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"Our Branches Are the Vines That Must Bear Fruit": The Role of Parents in First-Generation Students' Career Development

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Abstract

This interpretive qualitative study of 17 first-generation college students (FGCSs) in the U.S. uses parent-generated familial capital as an asset-based framework to recognize the various ways that parents contribute to their undergraduate students' career development. Six themes illustrate parental contributions: facilitating students' access to pre-college educational opportunity, making financial contributions, instilling career-related values, giving career advice, job choice from parent contexts (or the way that knowledge of parent cultures and regions of origin informed career goals, especially for immigrant participants), and giving back to parents as a source of motivation for achievement and financial success. Findings also acknowledge the importance of considering FGCSs' multiple social identities, namely immigrant status, as the majority of study participants are from immigrant families, in understanding participants' career development experiences.

Keywords: first-generation college students, parent influence, immigrants, undergraduate students, career development

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In 2016, 56% of bachelor's degree-seeking students in the U.S. were first-generation college students (FGCSs), defined by having no parents who have completed bachelor's degrees (NASPA, 2019a). Given the number of FGCSs enrolled in college, and the centralization of parents within the concept of "first-generation," a growing body of research examines how parents influence FGCSs' experiences and success. Many studies find that parents of FGCSs want their children to earn a college degree, and offer various forms of support through their student's college journey (e.g., Covarrubias et al., 2019; Cuevas, 2019; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Harper et al., 2020; Hines et al., 2019; Jehangir et al., 2020; Liversage et al., 2018; Silver & Roksa, 2017; Smith, 2022; Storlie et al., 2016; Tate et al., 2015). Overall, parental support is positively associated with FGCSs' academic and psychological outcomes (Kantamneni et al., 2018; Roksa et al., 2021).

Despite research examining the role of parents in FGCSs' college experiences, comparatively less is known about parental influence on FGCSs' career development. Career development research widely recognizes parents as sources of career information and socialization (e.g., Davies & Rizk, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2018; Leppel et al., 2001; Oliveira et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2018), although the role of parents is less clear in families where students attend college and complete postsecondary degrees but parents do not hold these same credentials. Further, research on the role of parents in FGCSs' career development has predominantly employed deficit frameworks that focus on barriers, knowledge gaps, and disengagement, despite evidence of the rich contributions that FGCSs' parents can, and do, make throughout their student's education (Baldwin et al., 2021; Kiyama & Harper, 2018).

In response to this research gap, this study applies familial capital (Gofen, 2009; Yosso, 2005) as an asset-based theoretical framework and uses interpretive qualitative methods to identify and understand the nature of parental contributions in 17 FGCSs' career development. Familial capital recognizes that the diverse strengths and resources of family (e.g., historical and local knowledge, cultural intuition, the accumulation of resources) contribute to a student's development and success. In this study, career development is considered broadly and includes the development of career-related interests, goals, and skills, as well as engagement in career-related activities and behaviors that shape career decisions over a person's life span (Sampson et al., 2004). Given that parent education defines FGCS status, this study focuses on parent-generated familial capital to answer the research question: How do parents contribute to the career development of first-generation college students?

First-Generation College Students

Across research, FGCS status has been identified as an important predictor of college aspirations, enrollment, degree completion, and post-graduate outcomes. Students whose parents have not attended college or have not earned college degrees may have less access to information about college (Perna, 2006), and are more likely than their continuing-generation student (CGS) peers to report uncertainty related to their post-secondary goals (Redford & Hoyer, 2017). FGCSs tend to enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than CGSs (Redford & Hoyer, 2017), and FGCSs who do enroll in college are less likely than CGSs to complete their degrees (Toutkoushian et al., 2021).

While researchers have identified potential challenges and outcomes associated with FGCS status, it is also important to recognize that FGCSs are extraordinarily diverse. Compared to CGSs, FGCSs are disproportionately low-income, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and from immigrant backgrounds (Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Because of this diversity, FGCS identity may hold limited explanatory power on its own and should be considered alongside intersecting social identities such as race/ethnicity, immigrant status, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics that shape individual experiences and access to education and opportunity in the U.S. Acknowledging intersectionality, or the intersecting experiences of oppression based on multiple marginalized social identities is critical to understanding the unique experiences and inequities that impact many FGCSs today (Collins, 2015; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

First-Generation College Student Career Development

Given the diversity of FGCSs, pinpointing the role of parents in career development can be difficult. Like many students, FGCSs balance intrinsic and extrinsic interests when making academic and career decisions (Jehangir et al., 2020). Activities or intellectual pursuits that evoke joy, engagement, and a sense of meaning often inspire FGCSs' career interests and goals, although this group may also be more likely to consider extrinsic factors such as familial expectations, financial security, and upward mobility (Jehangir et al., 2020). For FGCSs who are racially minoritized or from immigrant families, extrinsic factors may be more salient, with college and career serving as opportunities to break stereotypes and overcome deficit narratives (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Jehangir et al., 2020; Poon, 2016; Smith, 2022; Tate et al., 2015).

