

THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE MEN FROM RURAL MAINE

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This exploratory phenomenological study examined the experiences of four high-achieving first-generation men (HAFGM) from rural Maine and the critical influences that have helped them succeed in their undergraduate studies. This study viewed HAFGM from an appreciative inquiry standpoint rather than a deficit model. Four key themes emerged: (1) accessing student support programs; (2) connection with campus mentors; (3) family support; and (4) financial support. Implications for professional practice and future research are discussed.

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First-generation college students make up 30 percent of the total U.S. college student population (Opidee, 2015). Scholars have indicated that first-generation students are the largest growing body of students accessing higher education (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). While there are multiple definitions, in this article, first-generation students are defined as those who are the first in their immediate family to attend post-secondary institutions (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007). Scholars (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1994) have devoted attention to studying these students and their educations due to their unique challenges and needs, such as financial aid, pre-college academic preparedness, and lack of social capital (Kuh et al., 2006; Terenzini et al., 1994).

However, much of the literature on first-generation college students addresses these students in the aggregate with little regard for racial, gender, social class, and geographical differences (Kuh et al., 2006; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1994). Additionally, this literature has framed their experiences from a deficit of social capital (Kuh et al., 2006). Previous research on first-generation students has largely used a deficit approach, focusing on the obstacles they face rather than the ways in which they persist and succeed. In our review of the literature, there was scant research that looked at high-achieving first-generation students, let alone those who identify as men from rural areas. As a result, we wanted to address a significant gap in the literature by examining the experiences of high-achieving first-generation college men (HAFGM) from rural backgrounds.

Overview of the Literature

First-Generation Students and Cultural Capital

Much of the existing literature on

first-generation students has examined their cultural capital (or lack thereof) as it relates to academia (Hinz, 2016). Bourdieu (1984) posited the connection between one's socialization growing up to habitus, defined as the ways in which one perceives, acts, or behaves in the world. For many first-generation students, they may come from low-income or working class backgrounds (Saenz et al., 2007) and therefore enter institutions built on norms of middle-class or upper-middle class values (Jensen, 2004). This creates dissonance for first-generation students between their own culture and that of their institution.

Scholars have pointed to a positive connection between social and family support networks and first-generation student success at college. Social and family supports were two important factors that affect student persistence and retention during their first year at college (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Jensen, 2011; Kuh, 2003; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Support by family and friends, ranging from words of encouragement to financial contributions from family, provided a sense of belonging and community (Jensen, 2011). Students who experienced this support from their family and friends reported an increased sense of self-worth and decreased academic stress (Rayle & Chung, 2007). Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) found that this support was challenging for parents and families who did not fully understand the experiences their students faced in college. In many cases, family members who have not previously attended college were underprepared to help their child as they navigate their educational journey (Saenz et al., 2007).

First-Generation College Men

Scholars have increasingly paid attention to college men and their development over the last 20 years (Harper & Harris, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011). Yet, within the past few years, increased attention has been focused on first-generation college men, particularly first-generation

men of color (Barlis, 2015; Brown, 2013; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Valle, 2017). In the United States, young boys and men experience a high degree of socialization around masculinity and their gender identity, particularly within the college environment (Harper & Harris, 2009; Kimmel, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011). In fact, college men are at higher risk for student conduct issues (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005) and lower rates of student engagement (Kuh et al., 2006). When focusing on first-generation college men, these concerns become graver given the differences in student success outcomes among first-generation students. In 2011, DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, and Tran found a significant disparity in the graduation rates between first-generation college students after six years of enrollment (50.2%) to their peers (64.2%). Additionally, DeAngelo et al.'s (2011) study pointed to an increasing gap in educational attainment by gender with 27% of men receiving Bachelor's degrees compared to 35% of their women peers.

Yet, there is a dearth of research that has focused on this population. Olenchak and Hebert (2002) examined the factors for underachievement among academically talented African American and Vietnamese first-generation college men; however, this study focused on the deficits and obstacles only that these men experienced in higher education. Wilkins (2014) focused on the differences in high school to college transitions among Black men and White first-generation college men. In her work, Wilkins (2014) found that White first-generation men used gendered and racialized scripts to navigate class differences within educational contexts in ways that their Black peers did not. Additionally, Reed's (2011) work discussed the intersections of college men's experiences regarding one's socioeconomic status and masculinity, but while many of these men were first-generation college students, not all were. Reed's (2011) study found similar findings to Wilkins (2014) in terms of the ways that White lower socio-

economic status students experienced racial and gender privileges and negotiated those privileges to be successful in higher education.

