

Rural Male Social Scripts on Career Development

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Abstract

While rural students have increased barriers to college and career development than non-rural students and lower educational outcomes, limited research exists on influences on rural career development. Rural males indicate lower college and career aspirations than rural females and are at risk of reduced career outcomes. This study utilizes phenomenology to explore the career influences on rural males and conceptualizes results under a social cognitive career framework to inform future school counseling practice and research.

Keywords: school counseling, rural, counselor education, career development

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Introduction

While students who attend school in rural settings score as high or even higher than children from urban and suburban settings, people living in rural settings attain significantly lower levels of career success, including lower rates of college attendance and completion (Byun et al. 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Koricich et al, 2018). Only 50% of rural residents report attending some form of higher education as compared to 62% of suburban/urban people (Geverdt, 2015). Even when education is achieved, rural people earn less money and achieve less career advancement than people in urban and suburb settings (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 2019). The USDA (2019) found the average salary of rural people with a bachelor's degree to be \$42,269 versus \$54, 597 for urban and suburban residents. The gap between salaries increases for those with graduate degrees, with rural people averaging a salary of \$54, 513 versus \$72,348 for non-rural individuals.

Rural counties experience the highest rates of persistent poverty in the United States. Persistent poverty is a maintained rate of at least 20% of the population living in poverty over the past 30 years. The USDA stated that “persistent poverty tends to be a rural county phenomenon that is often tied to physical isolation, exploitation of resources, limited assets and economic opportunities, and an overall lack of human and social capital” (Farrigan, 2019 pg.1). A major factor in this generational poverty is the lack of job opportunities available in rural spaces, which have lost local industry staples such as factory work and small-farm operations due to economic globalization (Biddle & Azano, 2016). For this reason, rural communities tend to export human capital when

talented rural youth decide to leave their home community for good due to the perception there is no future there for them. This phenomenon, known as the rural brain drain, leaves rural communities at a social and economic disadvantage due to the lack of available human capital for community social and economic initiatives (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Petrin et al., 2014; Schafft, 2016).

A lack of job opportunities and educational institutions locally present a serious challenge for rural people trying to find their passion and route to success (Bright, 2018; Grimes et al., 2019). However, even when rural students leave home to pursue higher education and training, many barriers remain. As Corbett (2007) writes, equal choice in education assumes equal ability to relocate, and since rural students are likely to struggle with leaving their home community due to logistical, economic, and cultural reasons, equal choice in career decision-making is a “cruel fiction” (p. 30). Geographic isolation prevents rural people from accessing their community support system, which can prove particularly challenging for people leaving home from an unfamiliar environment for the first time (Corbett, 2007, 2010; Flora & Flora, 2008).

Influences on Rural Career Development

Social processes, such as messages about gender, community, parental values, available role models, cultural identity, and economic status influence how children view self and the world of work from an early age (Hartung et al., 2005). Rural parents tend to have lower educational expectations for their children than do parents of non-rural backgrounds, impacting what careers students aspire towards (Byun et al., 2012; Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). Much of these expectations are rooted in the parents’ own exposure to the world of work, where jobs historically available locally did not require

advanced education (Bright, 2020; Byun et al., 2012; Corbett, 2016; Grimes et al., 2019). Non-rural definitions of success often include high income, high educational attainment, and the social prestige which comes with one's work. These values often do not resonate with rural people, who culturally place a higher emphasis on authenticity, community, and family relationships much more than material gain or social status (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Corbett, 2016; Howley, 2006; Schafft, 2016). Ali and Saunders (2009) found that rural high school students had a negative view of education and its relevance for their lives. These students saw education was a vehicle for white middle and upper class people, groups they did not feel connected to, even if they were white. These students also felt that their cultural mannerisms and patterns of speech would be perceived negatively by non-rural people, leading to the belief that they would be outsiders in college or professional fields. Rural stereotypes are indeed pervasive in the media, resulting in rural people being less willing to pursue education and opportunity outside of rural spaces (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Wallace & Diekroger, 2000).