FGCSs' parents transmit career information, values, and advice to students in a variety of ways (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Kantamneni et al., 2018; Kiyama & Harper, 2018). For example, FGCSs may observe their parents working difficult jobs for little pay, an experience that can shape educational motivation and interest in pursuing lucrative and enjoyable careers (Jehangir et al., 2020; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016). Parents often share this same goal, wanting their students to "have a better life than they

did" (Tate et al., 2015, p. 300), even making significant sacrifices to facilitate access to opportunity (Cuevas, 2019). Given this context, parents of FGCSs—especially immigrant parents—may encourage their students to choose stable and high-paying careers in fields like medicine, law, engineering, or business, and may expect their children to make decisions prior to, or early in, their college journeys (George Mwangi, 2019; Scott et al., 2021; Tate et al., 2015). In some cases, parent expectations related to academic performance and career outcomes can also create guilt or conflict, especially for students whose parents immigrated to the U.S. to promote their child's opportunity (Kim, 2014; Ma et al., 2014; Moreno, 2021; Poon, 2016).

Although most postsecondary institutions offer career services offices and resources (Vinson et al., 2014), FGCSs may be unaware of career services, may not think that services are for them, or may be unable to access services (Parks-Yancy, 2012; Silver & Roksa, 2017). FGCSs are more likely than CGSs to use online career services (Eismann, 2016), but are less likely to participate in career fairs and receive assistance with resumes (NASPA, 2019b). FGCSs are also less likely to use family, alumni networks, and meet employer representatives on campus while job searching (Eismann, 2016). Often, FGCSs navigate career processes and job searches independently (Hamilton et al., 2018; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Silver & Roksa, 2017).

Familial Capital

While an array of family and community members contribute to FGCSs' academic and career development (Kiyama & Harper, 2018), FGCSs are necessarily defined by parent education. Thus, this study applies familial capital as a conceptual framework, but focuses on parent-generated familial capital that contributes to FGCS career development. Familial capital is derived from Moll and colleagues' (1992) concept of "funds of knowledge," or the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills" (p. 133) required to function within a person's family or local context. This framework is also influenced by Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model, which recognizes skills, knowledge, and resources that students from marginalized communities bring into education systems, including familial capital. In Yosso's model, familial capital includes "cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition . . . [and] engages a commitment to community well being" (p. 79).

Building on these ideas, in a grounded theory study of FGCSs, Gofen (2009) defined family capital as "the ensemble of means, strategies, and resources embodied in the family's way of life that influences the future of their children" (p. 115). Gofen further identified parent strategies "pav[ing] the way to social mobility" (p. 109) for children, including making sacrifices to benefit children and instilling values related to learning, education, familial solidarity, respect, achievement, and ambition. Many researchers have found similar ways that family capital helps FGCSs' achievement, especially

encouragement and emotional support (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Harper et al., 2020; Hines et al., 2019; Jehangir et al., 2020; Liversage et al., 2018; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Silver & Roksa, 2017; Storlie et al., 2016; Tate et al., 2015). In this study, Yosso's (2005) and Gofen's definitions of familial capital offer a framework for understanding parent contributions to FGCSs' career development.

Method

This study uses a generic interpretive qualitative approach, which situates research within theory and uses established methodological tools to fit a study's epistemological stance and research question (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). The epistemology guiding this work is poststructuralism, which recognizes the subjectivity of experience and sees individual meanings as inherently valid while acknowledging that power, privilege, and oppression influence meaning making, especially for marginalized groups (Jones et al., 2014). In alignment with the familial capital framework, poststructuralism also recognizes embedded knowledge within marginalized communities (Jones et al., 2014). While the original aim of this study was to understand how FGCSs navigated career development experiences, rich data about parent contributions to the career development process led to the present inquiry.

Research Site and Participants

This study took place at a mid-sized four-year private university in the northeast U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the undergraduate student body is approximately 50% white, 20% Hispanic or Latino, 10% Asian, 10% Black, 5% multiracial, and less than 5% international students. Nearly all students receive financial aid (99%), and 25% receive Pell Grants. The institution offers bachelor's programs in art, business, communications, education, human services, international relations, natural science, religious studies, and nursing and other health science disciplines. The institution also offers graduate programs in fields such as law, diplomacy, health sciences, natural sciences, education, public administration, and religious vocations.

