression, and neglect. As an Asian American woman-identified body in white academic spaces, I condemn the verbal and physical violence and racist xenophobic rhetoric against the Asian community. A national survey revealed nearly three million Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have experienced some form of hate incident since 2021, and one in ten APPI women reported hate-

related incidents (National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum; Samson). As these numbers climb, mothering a toddler while pregnant makes me navigate public spaces differently, including campuses and classrooms, as most of these hate crimes have targeted women and the elderly. Acts of violence are not always physical, though; the verbal harms of racism, sexism, and racialized microaggressions also have long-lasting impacts (Solorzano & Huber). As Asian Americans, we are perpetual foreigners, and now more than ever, we continue to witness retraumatizing acts of anti-Asian hate and violence as we continue to mother (Matias, et al. 180). In response, I will continue to work towards collective change as we welcome our next child into this world.

Conclusion

As we continue to navigate our present with our past and future, we continue to stay connected to one another, as well as our communities, ancestors, and First Mother to reclaim our identities in refusing to accept isolation, disconnection, and competition. Our intersectionality, counterstories, and collective voice reframe our first-generation resiliency and our trust in maternal ways of knowing. Our intention is to honor and recognize mothering practices and the wisdom of our ancestors and our own mothers. This practice allowed us to reconnect with our First Mother and to seek more love for ourselves, communities, and uplift those who stand on our shoulders.

We stand in solidarity with parenting students as they become mentors and examples through intergenerational role modeling for their children to achieve social and economic mobility. By evaluating current practices in building family friendly institutions, generational commitments to sustain connections can be made. Through CRF, we affirm our mothering identities. Sharing our narratives of mothering experiences as a collective—the good, the bad, and the ugly-crying—heals past trauma and reaffirms our experiences. Through our praxis as CRF practitioners, we continue to antiessentialize our experiences, place the onus of our marginalization on patriarchal structures, and create healing spaces for ourselves and other mothers (Otaky Ramirez 136).

Healing means knowing that we are more than our intergenerational, contemporary, or educational traumas. We need to name and call out "anti-mothering culture/climate" in our pedagogy, practice, and policy to build a "mothering-receptive culture on college campuses" (Phu, "Sleepless in School" 247). Additionally, we must be intentional as mothering mentors to hire and support more first-generation mothers of color while simultaneously supporting them with campus childcare, maternity leave, family housing, and liberation (Phu 46). Collectively, we reimagine educational and professional spaces to include family, children, and diverse communities and work towards

intergenerational role modelling, intergenerational healing, and intergenerational support against systems of oppression.

As we continue to collectively challenge systems of injustice, we must keep George's cries out for his mother, Larcenia Floyd, deeply in our hearts and always remember that he cried out to all of us. Until the day that all of our children are loved, valued, and nurtured, we must continue to hold space for each other in healing, solidarity, and community.

Works Cited

Ellis, Carolyn, et al. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung,* vol. 36, no. 4 (138), 2011, pp. 273–90. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294. Accessed 24 Sep. 2022.

Ali, Arshad Imtiaz, and Tracy L. Buenavista, editors. *Education at War: The Fight for Students of Color in America's Public Schools*. Fordham University Press, 2018.

Brown, Trina Greene. *Parenting for Liberation: A Guide for Raising Black Children*. The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2020.

Buenavista, Tracy Lachica, et al. "A Praxis of Critical Race Love: Toward the Abolition of Cisheteropatriarchy and Toxic Masculinity in Educational Justice Formations." *Educational Studies*, vol. 57, no. 3, 2021, pp. 238-49.

Buenavista, Tracy L., et al. "Narratives of First-Generation Faculty, Staff, and Administration of Color in the Community College." The Council of the Study for Community Colleges Conference, 29 April 2019, The Westin Hotel, San Diego, CA.

Buenavista, Tracy L., et al. "Fostering a First-Generation Professional Praxis." Hawai'i Student Success Institute Conference, 6 March 2020, Hilton Hawaiian Village: Coral Conference Center, Honolulu, HI.

Buenavista, Tracy L., Dimpal Jain, and Maria C. Ledesma, editors. *First Generation Faculty of Color: Reflections on Research, Teaching, and Service*. Rutgers University Press, 2022.

Cisneros, Nora, et al. "Mothers of Color in Academia: Fierce Mothering Challenging Spatial Exclusion Through a Chicana Feminist Praxis." *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology*, edited by Cecilia Caballero, et al., University of Arizona Press, 2019, pp. 29-46.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. Demarginalizing The Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, Issue1, Article8,chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf. Accessed 25 Sept. 25 2022.

Delgado, Richard, and Stefancic, Jean. *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Dones, Carmen M. "Expanding the Role of Community Colleges with Workforce Baccalaureate Programs." *Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation in the 21st Century: Emerging Research and Opportunities*, edited by D. J. Smith, R. Lewis, and L. Singleton, IGI Global, 2021, pp. 28-58.

Dones, Carmen M. Latino First-Generation Student Experiences in a Community College Baccalaureate Program. 2020. California State University, Northridge, PhD dissertation. hdl.handle.net/10211.3/217385.