A major factor in rural career development is gender role socialization. Rural females express higher educational aspirations than males due to the occupational and cultural structure of rural areas. Historically, rural spaces provided work in manual farm labor, logging, and factories, jobs which were typically filled by men due to the physical requirements. Rural people often perceive manual labor jobs requiring less education as more appropriate for men while jobs requiring more soft skills and education are better suited for women (Elder & Conger, 2000; Lapan et al., 2003; Meece et al., 2014).

Meece and colleagues (2014) found gender to be predictive of academic and career aspirations in rural high school students. Rural girls aspired to careers which required higher level of education and those which possessed more social prestige. A strong sense of rural identity and a positive perception of the local economy negatively correlated with academic aspirations for rural boys but did not do so for girls. A following study by Agger and colleagues (2018) produced similar results. Again, males had higher levels of place identification which negatively correlated with educational plans. Rural males, therefore, may be more susceptible to having their educational aspirations reduced through the gender expectations and cultural views of rural communities.

The School Counselor in Rural Career Development

In line with the American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) recommendations for comprehensive K-12 career education and planning, several states, such as Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, have developed career development standards at the K-12 level, with schools required to provide evidence of individual exploration and progress at grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 (Boyd, 2017). The ASCA lays out guidelines which highlight the need for school counselors to act as social justice advocates for their student populations, including in the realm of career development (ASCA, 2018). Grimes and colleagues (2013) proposed a social justice framework when exploring how a rural school counselor can best advocate for and respond to rural student population needs, including career development. More exploration into the unique needs of rural students could potentially develop career development programs and interventions appropriate for rural populations. A culturally competent approach, examining the unique needs of rural people, can help rural school

counselors appropriately meet the needs of their stakeholders and assure future student career success.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is rooted in Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory. The theory examines conceptually related concepts within career development, such as self-concept, self-efficacy, aspirations, individual abilities, individual needs, and personal values as they relate to career development (Lent et al., 1994) SCCT addresses not only the variables involved with making career decisions, but how these variables interact through a network of social experiences, feedback, and trial and error (Lent et al., 1994). Unlike previous career development models which took a unidirectional approach to variables, SCCT takes a fully bidirectional view of variables, in which people's thoughts, beliefs, and experiences all impact and are impacted by their behaviors and social environments (Lent et al., 1994).

SCCT aligns well with studies focusing on rural populations and has been utilized in several studies examining rural career development and the influence of gender (Ali & Menke, 2014; Ali & McWhirter, 2005; Ali & Saunders, 2009; Byun et al., 2012). Rural communities are isolated from outside career development influences, such as population centers with more diverse job opportunities and institutions of higher education (Grimes et al., 2019). Rural areas thus are slower to change economically and socially, rooting its inhabitants in the customs, ideas, and traditions of the community. Rural communities more frequently have generational employment, with many in the community taking up the trade or business of their family, particularly in the

case of males (Corbett, 2007; 2010). These factors make SCCT an appropriate theory to use in conceptualizing the results of this study.

Script Theory

A further examination of the social perceptions of rural males can be undertaken with the assistance of Script Theory (Gorman, 1959; Vanclay & Enticott, 2011). A script is a “culturally shared expression, story or common line of argument, or an expected unfolding of events that is deemed to be appropriate or to be expected in a particular socially defined context and that provide a rationale or justification for a particular issue or course of action” (Vanclay & Enticott, 2011, pg. 1). Script theorists claim that much interpersonal communication occurs according to cultural scripts, including lines, phrases, roles, and actions (Goffman, 1959). These scripts allow individuals to play their role within their culture and society. Scripts also assist group members in establishing their identity and sense of belonging. While not having an active awareness of the socializing role of common scripts, individuals still navigate the world using these oft-repeated stories, phrases, and arguments to make major life decisions (Vanclay & Enticott, 2011). Scripts are broken down into four categories including socially perceived routines (understanding or expecting how things will happen), catch phrases (metaphors or allegories that are frequently tied to life situations), mini-stories (parables have strong significant in social settings or within cultural groups) and a commonly used lines of argument (an often repeated point repeated from a particular social perspective). In conjunction with a SCCT framework, social scripts may be a useful cultural tool in understanding the messages rural males believe as they relate to higher education and career development.