Participants were recruited using purposeful criterion sampling (Patton, 2002), and were eligible for the study if they were undergraduates at the site institution and if they self-identified as FGCSs, defined as having no parents or guardians with bachelor's degrees. This definition is also used by the institution for programming. Staff at the site institution promoted the study via email to a large student organization for FGCSs. Interested students completed an electronic interest survey to report demographic and education information. All eligible respondents were invited to participate. Seventeen students participated (Table 1), 16 of whom were women and 14 of whom come from immigrant backgrounds. Just one participant (Daisy) transferred to the site institution after completing an associate's degree; all others entered the institution after

Table 1. Participant Information

Pseudonym	Class Year	Gender	Race/Ethnicity (*parents immigrated to U.S.)	Commutes	Major/Career Goal
Bethany	2nd	Woman	White	Yes	Secondary Education/Biology Teacher
Carrie	2nd	Woman	White	No	Political Science/Lawyer
Layla	2nd	Woman	Middle Eastern*	No	Biochemistry/Pediatrician
Lillian	2nd	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Nursing/Neonatal Nurse Practitioner
Marisol	2nd	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Nursing/Nurse Practitioner
Hazel	3rd	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	No	Biology/Physician Assistant
Hermione	3rd	Woman	Asian*	No	Nursing/Nurse
Jane	3rd	Woman	White	Yes	Nursing/Nurse Anesthetist
Kitana	3rd	Woman	Middle Eastern*	Yes	Biology/Pediatrician
Angie	4th	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Nursing/Nurse Practitioner
Anna	4th	Woman	White*	Yes	Marketing/ Marketing
Daisy	4th	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Social Work/Social Worker; Open Private Practice
Faith	4th	Woman	Black or African American*	No	Diplomacy & International Relations/Development and Relief in West Africa
Lina	4th	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Biology/Medical Doctor
Nyra	4th	Woman	Asian*	Yes	Finance and Accounting/ Public Tax Accountant; Neuroscience Research
Sofia	4th	Woman	Hispanic or Latina*	Yes	Biology and Religious Studies/Physician Assistant
Vedansh	4th	Man	Asian*	No	Finance & IT Management/ Wealth Management & Real Estate

Note. Participants were invited to select their own pseudonym. Participants are ages 18–23. Interviews took place in Summer 2021; class year reflects upcoming status in Fall 2021.

completing high school. Socioeconomic status was not collected, although the majority of participants described examples of financial strain within their families.

Data Collection

Consistent with interpretive qualitative research, interviews served as the primary data source (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). All participants completed a one-hour virtual semi-structured interview in Summer 2021. Interviews started with a written timelining activity where participants were asked to brainstorm and write down key experiences in their education and career journeys. This activity (10 minutes) was designed to promote recall and empower participants by enabling them to choose their most important experiences without the priming of interview questions (Kolar et al., 2015). Once they completed the activity, participants were asked to describe their timeline, and what had come to mind during the activity. After, interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol addressing participants' decisions to attend college, college and major choice, college experiences, and career goals. Interviews were recorded and auto-transcribed, then reviewed and edited for accuracy. Participants were compensated with a $20 Amazon gift card.

In almost every case, participants introduced their parents as important figures as part of the timelining activity. While only one interview question explicitly asked about family: "How do your family members feel about your decision to study [major]?," participants frequently mentioned their parents throughout the interviews, especially in response to interview questions related to resources outside of the site institution that were important to their career planning, and in reflecting how their identity as a FGCS influenced their career goals. Despite the lack of prompts explicitly focused on parent roles in participants' career development, the pervasiveness of parents in participants' career narratives inspired the present inquiry.

Data Analysis

Consistent with an interpretive qualitative approach, I used a variety of methodological strategies to analyze data (Kahlke, 2014). First, I used the phenomenological reduction strategy of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), and reviewed transcripts and written timeline documents line-by-line to identify data units relevant to the research question. These data units were treated equally as "condition[s] of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). I did not define the term "parent" and instead relied on participants' use of the term in their timelines and interview responses.

After identifying relevant data, I followed Charmaz's (2006) constant comparative analysis strategy and conducted initial coding, assigning code labels to identified data units. Examples of initial codes include "Parents moved to the U.S.," "Parents enabled access to good K-12 school," and "Parents encouraged participation in career program." I then conducted focused coding, building conceptual categories from initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). Here, codes were combined into higher-level categories, with

the above examples comprising the first theme: "Facilitating pre-college educational opportunity."

Throughout data collection and analysis, I built trustworthiness by consulting participants for clarification and confirmation and used written timelines and interview data to triangulate experiences (Kahlke, 2014). Participants frequently shared unique details in writing *or* in verbal responses about the same experiences, thus providing complementary points of evidence.

Positionality

In interpretive qualitative research, researchers must "indicate the position from which they speak about the research and the approach" (Caelli, 2003, p. 5). I am a non-immigrant white cis woman scholar of higher education in the U.S. I was not a FGCS; I have two parents who earned associate's degrees and, later, bachelor's degrees. I am also a former career advisor, and my experience working with FGCSs informed my interest in this topic, and my choice of familial capital as a framework, as I have seen the varied ways that families contribute to student career development.