High-Achieving College Students

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to move away from deficit-based scholarship on college student populations, particularly those from historically minoritized backgrounds. Scholars have begun to illuminate the experiences of high-achieving college students, particularly around their academic motivations (Griffin, 2006), college access (Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009), student engagement (Harper, 2005), and factors of identity development (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2004). Yet, there is disagreement within the scholarship on what high-achieving even means. For example, Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) centered students' intellectual ability or academic achievements, through their participants' engagement in their campus' honors program, in their study while other scholars, such as Harper's (2008) work, incorporated additional aspects of student involvement and interpersonal relationship-building with faculty, staff and peers, such as being elected to student leadership roles, engaging in faculty-student research or study abroad experiences, as well as having a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. A critique, particularly of Harper's (2008) definition, is that these criteria are predicated on the assumption that high-achieving students can financially afford to be in campus programs, such as study abroad and summer research programs.

In studying the differences between the low, average, and high-achieving college students, Albaili (1997) found that high-achieving college students had a higher motivation and work ethic, which contributed to their success in college. The information gleaned from the existing literature on high-achieving college students presented an important framework for moving beyond deficit-based

research of student populations; however, in our review of the literature, there were no studies that we found at the time that explored high-achieving first-generation college students' experiences. As a result, this study aimed to address that gap in the literature, and we particularly were interested in the narratives of HAFGM from rural areas.

Rural College Students

The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) defined rurality as those locations with fewer than 2,500 people living there. Scholars have found that rural college-going students experience greater levels of social support from their home communities than their urban college-going peers (Crockett et al., 2000; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). Byun, Meece, and Irvin (2012) found that rural students often experienced difficulties in persisting in college because they typically had lower socioeconomic backgrounds than their non-rural college peers. The implications of understanding the experiences of first-generation college men from rural New England is important given the dynamic changes happening within the region's economy. For example, Maine's economy in recent years has been marked by a steady decline in natural resource based industries, which have long been the standing norm of Maine's workforce (Colgan & Barringer, 2007). In previous decades, one in three people in Maine's population worked in natural resource industries that were primarily located in rural parts of the state; today, only one in 19 individuals are employed in such work (Colgan & Barringer, 2007). This decrease in employment opportunities in rural areas is juxtaposed with an increasing population of first-generation college students attending colleges and universities within the state.

At the University of Maine, 15% of first-year students attending the University for the first-time (or those students who are not transferring into the institution) were first-generation students (T. Coladarci, personal communication, April 24, 2014). In Fall 2014, 2,068 incoming new first-year

students began their studies, with approximately 310 students identified as first-generation students. Out of that entering first-year cohort, 1,150 of the total 2,166 students identified as men (UMaine Common Data Set, 2013-2014). While these data are specific to Maine, the dynamics occurring within the state mirrors trends, particularly rural areas in New England. Given the increasing number of first-generation students from rural communities in particular U.S. regions (Pappano, 2017), there is a need for greater clarity about these students' educational experiences and the ways in which higher education professionals can support them.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, we chose to use the lens of appreciative inquiry as a conceptual framework for our work. Emerging from the field of organization and change management, appreciative inquiry "offers a positive, strengths-based approach to organization development and change management" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 1). Appreciative inquiry reframes the traditional paradigm of research, which has typically reinforced a deficit model where research questions are formulated to understand an issue or concern around a particular topic (Hammond, 1998). Instead, appreciative inquiry emphasizes the learning that can occur within organizations by using a strengths-based approach (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Hammond, 1998). While appreciative inquiry was first used to study organizations, scholars have recently used this model in understanding students and their development, such as emotionally intelligent leadership in community colleges (Yoder, 2004), student involvement in the classroom (Shreeve, 2008), and advising at-risk students' academic goals (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). Given that the appreciative inquiry framework is focused on student success outcomes, this conceptual framework was chosen to guide our work in this study. As aforementioned, much of the literature on first-generation college stu-

dents has largely been framed from a deficit model, outlining the obstacles and challenges these students might face. As a result, we used an appreciative inquiry approach to frame our methods to build upon the successes of HAFGM.