Purpose of the Study

While approximately 25% of Americans are raised and receive their education in rural settings, limited research exists covering the educational and career development needs of rural people (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Johnson et al, 2014; Johnson & Strange, 2007; Sipple & Brent, 2008). The cultural components of rurality including perspectives on education and gender are also lacking within the literature (Breen & Drew, 2012; Bright, 2020; Grimes et al., 2013). Given these factors, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore rural male perspectives on career development influences in a sample of 5 rural males in the northeast United States. The results conceptualized utilizing a combination of SCCT and Script Theory with implications meant to guide future research and practice with rural school counseling.

Methods

The researcher utilized phenomenology to capture the lived experience of rural male career development. Phenomenology requires the researcher to become the primary instrument of data collection (Cresswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994) through the utilization of in-depth interviews. The shared experience of all participants (males in a rural setting who made career decisions) allows for a phenomenological lens where the experiences and the meaning drawn from the experiences are analyzed.

Participants and Procedures

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling with qualifying participants being rural adult males who had attended their K-12 education in a rural setting. After obtaining institutional review board approval, the researcher reached out to a known contact in a particular rural community where the researcher had internship experience.

The recruitment email was provided to 2 of these participants and snowball sampling was utilized to recruit participants (Cresswell, 2014). The snowball sampling occurred when the 2 participants forwarded the email to other potential interviewees, providing the final 3 participants for a total sample size of 5. This sample size is the minimum suggested by Creswell & Creswell (2014) who recommended 5-25 participants for phenomenological studies. The 5 males ranged in age from 24-30. Of the sample, 4 identified ethnically as Caucasian, while 1 identified as Pacific Islander in heritage. All individuals had attended the same K-12 school district for all years of their schooling located in a rural-distant community (more than 25 miles from an urban area) in the northeastern United States. See Table 1 for full information regarding participants.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Education Level
Josh	29	Male	Pacific Islander	Associates
Kris	28	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
James	27	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
Larry	25	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
Allen	24	Male	Caucasian	High School

Data Collection

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol based on a review of the literature regarding rural career development (see Table 2). Each interview was conducted remotely over the phone for an average of one-hour. Interviews were recorded onto a password protected university computer within a locked office. The researcher transcribed each interview and provided the transcriptions to each participant via e-mail, asking for any clarification or additions to what the participants

provided. No participants elected to modify anything shared during the interviews. The recorded interviews were deleted at the end of the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

In line with Creswell & Creswell's (2014) recommendations, the researcher accounted for biases in the analysis process. The researcher utilized reflexive journaling to analyze their feelings regarding the subject matter and potential results 3 times prior to conducting interviews and an additional 5 times, once after each interview. The researcher also utilized this journaling to analyze potential biases twice during the analysis process, once after each round of coding. Per Creswell & Creswell's (2014) suggestions, the researcher transcribed the interviews and analyzed them line-by-line for thematic codes. The researcher coded the data based upon words with positive and negative connotations towards college and career development. This coding process allowed the researcher to identify what processes were influencing the participants' view of higher education and how. The second phase of coding focused on emerging concepts and themes. This allowed the researcher to further examining which experiences emerged as the result of commonly thought social scripts between the participants. The 2 rounds of coding were reinforced through the process of member-checking, where the themed codes were presented to the participants. The participants agreed that the codes created accurately represented sentiments they expressed, and no corrections were suggested. Finally, to assure trustworthiness, the transcribed interviews and developed codes were sent to an outside researcher for review, who agreed with the interpretation of the source data.

Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Sample Questions

1. What is the value of a college education?
 2. What factors impacted your decision to pursue a college education?
 3. What challenges existed in your college and career journey?
 4. What sources provided you college and career guidance?
 5. What local factors were helpful to you in your college and career selection?
 6. What factors made you a good or bad fit for college?
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Findings

The researcher examined themes and scripts as they relate to the rural male's experience with higher education, their perceived need for it, and their perceived fit within its culture. Based upon this coding, the researcher found 4 major thematic scripts conceptualizing rural male thoughts related to higher education and career development.

Script 1 (Catch Phrase): College is its own Culture

“It was so hard to adjust to the whole culture and expectations. College is its own world and I got lost in it,” Josh, commented. This reflected a theme prevalent in all responses, namely that the culture, expectations, and structure of college were viewed as new, complex, and overwhelming. As James stated:

“The transition to college was a huge challenge. I was not ready for it from many points of view. They all hit me in the face. Independent accountability, external pressures, distractions, and time management. High school was so much easier and everything was spelled out for you. This was an entirely new world with a new culture and way to function. It was too much at first.”

While literature supports the college as being difficult for many students, individuals from rural backgrounds often have compounded challenges due to a lack of high school expectations (Johnson et al., 2014), lack of knowledge of college and career due to geographic and cultural isolation (Grimes et al., 2019; Schafft, 2016), and a lack of professional career opportunities and guidance in their hometown (Bright, 2020; Grimes et al., 2019). This confusion with the culture and structure of college was highlighted by Kris who expressed a source of his initial challenges:

“I didn’t understand the structure of schooling that comes with college. I wasn’t aware of all of the support systems I had access to in order to help with my academics. I still needed to figure out exactly how college worked in order to succeed in the new system.”

Kris’s expression highlighted a lack of comfort, familiarity, and understanding prevalent in all interviews when discussing challenges associated with their college and career journeys. This lack of understanding made several participants feel as if they were “lost,” as Larry put it, leading to feelings of isolation and depression.

“The academics as well as the transition to college were challenging,” Kris said, “and I was depressed during my first two years.” Larry echoed this sentiment by saying, “I was lonely. I didn’t fit in at college. I kind of just jumped around since I was unsure of the environment and didn’t fit in socially.” These feelings of being lost or out of place presented challenges to access to resources and college success as well. “In college I didn’t know where to go for any support like a career counselor or anything,” Larry said, “so I just chose easy classes and an easy major so I could graduate.” Allen had a

similar experience, saying, “I didn’t know what I was doing or why my classes mattered. I don’t know how to get certain jobs, didn’t know why I needed classes.”

The disconnect between rural education and career development is well-documented in research literature. Rural students are more readily exposed to careers available locally, often only a high school diploma, making more professional job opportunities and the skills required to obtain them foreign to rural students (Bright, 2020; Grimes et al., 2019, Howley 2009). Rural students often feel a pressure to leave home for educational and career pursuits due to the low availability of jobs in their home communities (Bright, 2020; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007, 2010; Howley, 2009). Leaving home is often emotionally difficult for rural students due to how far they must travel from higher education, how culturally different college is compared to home, and how completing college will likely mean a permanent relocation from the home community they love (Bright, 2020; Corbett, 2007; 2010; Grimes et al., 2019, Howley, 2009). Further, many rural parents did not attend college and thus are limited support systems in helping their children navigate collegiate processes (Grimes et al., 2019).

The participants expressed experiencing these types of challenges. Two participants, Josh and Allen, dropped out of their initial programs of study due to a lack of understanding of their tie to career outcomes as well as a lack of knowledge of college support systems. Larry changed his major several times and planned to drop out on two occasions. The participants indicated that the disconnect between college and career went further, due to a philosophical line of argument used when evaluating their college experience.