Throughout this research, I engaged in self-reflexivity, constantly considering the multiple ways that my social and educational identities may shape my interactions with participants, and my interpretation of their experiences. In particular, my privileged social and educational positions may have affected the experiences that participants shared in the course of interviews, or the way they shared them. As such, the timelining activity was included as a data collection strategy that intentionally gave participants the opportunity to tell their own story in their own way prior to following a semi-structured interview protocol. One participant (Mirasol) took the full interview period to recount the events of her timeline, an approach I chose not to interrupt based on the decision to prioritize participants' voices above my own. In the analysis, I used an inductive coding strategy with constant comparison, with codes generated directly from the data and, whenever possible, derived from participants' own words. Throughout the findings, participant quotes are used to name, define, and illustrate each theme.

Findings

Six themes illustrate how parents cultivated and transmitted capital to FGCSs' career development: facilitating pre-college educational opportunity, financial contributions, instilling career values, giving career advice, job choice from parent contexts, and giving back to parents as a source of motivation. Given that the majority of participants are from immigrant families, findings also reflect some students' experiences as FGCSs and as first-generation Americans. Themes also illustrate how students built upon parent contributions to create capital of their own.

In summarizing the role of parents and family within her journey, Faith, whose family had immigrated from western Africa, shared an analogy that seems an apt way to start, encompassing all findings:

> My ancestors decided to plant the seed in the ground by teaching my parents what to do, urging them to leave the whole continent for something better. My parents, they spread the roots and they became the trunk. My siblings and I, our branches are the vines that must bear fruit. It just keeps going and going, so on and so on, a legacy.

Across participants, parents established a foundation that enabled students to access college, identify career ideas, and navigate academic and professional environments towards career goals.

Facilitating Pre-College Educational Opportunity: "It Would Help Me in the Long Run"

The first theme illustrates the ways that parents facilitated student opportunity long before college. As the majority of participants are from immigrant families, one significant way that parents facilitated opportunity was by moving to the U.S. Lina explained: "I was repeatedly told that my mom and dad both left their country to give us a better life." Hermione described: "There really is no comfort for [my parents] in America. They don't know English, they've never assimilated into this culture." She continued, "it's so much easier for them to live in India. But they know that if they live in India, the opportunities for their kids wouldn't be there." In moving to the U.S., parents sacrificed proximity to family, their own career opportunity, and faced difficulty navigating language barriers, bureaucratic systems, and cultural norms.

In addition to moving to the U.S., Lina's parents also created opportunity for her and her sister by moving to a "really good school district." While Lina felt out of place as one of few Hispanic students, the school had a strong college-going culture: "My parents made sure I was able to go to a district that emphasized, 'You're going to go to college.'" Other participants described similar experiences. In high school, Layla participated in a costly summer program that "exposed her to the medical field," confirming her interest in medicine. "[The program] cost a lot of money but my dad was willing to pay for it because he knew it would help me in the long run, like not waste time changing majors" (Layla). In high school, Layla's parents also encouraged her to apply to a pre-med scholarship at the site institution after they learned about the program from a mailer: "My parents told me about it and I was like, 'There's no way I'm getting in.' But I applied anyways, and I got in . . . I don't even think I would have even seen the thing in the mail if my parents hadn't shown me." In this theme, parent contributions to students' career development started at early ages, with direct implications for later opportunity.

Financial Contributions: "This Is Their Life Savings Out There"

Another way that parents facilitated educational opportunity was through financial contributions and assistance. Although some participants received full scholarships or took out loans and worked to cover college costs on their own (Daisy, Lina, Angie, Kitana), other participants' parents contributed financially and/or strategized with participants to lessen or avoid debt. Lillian is paying for college with the assistance of her father's military benefits, in addition to scholarships and working part-time. Carrie and Hazel's parents are contributing financially to their college education, which creates opportunity for graduate school: "My choices were to go to a school that is less money and [my parents] will be able to pay . . . or go to a school and take out loans" (Carrie). Carrie entered a 3+2 dual law degree program at the site institution and her parents' support will help her afford law school: "My parents are paying for undergrad but making me pay for law school . . . technically I'll be in law school my senior year of undergrad . . . knocking that year off saves me a lot of money." Hazel envisioned a similar arrangement towards her goal as a physician assistant: "My parents are lucky enough to help me out financially. If that weren't the case, I would probably not be even thinking about grad school." Both women also work part-time and receive scholarship money from the institution.

For some parents, supporting students financially came at a significant cost. Faith described that she, her parents, and her siblings are "working overtime after overtime, and overworking themselves" to "stretch the dollar" to meet college expenses. Jane has older siblings but is the first in her family to go to college, in part because her parents were younger and unable to contribute financially when her siblings finished high school. However, Jane's parents saved up for her: "My parents are older, and they tell me all the time, 'This is their life savings out there,' spending on my college. They have been saving since before I was born." Although Jane's father was retired, he recently began working again to help Jane meet unexpected expenses that arose when she had to retake a class.