Falcon, Lauren. "Breaking Down Barriers: First-Generation College Students and College Success." *League for Innovation in the Community College: Innovation Showcase*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2015, www.league.org/innovation-showcase/breaking-down-barriers-first-generation-college-students-and-college-success. Accessed 19 Sept. 2022.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, editors. *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines.* PM Press, 2016.

Gándara, Patricia C., and Maxwell, Jolley. *Priming the Pump: Strategies for Increasing the Achievement of Underrepresented Minority Undergraduates*. College Board, 1999.

Matias, Cheryl E. "Birthing the Motherscholar and Motherscholarship." *Peabody Journal of Education*, vol. 97, no. 2, 2022, pp. 246-50.

Matias, Cheryl, et al. "Raising Love in a Time of Lovelessness: Kuwentos of Pinayist Motherscholars Resisting COVID-19's Anti-Asian Racism." *Peabody Journal of Education*, vol. 97, no. 2, 2022, pp. 179-98., doi.org/10.1080/0161956x.2022.2055886.

Mechur Karp, Melinda. "A Holistic Conception of Nonacademic Support: How Four Mechanisms Combine to Encourage Positive Student Outcomes in the Community College." *New Directions for Community Colleges, vol. 2016, no. 175, 2016, pp. 33-44.*

Molinsky, Andrew. "Cross-Cultural Code-Switching: The Psychological Challenges of Adapting Behavior in Foreign Interactions." *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 32, no. 20, 2007, pp. 622-40.

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. "The State of Safety for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Women." NAPAWF, 2022, www.napawf.org/our-work/march-2022/state-of-safety?utm_source=social&utm_medium=instagram&utm_campaign=state+of+safety. Accessed 19 Sept. 2022.

Oka, Cynthia Dewi. "Mothering as Revolutionary Praxis." *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, edited by Alexis Gumbs, Chins Martens, and Mai'a Williams, PM Press, 2016, pp. 51-57.

Otaky Ramirez, Zeina. *You Do Not See Us: Women of Color in Student Affairs Leadership Through a Critical Race Feminist Lens.* Dissertation. California State University, 2021, hdl.handle.net/10211.3/219402. Accessed 19 Sept. 2022.

Pérez, Patricia A., and Miguel Ceja. "Building a Latina/o Student Transfer

Culture: Best Practices and Outcomes in Transfer to Universities." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education,* vol. 9, no. 1, 2009, pp. 6-21.

Phu, Cindy N., Dones, Carmen M., Otaky-Ramirez, Z., and Aguirre, Patricia, L. "First-Generation Mothers of Color Professionals: An Examination of the Intersectional Experiences in Higher Education." International Association of Maternal Action + Scholarship Conference, 24 September 2021.

Phu, Cindy N. *Othering Mothers: Mothering Students of Color in Community College*. Dissertation. California State University, 2020, hdl.handle.net/10211.3/217402. Accessed 19 Sept. 2022.

Phu, Cindy N. "Sleepless in School: A First-Generation Doctoral Student Mother of Color's Journey." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2020, pp. 241-47., doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.8.2.0241.

Rios-Aguilar, Cecilia, et al. "Funds of Knowledge for the Poor and Forms of Capital for the Rich? A Capital Approach to Examining Funds of Knowledge." *Theory and Research in Education*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2011, pp. 163-84.

Rose, Shelagh, Rebecca Colina Neri, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar. "(Re) Contextualizing Guided Pathways to Provide Equitable Supports for Community College Students." *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2019, pp. 63-74.

Salazar, María del Carmen, Amanda Stone Norton, and Franklin A. Tuitt. "Weaving Promising Practices For Inclusive Excellence into the Higher Education Classroom." *To Improve the Academy,* edited by Linda B. Nilson and Judith E. Miller, Jossey-Bass, 2008, pp. 208-226.

Samson, Carl. "Nearly 3 Million AAPIs Experience a Hate Incident Since 2021, National Survey Data Suggests." *Next Shark*, 17 March 2022, nextshark.com/3-million-aapis-hate-incident-since-2021/. Accessed 19 Sept. 2022.

Stebleton, Michael J, and Krista M. Soria. "Breaking Down Barriers: Academic Obstacles of First-generation Students at Research Universities." *The Learning Assistance Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, pp. 7-20.

Solórzano Daniel G., and Huber Pérez Lindsay. *Racial Microaggressions: Using Critical Race Theory to Respond to Everyday Racism*. Teachers College Press, 2020.

Terrell, Mary C. "The Progress Of Colored Women." *The Progress of Colored Women by Mary Church Terrell*, http://gos.sbc.edu/t/terrellmary.html.

Tovar, Esau. "The Role of Faculty, Counselors, and Support Programs on Latino/a Community College Students' Success and Intent to Persist." *Community College Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 46–71.

Wing, Adrien K. "Critical Race Feminist Theory." *Encyclopedia of Law and Society: American and Global Perspectives*, edited by David S. Clark, Sage,

2007, pp. 351–353.
Wing, Adrien K., editor. *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader.* 2nd ed., New York University Press, 2003.