Script 2 (Catch Phrase/Commonly Used Line of Argument): College is Not Useful

The second script prevalent in the discussion of higher education and career development was the utilitarian view of college and education presented by the participants. While participants acknowledged that college was necessary to obtain certain jobs, they challenged the inherent value of the education itself, indicating that the system required them to complete college courses but that the knowledge offered and gained had little value on its own. As Larry, Allen, and Josh (respectively) stated:

“A college education is worthless. It’s valuable to people’s egos I guess, but it’s just another checkbox requirement for employers to check off. It doesn’t really show you are intelligent or know how to accomplish anything, but society makes it a prerequisite for most jobs now.”

“I guess college is good for some people and jobs but not everyone needs it. I don’t think it really shows how much you know either. They don’t always grade fair or look at who you are as a person. Like, I could do a bunch of those jobs that require a degree, but I can’t get the jobs because I don’t have one. It’s messed up.”

“College is basically a prerequisite nowadays, but I honestly feel like it’s sort of weird and ineffective. There’s so much more room to learn through experience. College sort of prevents that in certain fields. With every occupation in the medical field, there are things that are just better to learn by hand and through experience. College places value on people’s ability to pass tests and write papers more than how well they can perform in their field.”

Rural communities are often rooted in economic industries which value practical knowledge and application, such as agriculture, factory work, and manual labor (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Culturally, rural people often appreciate simplicity, directness, and authenticity (Howley, 2006, 2009). Unlike urban and suburban communities, rural communities place little value on prestige through careerism, and the cultural influence of this within college settings may alienate rural students (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Corbett, 2016; Howley, 2009). Rural students may see college as a necessary means to an end to achieve work not available in their home communities but may question what they are doing due to a lack of connection with higher education (Bright, 2020; Schafft, 2016). As James and Larry (respectively) mentioned:

“The value of a college education is relative to the individual. It can be a catalyst to open up doors, but does so for people in different ways. For upper middle class individuals it’s basically a prerequisite for their entire lives.”

“College serves to separate people into classes, the more you pay, the higher you get, and having people divided into classes is very important to society. It keeps society structured the way it’s always been. I also think some people are excited by the idea that they can achieve by going to college, but that’s limited by money and opportunity too.”

While college has been viewed by certain social classes as the natural end path these responses indicate a rural awareness that college looks and performs differently depending on one’s background in society. Further, the view of rural America as being lower and requiring a stepping stone, is prevalent in the previous two responses. These

ideas and attitudes may factor into the college enrollment and completion processes of individuals from rural backgrounds.

Script 3 (Commonly Used Line of Argument): College is the Only Way Out

In line with the concept that rural areas are a lower tier of American society, the participants expressed college as a potential venue for rural individuals to achieve financial and professional success. They expressed a shared opinion that these opportunities were more plentiful than the ones they could obtain with a high school diploma in their hometown. While participants questioned the true value of the knowledge and experiences gained from college, they acknowledged its potential as a social vehicle. As James mentioned:

“In rural America it (college) is a huge stepping-stone for class advancement.”

Josh acknowledged that college was presented to him as the way to achieve and avoid the pitfalls of his hometown. He stated: “Tech, vocational, or other trade schools weren’t really talked about. You either went to college or you became a failure because there’s no real jobs in the area.”

This idea was supplemented by Kris, who shared:

“My parents pushed the idea that I could better myself and have a stable career. The way to do this was to go to college. There wasn’t much chance of that by graduating high school and staying around home. There are just no jobs available.”

This reinforces a developing concept that college is separate from rural living and rural culture. The participants indicated the cultural differences and expectations along with how college can be utilized as a resource to supplement the transition of social classes and achieving success. This is in line with previous research, which suggests

that higher education is viewed as a process which removes rural individuals from their cultures and their hometowns, providing access to life and careers outside society (Corbett, 2007; 2010).