Participants whose parents contributed financially to their college education wanted to make sure they made this support "worth it." "My dad is making sure that I don't have to pay a penny for college, and I want to make sure that it's worth it . . . That's definitely motivation for me" (Layla). Hermione described: "My parents pay for my college . . . I have to honor their wishes and make no dumb decisions, because it's their money." This support also led Hermione to become highly involved on campus: "My parents are paying a lot of money, let me go see what is out there." While financial situations varied, many parents made financial contributions, whether via saving and paying for college, using benefits, or making financial sacrifices to help students. For some participants, parental financial support not only influenced college choice, but enabled the accessibility of graduate programs and, thus, the opportunity to pursue specific career fields.

Instilling Career Values: "My Entire Life Has Been Putting Trust into My Parents"

In addition to the tangible ways parents facilitated opportunity, parents also fostered career-related behaviors, skills, and values among participants. Hazel described: "[My dad] is looked up to in his job, even though he doesn't even have a college degree. He always tells me, 'You need experience, you need people to see that you're actually interested.'" Hazel began volunteering and working at an early age: "My parents pushed me to do all those things and I've gotten two job opportunities solely based off of my experience . . . my entire life has been putting trust into my parents." Kitana connected this idea to playing chess with her father, a "huge part" of her culture: "[Playing chess], I started to learn that it's not just, 'Oh, you think two steps ahead.' You actually think 10 steps ahead." When it came to career preparation, Kitana's parents encouraged her to think ahead, to "put [her]self out there" and to "[get] the experience you need." In her first year of college, Kitana asked to shadow her pediatrician: "She was like, 'Yes, of course' . . . If I didn't put myself out there, I wouldn't have shadowed."

From parents, participants also learned the importance of hard work. Jane described: "My parents and I, we've never been able to breeze on by . . . we've always had to work hard. I feel like that's why I went towards nursing, because it's a lot of hard work." Lillian noted: "My dad is a really hard worker and I think that's because of how he grew up. I was always pushed to work hard, that helped me a lot academically." Bethany described: "I've been working since eighth grade. My parents pay for school and stuff like that. But as far as my personal things go, I pay for all that . . . working is something that is super important." The importance of work was reiterated by participants again and again, and nearly all participants held at least one job, with several participants working several jobs, both in the summer and during the academic year.

The work ethic that parents instilled also influenced students' approach to education. Angie described: "My parents have always told me that education is the only way to grow in life. Yes, a job is important, but if you want to get further ahead, you really need to focus more on education." Other participants also described that a college education provides an opportunity for social mobility, which was not an experience to take for granted:

> [Being a FGCS] has made me a lot more motivated to pursue my education and really work hard for it . . . I don't think I would have appreciated the importance of the knowledge that I'm gaining in school and in the workforce if it wasn't for the values that my parents instilled in me. (Nyra)

Bethany similarly shared that she was "really thankful and appreciative that [she] is able to go to college," since her parents did not have the opportunity. Gratitude also motivated Mirasol: "[In nursing], my classmates would complain. Yeah, the work was really hard, but I loved it, I loved every minute of it." In this theme, parents passed

on career values such as gaining experience, work ethic, and taking advantage of the opportunity to attend college.

Giving Career Advice: "'Success' Means Doctor, Lawyer, Engineer"

In addition to instilling career values, many parents also provided advice. Parents generally expected students to have clear post-graduate goals and preferred students choose majors and careers associated with high-paying, stable, and reputable jobs. While some parents acknowledged that students' interest and skills were important in career selection, job security often held higher priority. Angie shared: "My dad is always telling me, 'You need to pick a career that is realistic with the market. You can love what you do, but you need to be also realistic about doing something that pays the bills.'" Some parents also gave advice based on their own experience; Anna described: "[My parents] always told me to find a job where you enjoy doing what you do, but to get money without having to work as hard as they did manually, because they see how people get money easily when they just sit at a computer."

Some participants also received specific advice when it came to choosing a major and career. Vedansh had chosen to study business and received advice from his father to pursue finance, as it is a lucrative option within business. Jane's parents encouraged her to go into nursing, in part because Jane was often sick while growing up and was "constantly near nurses": "People are always going to get sick, nurses are always going to have a job." Hermione also chose nursing, in part because it is a common career for women in her culture. While in college, Hermione briefly considered becoming a teacher but changed her mind when her parents did not support the decision: "They were like, '[Teachers] don't make anything.' I was like, 'Okay you're not accepting that idea,' so I think it kind of shut down."