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we were curious about participants' experiences of the phenomenon of being high-achieving first-generation students from a rural area. We wanted to elucidate what the common phenomenon is for these students' experiences. Therefore, phenomenology was a useful approach for our work. Phenomenological studies aim to illuminate a deeper examination of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Patton (2002) maintained that researchers using phenomenological approaches allow greater insights around making meaning of the phenomenon being investigated. As a result, in-depth interviewing and participant observation become central to phenomenology (Patton, 2002). In his discussion of research on college students, Harper (2007) argued that phenomenology allows participants to "offer personalized data and perspectives that help shed light on the magnitude of how [college students] were affected by something in their learning environment, participation in a program or activity, or interactions with faculty and student affairs educators" (p. 58).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were: 1) What are the experiences of HAFGM from rural Maine attending college? and 2) What or who are the critical influences in these students' lives that helped them be successful in their endeavors at college?

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants, we sent emails to key campus administrators who worked at the seven institutions within Maine's public university system (i.e., college deans,

senior student affairs officers, staff in TRIO and student support services offices), asking them to send a brief description of the study out to student organizations and/or students with whom they worked. This communication included our study criteria, which stated that participants must identify as (1) a first-generation college student; (2) a man; (3) a junior or senior in college; (4) come from a rural area; (5) have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher; and (6) be involved on campus in at least one campus leadership role. Given the aforementioned scholarship on high-achieving students, we wanted each participant to have a strong academic record and a high degree of engagement on campus. The email also included our contact information for students to self-nominate themselves for participation in the study. A flyer was also included in the email, and administrators were asked to post them on their respective campus.

Data Collection

Four participants (see Table 1, on next page) were interviewed twice. All participants identified as White, which is unsurprising given the racial demographics within the University system and the state. Brian attended Institution A, a smaller campus that offers associate and baccalaureate degrees in the central part of the state with roughly 4,600 students. Chuck and Victor attended Institution B, the flagship university with over 9,000 undergraduates, located just outside a larger city of the state. Frankie went to Institution C, located in the densely populated southern part of the state, which enrolled approximately 6,600 undergraduates. Each of these institutions had predominantly in-state students in attendance.

The first interview was approached as an in-depth life history that focused on their pre-college and college experiences using an appreciative inquiry approach (Cooper-rider & Whitney, 2005). Questions in this interview included: What were you like as a student growing up?; Did you ever con-

Table 1 <i>Demographic Information</i>					
Name	Institution	Race	SES*	Campus Involvement	Academic Major
Brian**	Institution A	White	Working	Student Government, Student Conduct Committee, French Club, On-Campus Student Employee	Public Administration
Chuck	Institution B	White	Lower-Middle	Student Government, Fraternity, Part-Time Work Off-Campus	Business
Frankie	Institution C	White	Middle-Working	Resident Assistant, Study Abroad Student, Health/Wellness Peer Educator	Anthropology & Tourism
Victor	Institution B	White	Poor	Campus Tutor, Lab Assistant, Men's Chorus Member	Biology & Chemistry with Pre-Med Concentration
* Socioeconomic class is designated by self-identification					
** Represents adult learner non-traditional student; all others between 18 and 22 years old.					

sider any other options instead of college, and if so, what were they?; and What has your experience been like here as a student? For the second interview, we followed up on themes explored in the first interview and expanded our understanding of the students' meaning they made of being a HAF-GM and the critical influences that helped them succeed in college. These interviews generally lasted for 45 minutes to one hour. Participants were compensated with a \$25 gift card, which had been stated in our recruitment materials.

Data Analysis

Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities in an attempt to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and participants were asked to review their transcripts as a form of member checking (Patton, 2002). In our

analysis of the data, we followed Hycner's (1985) suggestions for phenomenological work. Hycner (1985) outlined the following five steps: (1) transcribing all data; (2) employing bracketing and suspending researcher interpretation onto the data; (3) listening for the sense of the whole from the data; (4) delineating general meaning of the data; and (5) delineating general meaning of the data as it relates to the research question.

The research team also took field notes during interviews and our process together. This included crafting statements of our individual positionality and the ways in which our multiple identities had a connection with the work in which we were engaged prior to the start of data collection, also known as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). By crafting our positionality statements, we attempted to bracket own biases to under-

stand how our experiences as White men who were not first-generation students, but who came from rural, working-middle class backgrounds influenced our worldviews and regard for the data. Each of these steps was completed in an effort to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

We attempted to abide by these steps to suspend our own judgments and assumptions of the data. As we analyzed the data, we worked to understand our participants' lived experiences and honor their voices. We attempted to identify general codes from the data and then worked to connect those codes, themes, and patterns to the larger research questions. For instance, we individually reviewed each transcript, engaging in line-by-line coding and then met together to compare our codes, discussing similarities and differences. In comparing our work, we focused on understanding the nuances in our interpretations to work towards mutual understanding and being true to participants' narratives (Hycner, 1985; Patton, 2002). Additionally, in an effort to engage in internal validity of the data, we had designed our study intentionally around prolonged engagement with our participants through two in-depth interviews held over a span of a several weeks to allow for greater rapport to be built between the researchers and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In the next section, we will address these findings from the data.