Script 4 (Socially Perceived Routine): Family Guides the Way

Breen and Drew (2012) suggest the five subcategories that are valued in rural life are culture (a unique rural life culture), trust (as a habit and value), family (as one of the highest values), school (as the center of the community), and lack of services (as a unifying hardship). It is unsurprising then that family emerged as a key facet in guiding the higher education and career development paths of the participants. Each participant mentioned family a large influence on their decisions to pursue their education and career path, despite 4 out of the 5 participants coming from a first generational college background. As Kris highlighted: “My family inspired me to go to college. We didn’t have a lot growing up. They pushed the idea that I could better myself and have a stable career. The way to do this was to go to college.”

Larry also mentioned his family’s role in his college decision making process, stating:

“I was talked into going to school by my family. I didn’t see myself in college and didn’t want to go but they worked hard to give me the opportunity. They kept convincing me to stay in and graduate even though I tried to drop out every single year. It was their dream more than it was mine.”

These responses further reflect the previously discussed view of college as a vehicle out of lower social classes. With families holding this view it is understandable

why the participants would pursue degrees even if the culture, climate, and reality of college was foreign and challenging. As Allen put it:

“My family pushed me into college because I didn’t have direction. I didn’t know what I was doing with myself. I still don’t. I went into college but it was tough, and I ended up going to the military. Neither really helped me figure things out.”

Family as a guiding principle was also reflected in the lack of support and guidance reported regarding community resources such as school. When asked about which local and community factors assisted his college and career path, Larry responded: “Absolutely none. School didn’t help at all. I just kind of followed my brother’s path with college and career choice. It all just kind of seems like an accident looking back at it.”

Josh also cemented this position, sharing: “I didn’t really have much help besides my parents. They knew about the medical field and the steps I had to take to get into it. I really just followed their lead and their path.”

These responses regarding familial influence on career choice and path therefore speak to not only the value of family in rural communities, but the lack of structured guidance and experiences provided in rural school settings.

Discussion

Implications for School Counselors

The first 2 scripts demonstrate that higher education is perceived to be an outside culture by rural males who also see a disconnect between the goals of higher education and practically valuable knowledge. Historically, higher education has served as vehicle for white middle and upper class people to expand their social status and

networking connections, values which may come off as strange to rural people (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Corbett, 2016; Howley, 2009). Within a SCCT perspective, it is likely the participants in this study were influenced by the rural setting in which they were raised. While rural communities have been able to persist without higher education, the reality of a globalized economy in which jobs and opportunity are increasingly sparse in rural spaces highlight the need for rural people to receive access to education and training which can help make them successful.

Rural school counselors should aim to provide bridges from rural communities to the processes of higher education. Providing rural middle and high school males with the opportunity to experience institutions of higher education, such as technical schools, community colleges, and 4-year universities, may reduce how foreign college and its processes feel to rural males. By organizing multiple field trips which incorporate a tour of college services (such as academic advising, career counseling, and mental health counseling services) the rural school counselor can provide male students exposure to potential beneficial resources in a proactive and preventative manner (Bright, 2020). In this way, rural males are empowered to understand what college is and how to navigate it prior to their attendance, potentially increasing their likelihood of succeeding during their difficult transition.

College degrees may come off as invaluable or irrelevant to rural males due to their cultural values and exposure to local work opportunities (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Corbett, 2016; Howley, 2009). By integrating comprehensive K-12 career development programming, the rural school counselor can allow male students to explore if higher education could help them attain their life goals and through what processes. For

example, Bright (2020) recommended place-based career development curriculums as a way to demonstrate the value of higher education to rural students. In place-based education curriculums, the local community is utilized as part of academic and career lessons. For example, career exploration in the sciences could be tied to local environmental and biological concerns, such as preservation. Career exploration lessons could tie scientific knowledge (such as in biology) to concrete challenges facing the local community, supplemented by activities outside in local spaces and through conjunction with local partners, such as forest rangers or governmental officials. Field trips to local places of business, as well as incorporating visits from community workers with college degrees can further tie the potential value of higher education to local needs and job opportunities (Bright, 2020). In these ways, higher education may become more relevant and tangible to rural males, who are empowered to see the connections between receiving specialized training and what happens around them in the local community daily. Further, by providing these lessons, programs, and experiences across the K-12 years, the rural school counselor helps rural males in exploring their values, skills, abilities, and aspirations from an early age, allowing students to consider more pathways prior to making their decision at the end of high school.