In some cases, participants received encouragement to pursue careers that parents perceived as high-status, especially doctor and lawyer, and sometimes business or engineering. Several participants described these expectations in the context of their immigrant identity: "[To the parents of] first-generation Americans, 'success' means: doctor, lawyer, engineer" (Faith). Hazel said: "Being a child of immigrants, it has to be something that makes money . . . the assumed thing was either doctor, lawyer, or business." Sofia's dad was "very persistent" in his encouragement for her to become a lawyer, while her mom gave her a choice: "lawyer or doctor." Sofia described: "I don't want to be a lawyer, so I might as well be a doctor." Sofia later changed her goal from doctor to physician assistant (PA) once she learned about other career options in medicine, believing that PA would still pay well, but provide greater work-life balance.

Frequently, parents expected students to have specific post-graduate goals when entering college. Faith, a diplomacy and international relations major, described: "[My parents] were excited about my [major], but they were also a little lost. 'What do you do with that? You're going to be a diplomat?' 'No.' They're like, 'Then what?' and I said, 'I

don't know.'" Faith continued, "If you tell my parents 'I don't know,' it's a bad thing." Carrie similarly shared:

> My dad was always on my tail . . . "What are you going to do with a political science degree?" Like, "Come on, what do you do with that?" I'm like, "I don't know." He'd be like, "Well, you need to find out because I'm not spending all this money on you to go to college for you to have a degree and be like, 'what do I do with it?'"

While in high school, Carrie researched careers associated with political science and settled on law. In this theme, participants' parents provided career advice, expected students to have specific goals, and advocated for careers that would provide financial security.

Job Choice from Parent Contexts: "A Lot of People Are Going Through the Same Thing"

In some cases, parent contexts and experiences provided a source of career ideas and motivation, especially for participants from immigrant families. Faith recalled watching the news with her father and seeing United Nations peacekeepers, thinking: "That's it. That's exactly what I want to do." Faith's career goal is to build sustainable communities in her parents' home region: "West Africa has all these natural resources that the world benefits from, but a lot of times they don't get what they deserve." She summed: "The connection that I had with West Africa is something that can't leave me." For Kitana, global exploitation and limited resources in her parents' home country was a similar source of career inspiration and motivation:

> Here in America, a kid would get Coronavirus, and [they] go to the doctor, get a prescription . . . [In Syria] they just slowly die . . . you would have to stay with your family, your family would get sick, it would spread, it got bad. Seeing my family go through that over there, it was like, "Okay, if become a pediatrician maybe I can go there and help."

For both women, parental experiences and the conditions of parents' home regions provided a source of career ideas and motivation, with both women wanting to use their education for good.

For Mirasol and Lina, parent challenges in the U.S. was also a source of career motivation, as both women's parents experienced difficulties navigating U.S. health systems as Spanish speakers. As a toddler, Mirasol was hospitalized, with providers' inability to speak Spanish creating a perilous situation where Mirasol's mother was unable to share important information. As she grew up, Mirasol watched several family members pass away as a result of poor medical care, further inspiring her interest in healthcare: "Once I graduate, I can start doing what I really want to do, which is being someone

who people can depend on. Especially people who are like my parents who came to this country without knowing much." Lina's mother "never trusted" U.S. doctors "because she wasn't able to communicate with them and no one looked like her." As a result, Lina only received medical care while visiting Colombia, sometimes traveling just for health needs. Lina described: "I'm not the only one that's doing this. I'm sure a lot of people are going through the same thing . . . I want to be that person for that group of people."

By watching her parents navigating language barriers in the U.S., Hermione had fostered an empathy similar to Lina and Mirasol. While volunteering, Hermione used basic Spanish skills to communicate with a patient: "I know what it's like to not know English because of my parents . . . you deserve to be taken care of even if you don't know English." In this theme, FGCSs recognized community needs based on global conditions and parental experiences, with needs inspiring career ideas and motivation to help others who share their parents' identities.

Giving Back to Parents as a Source of Motivation: "This Gift of, 'I Did It'"

By and large, participants were motivated to complete college and to pursue reputable careers to honor their parents. Like the previous theme, this theme was most salient among participants whose parents had immigrated to the U.S. to facilitate educational and professional opportunity for their children. Layla shared: "I'm doing what [my parents] were never able to do. . . . it's a big thing that I want to make them proud." Angie described: "Everything [my sister and I] do is to make [my mom] proud . . . if your parents come here and sacrificed so much, the least you could do is just repay them back with this gift of, 'I did it.'

The idea of showing love through success was pervasive, expressed by nearly every participant. Sofia described her father's 12-hour workday, sharing that completing college and entering a prestigious career was the best way to "show back the same love." Kitana, who aspires to be a pediatrician, is motivated by her parents' anticipated celebration of her accomplishments:

> The only thing that's keeping me going is the white coat ceremony . . . with my family and my mother crying. . . . that would make my mom so proud, it would make my dad so proud . . . seeing them happy would make me like the happiest person ever.

Kitana's parents also wanted her to succeed to for their larger community:

> My dad has always been like . . . "You need to show people that an Arab female Muslim whose parents were from Syria and never went to college can actually make it. . . . you're going to show all those little Muslim girls who go to mosque that they can become something."