Findings

From the participants' experiences, four significant patterns emerged that were deeply connected to the importance of relationality for these high-achieving first generation college men. These included (1) accessing student support programs; (2) connection with campus mentors; (3) family support; and (4) financial support. Each of these four patterns intersect around maintaining strong, interpersonal relationships with others, including faculty, staff members, family, and peers. From a phenomenological standpoint, these relation-

ships weave together to provide the necessary support system for these students to be successful in their college experiences. These themes and patterns will be explored further in this section.

Accessing Student Support Programs

There were distinct differences in the types of student support programs participants accessed during their time in college, particularly whether they were a traditional-aged college student (18 to 24 years old) or a non-traditional student (25 years or older). For Brian as a non-traditional student, he highlighted the importance of a student support services program geared toward first-generation and non-traditional students. He commented, "They have enrichment programs and classes and very encouraging people over there....I go over there sometimes just to talk. ...Or I'll go see [a staff member] for advice." Brian's experience at his institution was unique in that 17 years prior he received his Associate's degree there and then reenlisted in the military. He mentioned that during his Associate's degree coursework, he "didn't reach out as much" and "I just figured, 'Well, it's my own responsibility. I've got to struggle through it.'" His viewpoint changed after his 20+ year military career. He reflected, "So now I realize there's a lot more resources out there than I thought. And you might as well use them because that's why they're there, you know?" Brian credited the positive encouragement he received by campus staff members for helping him be successful. However, this outreach to campus support services did not happen in the same ways by those who were traditional-age HAFGM.

The traditional-aged HAFGM tended to seek out student support programs that were career-specific. Chuck, Frankie, and Victor mentioned accessing campus resources, such as faculty in their disciplines as well as campus resources, such as career services. Frankie could not think of any campus resources that he actively used to support him as a first-generation student

yet he pointed out that his faculty members were key. When asked what he attributed to his success on campus, he shared, "I feel like I could go up to my professors and talk to them about some things that maybe didn't even involve class, but it was just way interesting." Explaining that he felt overwhelmed by what he should be doing in his first-year on campus, Victor said, "Utilizing the career center and really utilizing how I do things in order to prepare myself for my career that's had a really big impact on me and really helped me to get to where I am today." He continued:

I feel as a first generation college student, you really don't have those tools, like that background going into college. Nobody in your family has ever applied to a professional school before so...I'm sitting there, "Okay, how do I do that?" So really the career center is a really great resource in that sense.

By accessing campus resources and seeking help, these participants were better equipped to be successful in college and gained valuable support networks, particularly through mentoring they received which will be discussed in the next section.

Connection with Campus Mentors

Through their deep engagement in campus life, the participants developed key relationships with various mentors who helped support their educational pursuits. Many of these mentors were staff members with whom they had connected through reaching out to student support services. Victor discussed the importance of the relationship to the pre-health professionals' advisor with whom he worked closely since arriving to the university. In his first year, Victor told her that he had a goal of becoming a doctor, and her enthusiastic response helped affirm his decision. He stated, "It wasn't really specific to being a first gen college student, but not understanding the process of applying to medical school, and what I had to do ... I've really used her as a resource." Brian shared the importance of relationship build-

ing and how that had positively influenced his experience in college. He recounted the importance of his connections to multiple student life staff members on campus who encouraged him to join the campus judicial conduct board as well as student government. This increased his level of community engagement and his campus support network, but also shaped his family's life.

In one particularly moving story, Brian shared how an informal drop-by conversation with a campus mentor who worked in the admissions office for adult learners on his campus led to his wife receiving a scholarship to come back for her own education. He stated:

She asked me how my wife was doing, and I said, "Oh, good. She's thinking about maybe coming here." So she dug out a brochure, and she said this is a scholarship for women that have never attended a college class. So I brought it home and my wife looked at it and filled it out and she got the scholarship...She took the class, and then the next semester she took two more on her own.

Brian's story here exemplifies his thoughts on the importance of networking, or in his own words, "just talking to people." Through his contact with campus mentors, they shared resources that supported not only him, but also his family.