A comprehensive place-based curriculum may also address the attitude present in Script 3, namely that college is the only way out for rural males. If career development and pathways are explored from an early age, the rural school counselor can assist students in determining which options are best for them and why. For example, a place-based curriculum may raise awareness of potential jobs both in and

outside of the community. Rural students can see college both as a vehicle to meet the needs of their hometown and as something which can open the door to live in other areas if they desire. There may not be the traditional dichotomy that the rural male must leave home to find any sort of success, which has been repeatedly expressed in the research literature (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; 2010). Rural males may be inspired through their career development education to explore jobs locally which only require a high school education or training experiences (which can be coordinated by the rural school counselor as part of a high school to local business internship/shadowing program), to receive some training and come back to their community, or take the knowledge and principles they've learned at home and move onto another area. By being integrative and proactive in career development efforts, the rural school counselor truly allows students to consider and explore every possibility.

The results also indicate the value of family in the career development process of rural males. Culturally, family stands as an important value to rural people, and must be considered by school counselors in all interventions (Breen & Drew, 2012). Given that rural students are disproportionately coming from low-income and first-generation college backgrounds (Bright, 2018), it is imperative that the rural school counselor provide parents with access to resources to help them support their child's journey. The rural school counselor can accomplish this by providing resources to families through e-mails, newsletters, social media groups, and events throughout the school year. Events could entail college and career exploration nights, where some of the same information presented to rural high school students is shared with families. Further, financial aid and FAFSA nights could provide valuable information to rural parents who are uncertain on

how to navigate these processes. By partnering with families, rural school counselors are not only providing much-needed resources, but also better examining what the community truly needs in the realms of career and holistic student development (Breen & Drew, 2012; Bright; 2020).

Counselor Education Implications

Rural clients and the influence of their cultural do not receive enough coverage in counselor education programs (Breen & Drew, 2012; Grimes et al., 2019; Grimes et al., 2013). Learning modules presenting rural people as a unique sociocultural population would be helpful in empowering counselors in training to effectively serve this population (Bright, 2020; Grimes et al., 2019; Grimes et al., 2013). Counselor-education programs could additionally assist rural communities in addressing their career development needs. Programs providing rural students career counseling and exposure to college could be managed by counselor-education departments and provide counselors-in-training which rich and meaningful internship experience. Given that rural communities are highly lacking qualified education and mental health professionals (Bright, 2018; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016) it is likely that these partnerships are desired and would make an immerse service impact in rural spaces.

Limitations

The small sample size limits any generalizability of this study. Further, the current sample is taken from a single rural community, thus the attitudes expressed cannot be said to concretely represent the perspective of all rural males. In a similar vein, the current sample is overwhelmingly white, and rural individuals of different cultural backgrounds may have other influences on their career development processes. While

measures were taken to remain impartial in evaluation of the data, in qualitative research there is no way to assure absolute objectivity. Quantitative studies examining the attitudes and ideas expressed in this article would be helpful in clarifying the true validity of what is presented here.

Conclusion

Rural males are at risk for low college and career outcomes. Rural males express that college may be unfamiliar, lack value in practical ways but provide opportunity to leave the community, and be a system which requires family guidance to navigate. Rural school counselors should account for these realities while developing comprehensive K-12 career development curriculums to expose rural students to opportunities available locally and beyond through higher education training.

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