In addition to career success, participants also hoped to be able to give back to their parents financially. Hermione plans to give her parents her first nursing paycheck "in reparation for all that they've done." Hazel plans to pay off her parents' debt. Kitana hoped to actualize her parents' travel dreams: "It's the little things that they always talked about while I was growing up . . . I want to make their dreams come true, just like they made mine come true." Faith's family jokes about the children giving back, although she also sees it as true:

> My mom always says, 'I deserve a Rolls Royce,' for all her time she did with us. My sisters and I, we plan to give her everything that she wants and the best of life because of how much she sacrificed . . . We always make fun and joke around. But it's like, you know, treat her like the queen she is.

For some, the goal of giving back financially influenced career choice. In considering healthcare careers, Sofia selected PA partially due to the salary. Sofia had seen her parents "start from nothing" and "struggle" and she saw her career as a means for achieving her "final goal": "being able to pay back [her] parents a little bit for their sacrifice." This was also central to Lina's interest in being doctor: "I wanted [a career] that was for sure going to lead me to a path of success and that will allow me to live a nice life, provide for my family, and be a role model for society." Overall, achieving financial independence was important to participants. Lillian plans to enter the military after college to earn a "good salary," and to get health insurance and funding for graduate school. Nyra will also prioritize salary to pay for medical bills, as she is navigating a debilitating health condition: "I will be negotiating the offer that I get and trying to get a stable income the first few years just so I can create a sense of financial independence." In this theme, students recognized the multigenerational nature of familial capital and were motivated by their parents' collective efforts towards their education and career success.

Discussion

While researchers have increasingly considered the ways parents shape FGCSs' post-secondary experiences, the connection to career development is often overlooked (Baldwin et al., 2021). Although FGCSs' parents did not complete bachelor's degrees, findings from this study revealed that parents of FGCSs contributed to their student's education socially, emotionally, and financially, which is consistent with existing literature (Cuevas, 2019; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hines et al., 2019; Liversage et al., 2018; Silver & Roksa, 2017; Storlie et al., 2016). However, this study extends existing research by acknowledging parents as a source of career-related capital, contributing to FGCSs' career development by facilitating pre-college opportunities, providing various forms of financial support, imparting familial and cultural values related to work, giving advice toward pursuing stable and high-paying jobs, navigating global contexts

that provided a source of career inspiration, and serving as a source of motivation for students' academic and career success. The high representation of students from immigrant families within the study sample also contributes to the literature, with findings illustrating how parent region of origin, language, and culture may serve as unique sources of capital in FGCSs' career development.

In career development literature, parents are often conceptualized as agents of professional information and socialization, where privileged knowledge, skills, and networks are passed across generations for status attainment (Davies & Rizk, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2018; Leppel et al., 2001; Oliveira et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2018). While FGCSs' parents may encourage college attendance and success in order for their students to pursue well-paying and stable careers (i.e., status attainment), the mechanisms that families use to support students may differ based on social identities, including FGCS status. Hamilton and colleagues (2018) found that affluent parents serve as a personal "college concierge" (p. 116), using personal resources and networks to not only encourage their students towards prestigious careers, but to actively co-navigate college systems to help their children along. In contrast, parents who have not participated in U.S. postsecondary systems may trust the university to provide necessary resources (Hamilton et al., 2018). Findings showed that some FGCSs' parents leveraged their knowledge of postsecondary systems in their recommendations to students (e.g., through sharing information they had seen on a mailer) but, more often, parent knowledge came from other contexts, and FGCSs were trusted to enact their own navigational capital (Yosso, 2015) and use resources outside of the family to achieve career goals.

Although parents of FGCSs have different education and professional experiences than their students, findings illustrate the varied ways that parents cultivated capital related to work. Parents imparted career-related advice to their children from an early age, instilling values based on their own life experience. Consistent with existing research, parents served as professional role models to FGCSs, with parent work experience and work ethic influencing student's career goals and perceptions (Jehangir et al., 2020; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016; Tate et al., 2015). Findings extend this work by illustrating how parents encouraged their students to gain applied experience, as they knew the importance of experience to professional advancement firsthand, especially in the absence of a college degree. This advice produced tangible outcomes for participants, who shadowed, volunteered, worked, and interned based on this advice.

It is important to interpret study findings within the context of the sample, especially the high representation of FGCSs from immigrant families. Parent encouragement towards prestigious careers is common in research related to FGCSs and is also common within research focused on students whose families have immigrated to the U.S. (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; George Mwangi, 2019; Jehangir et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2014; Poon, 2016; Smith, 2022). Within this sample, several participants acknowledged the intersecting nature of their identities as FGCSs and first-generation Americans when describing their limited career choice sets (e.g., "lawyer or doctor"). While some parents considered their student's personal interests and skills while imparting advice,

parents and participants alike tended to recognize individual preferences as second to extrinsic factors, such as pay and job stability.