Peers were also named as important possibility models. For example, Chuck spoke at length about how important his peers were in terms of his success at his university. He named another student who was older than him who mentored him and helped him navigate the systems with which he was unfamiliar. Other participants named their peers, whether those who served as tutors, classmates, or individuals in positional leadership roles, as influential in helping them get connected on campus and developing important relationships through those opportunities.

While staff and peers were named as key supports to the participants' overall success, the importance of family support

also emerged as a significant factor.

Family Support

Family support varied for each of the participants. Given that all of the participants were first-generation college students, none of their parents had a great deal of knowledge about colleges and universities. For all of the participants, their parents were largely working in working-class or lower-middle-class positions. For Chuck, Frankie, and Victor, their parents encouraged their educational pursuits, and the three men felt as if college was inevitable. Frankie mentioned how his parents talked to him from a young age about going to college, saying, "I can't remember a time in my life where I thought I wouldn't go to college....It was something that I was always, that I feel like I was always interested in." His parents also supported his desire to study abroad, both after his high school graduation and then again in college. This was a very different experience than Brian's experience.

Brian shared how he was the first in his family to break the tradition of working in mills as factory workers. He stated:

If you weren't one of the lawyer's kids or the doctor's kids, where they're expected to go to school and they have the means, it was just, you know,...your father's a factory worker. You're probably going to be a factory worker.

His parents' expectations of his education was rooted in a working class understanding of the necessity of work and a perception that higher education was outside of their financial means.

Parental and family support added additional pressure onto the participants. As a husband to a wife who was in college and father of two children in high school, Brian was conscious about role modeling good academic behaviors for his family. He recounted how important it was for his family to talk together about how their classes were going over dinner and use one another as supports. While this support was helpful, it added a level of stress for Brian because

he did not want to disappoint his wife and children with failure. Discussing his feelings of "extra responsibility," he stated:

There was, I don't want to say pressure, but the responsibility of leading by example. They always told us in the military, you lead by example....you're not out back in the office. You're out front leading your soldiers. This is what you're going to do....So now, here I am in school. It's like, "Am I going to bring home Cs?"

Parental expectations of academic excellence were more often experienced by the traditional-aged participants. Chuck said:

I think they were definitely more towards the present as far as like they'd get really disappointed anything that you get below a B. I mean, a lot of parents are like that because they want their kids to strive to be the best, and strive to be good....And so, I mean, in the end, it was just easier for me to do better in classes rather than have to slack off and deal with the consequences.

Victor shared how his mother encouraged him to do his absolute best work possible as a student to be as competitive as possible when applying to college. The participants internalized this high standard of excellence; however, they also realized that their academic excellence often resulted in scholarships that would help them pay for college.

Financial Support

Financial support played a significant role in their success in college. Victor had earned a tuition-free scholarship as the valedictorian of his high school, which allowed him to attend any in-state public university at no cost. This was an important aspect to his education, as he acknowledged, "I have the financial resources that have really helped me to not worry about funding my college experience." Brian was able to fund his education through the GI Bill as a result of his military career. He shared how having the GI Bill was a "blessing," allowing

him to be engaged in campus life and focus on his studies.

Unlike both Victor and Brian, Chuck and Frankie were financing their educations by themselves. Chuck's family encouraged his education, but they were not able financially to provide him any money for college. Frankie's parents provided help with living expenses, including a cell phone bill and credit card, but were unable to help beyond that. Both men worked at part-time jobs, either on-campus through Federal Work Study, or off-campus, to have money for personal use. Frankie supported himself by being a resident advisor on his campus, which paid for his room and board. Chuck acknowledged that his grandparents often did try to do their part to support him. He stated, "They support me in any way they can, through sending cards, through just gifts, general support, like uplifting words." He mentioned that their cards would include some money to help him pay for things that he needed. For all of the men, financing one's education was a stressor, but having support from others—even in small ways—made a difference.

Discussion

Understanding the experiences of HAFGM is critical in providing higher education professionals the tools to help support these students. However, much of the conversation around these students has framed their experiences from a deficit model approach instead of focusing on their resilience and persistence. The participants in our study shared that while they did indeed face challenges, they persisted because of the positive critical influences in their lives, including the support of family, peers, and campus-based mentors, which reinforce strengths-based approaches to supporting HAFGM.

As mentioned previously, much of the literature on first-generation students has problematically aggregated these students as one monolithic group (Kuh et al., 2006; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). In our

work, we focused on HAFGM from rural Maine in an attempt to disaggregate our understandings of how to better support these particular students. Their experiences of being raised in rural areas did have an influence on their lives in meaningful ways. While Victor planned on attending medical school, his intention was to work as a doctor in rural New England following his residency program because he had a strong interest in supporting the health and wellness of individuals living in poverty. Additionally, Chuck's work ethic was largely attributed to his background of growing up on his family farm. For the participants, their social class identity played a role in their worldviews yet there was a resistance to being perceived as lower class by others. For the participants, they were cognizant that their educational journeys were made easier due to the financial support they had, whether through merit-based aid or other means, such as the GI Bill. By incorporating rural, working-class values in their lives, the participants found a great deal of importance of how their geographical roots played a role in their educational pursuits.

As aforementioned, scholars (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Jensen, 2011; Kuh, 2003; Rayle & Chung, 2007) have often pointed to family and social support networks as being key to first-generation college student success. The findings from this study reinforce the importance of that support. Having a network of peers, family, and mentors who were there to provide financial and/or social support and encouragement during college was an important element to their overall success. This connects to Rayle and Chung's (2007) work that inferred a connection between first-generation students' sense of self-worth and academic stress. While the participants in this study occasionally faced concerns with their ability to be successful, they largely were able to channel their concerns into positive directions by relying on others to support them in those challenging times.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that we struggled to identify participants who met the research criteria largely due to FERPA regulations and being dependent upon campus administrators sharing recruitment materials. While we attempted to distribute these materials multiple times in various ways, we only secured four participants to complete the study. In future iterations of this work, it may be helpful to focus on a particular institution rather than an entire system. Additionally, due to participants self-nominating themselves, we were dependent upon only those who responded, which was a racially homogenous group. A similar study that focuses on HAFGM with a more racially diverse sample population may be useful in increasing college student educators' understanding of HAFGM of color.

This study was focused on the experiences of HAFGM in a particular region of the country. Yet, it would be helpful for research that uses a comparative approach with HAFGM. Research is needed that looks at HAFGM from rural areas versus those raised in suburban or urban areas in the United States and their success in college. Longitudinal research on HAFGM would be very helpful in developing further insight into their experiences as they are navigating systems of higher education as it is occurring.

Implications for Practice

Scholars have documented the tendency of college men to be less likely than their peers to engage in help-seeking behaviors (Davis & Laker, 2004). There has long been an assumption that college men, particularly first-generation college men who have less social capital than their peers, will not connect with particular resources that may benefit them. Yet, this study highlights the positive outcomes of HAFGM who did connect with support networks on campus, particularly academic counselors or advisors. For the first-generation college men in this study, they worked to find their niche and found mentors who took a vested interest

in their development. Student affairs professionals need to invite HAFGM seeking out services and programs in their offices and cultivating relationships with these students. Rather than assume that HAFGM are not interested in their programs, professionals should be assertive in identifying ways that they can developmentally engage HAFGM. As our findings showed, having meaningful connections with staff members was key to HAFGM's success.

Connected to relationship building, our findings reinforce the potential of appreciative advising as a framework. Bloom, Hutson, and He (2008) maintain that the core of appreciative advising is the "deeper personal relationship between advisors and students through an emphasis on the intrinsic, ontological value of each student encountered" (p. 7). Appreciative advising is connected to strengths-based advising approaches, which have been found to be helpful for high-achieving students (Braunstein, 2009; Clifton & Harter, 2003). By adopting this model for advising, advisors can invite HAFGM to capitalize on their strengths in and out of the classroom to work toward their academic and vocational goals. While the HAFGM did not use the language of appreciative advising necessarily, it was clear that the professional staff members they connected with in campus offices were often incorporating the six stages of Bloom et al.'s (2008) model of Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle in their work. This framework presents the possibility of engaging in strengths-based advising practices that affirm students and their lived experiences.

Given the participants' discussions of support networks, family support, and financial support, it may be beneficial for colleges and universities to create broader coalitions between academic advising, financial aid, and family and parent programs to support HAFGM. The HAFGM in this study represented varied backgrounds, but all identified these areas as key to their academic success. If institutions could channel resources

to partnerships between offices rather than isolated silos, this would help HAFGM who may be more confused about what offices they might need to visit to receive specific services. From an appreciative advising standpoint, these implications, which would serve HAFGM better, may help all students given the potential for more coordination of services, increased communication between offices and students, and the possibility for more collaborative partnerships and programs. Academic advisors can serve as vital advocates for this type of collaboration and restructuring of services on their campuses to increase the success of their HAFGM.

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