Overall, findings underscore the importance of considering multiple social identities alongside FGCS status (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Although parent education impacted student experiences and perceptions, such as appreciation for the opportunity to attend college, participants' other social identities—especially language, culture, and immigrant identities—were just as salient, if not more so, to shaping career development. This dynamic was most apparent when knowledge of parent cultures and regions of origin led directly to career ideas, opportunities, and goals. In one example, familial capital intertwined with linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) when two participants each watched their Spanish-speaking parents navigate U.S. healthcare systems not built for their needs. In another example, two participants saw global issues, such as resource exploitation or COVID-19, adversely affecting their families' homes. The globalized knowledge that comes with an immigrant identity was an invaluable resource for identifying societal need, directly informing and motivating career plans for some FGCSs.

Beyond immigrant identity, 16 of 17 participants self-identified as women, with research suggesting that women FGCSs from cultures that value collectivism may feel a unique duty to their families, such as by assuming traditionally gendered caretaking responsibilities (Sy & Romero, 2008; Torres, 2004). Within study findings, gender intersected with race/ethnicity and culture to shape participants' career goals, especially for FGCS women from immigrant families. In some cases, gender identity was considered alongside cultural norms related to women's work; one participant selected a career in nursing because it is a common career for women from her culture, and she knew her parents would approve of this choice. Another participant's gender helped her to sustain career motivation, with her parents expressing great pride that she, a Muslim woman, would become a doctor and serve as a role model for young girls in their local community. For other participants, gender indirectly informed career choice, as participants considered how various career options aligned with their personal goals, especially the anticipated ability to support oneself, support parents and family, to have families of their own, and/or to balance earning good compensation with achieving a work-life balance.

Limitations and Future Directions

While parental contributions were featured in this study, familial capital naturally includes a broader definition of kinship (Yosso, 2005). Future research may explore how diverse family structures and/or other familial relationships shape FGCSs' experiences. As the original aim of this study focused generally on FGCS career development, in this study, "parent" was a term introduced by each participant in the telling of own educational and career journeys. Researchers building on this work may use a more explicit definition of "parent" and may collect more data about participants'

parents, and perhaps include the parents themselves in the data collection process (see Harper et al., 2020). Additionally, researchers may also include siblings (see Roksa et al., 2020) or extended family members—whether these family members have college experience or not—to understand how FGCSs derive familial capital from kin who span generations.

Importantly, not all students have parents, and not all students have relationships with the parents they do have, which offer additional areas for future inquiry. If parents were a meaningful source of capital for FGCSs' academic and career experiences in this study, how do students who are *not* connected to parents or family structures navigate college systems and develop career-related experiences and goals? Future research may explore the experiences of students who are not connected to family structures, whether biological or otherwise, and who may therefore have even greater need for institutional support resources.

Overall, the composition of the sample provides a rich source of insight for continued inquiry. Research on FGCSs must consider intersectional identities and experiences, as parent education level is rarely the sole influence shaping student experiences and outcomes (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). Within this study, immigrant, cultural, linguistic, and gender identities were highly salient in FGCSs' career development experiences, with each identity warranting a need for further research. Other social identities appeared as salient to student experiences but were not explored in depth. Nyra's experience as a student with a disability with significant health expenses, for example, suggests a need for further research related to the intersection of FGCS status and ability in understanding student career development experiences, goals, and needs.

Although institutions may be well-positioned to support FGCSs' career development and success (Vinson et al., 2014), students may not know that these services exist, or may not have equitable access to them (Eismann, 2016; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Silver & Roksa, 2017). As findings illustrated, parents and students alike often had limited knowledge of career options when starting college. In response, institutions can provide in-person and online career education resources for FGCSs and their families by sharing information about a wide range of available careers aligned with student interests and practical needs. Career centers and offices providing related services should conduct outreach targeted to FGCSs, perhaps through mailers to also help families learn about services. As institutions build these services, there may be an opportunity to use individual advising and counseling services to help students identify their unique journeys, desires, and their educational success, as well as build group-level services tailored to FGCSs, creating a community of students with shared experiences (see Kezar et al., 2021). FGCSs comprise a significant share of students in higher education today, and ensuring that they have the tools to succeed, both in college and beyond, is critical to the operation and success of U.S. postsecondary systems.

Conclusion

This study responds to research gaps regarding the role of parents in FGCSs' career development. Findings illustrate that *all* parents have transmissible career capital, and that the unique experiences and identities of FGCS participants—especially those from immigrant families—may result in unique sources of capital. Despite growing up, learning, and working in different contexts than their children, parental advice proved useful to FGCSs in these examples. Findings shed light on the ways FGCSs see themselves as extensions of their families, primed to "bear fruit" and create a successful future not only for themselves but for their parents and communities as well.

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