

## “Determined to Prove Them All Wrong”: The College Aspirations of Hmong Males

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### ABSTRACT

*This qualitative study explored the college aspirations of Hmong males who are pursuing or have completed higher education in the U.S. Using qualitative data from The Hmong College Student Success Project, this study analyzed trajectory analysis statements from 59 Hmong males to understand their aspirations to attend college. This study highlights how Hmong males leverage their aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital to navigate their ways to college. Specifically, findings from this study reveal the cultural resources emerging from parents, siblings, educators, college and career preparation programs, and themselves that cultivated their college aspirations. Implications for research and practice focus on cultivating college aspirations and increasing college enrollment among Hmong males are provided.*

**KEYWORDS:** Hmong Americans, male students, college aspirations, cultural wealth.

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College enrollment of Hmong Americans has decreased in the last decade, particularly for Hmong males. For example, 26.1% of Hmong Americans 3 years and older were enrolled in college or graduate school in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). This represents a 4.8% decrease from 2016 and an 8.3% decrease from 2011. At the same time, the college enrollment of Hmong males has also declined. For Hmong males 3 years and older, 25.4% were enrolled in college or graduate school in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). This represents a 2.9% decrease from 2016 and a 7.8% decrease from 2011. Given these trends and the relationship between college aspirations and college enrollment (Klasik, 2012), the focus on the aspirations to attend college among Hmong males is important. Of particular significance is what we can learn about the college aspirations of Hmong males who are currently enrolled or have graduated college as a way to begin increasing college enrollment among this population.

Scholars have studied extensively the college aspirations of students generally (e.g., Cohen, 1983; Qian & Blair, 1999; Wohn et al., 2013), and some scholars have further investigated the college aspirations of Asian American students (e.g., Kiang et al., 2015; Mau, 1990; Park, 2001), including Asian students from Southeast Asian ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese). Other scholars have focused on the college aspirations of male students of color, particularly Black and Latino males (e.g., Brooms & Davis, 2017; Patron, 2020; Toldson et al., 2009). One population that has not yet received much attention in the broader college aspiration literature is Hmong Americans. Moreover, scholars have rarely explored the college aspirations of male Hmong students.

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The literature on Hmong American students has documented their unique experiences across the educational pipeline. Research suggested that cultural resources impact Hmong students' educational experiences (C. T. Vang, 2005). Cultural resources influence Hmong students' preparation for college (C. T. Vang, 2004), transition to college (Lor, 2008), and success in college (Gloria et al., 2017). However, much of this research has highlighted how Hmong students' cultural resources created barriers and challenges in their educational experiences (Rubright, 1993; Supple et al., 2010; Xiong & Lam, 2013) rather than the extent to which cultural resources positively impact their educational experiences (P. Her & Gloria, 2016; P. Her et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2015). Thus, the positive influence of cultural resources on the experiences of Hmong students in other aspects of their educational journey, specifically Hmong males and their pursuit of higher education, is not well understood.

Hence, this study addresses the calls from scholars for more research on Hmong males (Ngo & Lor, 2013; S. Xiong, 2020). This study focuses on Hmong males and their aspirations to attend college. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore how Hmong males' college aspirations were cultivated by their community's cultural wealth. The primary research question guiding the current investigation was: What role does community cultural wealth play in cultivating the college aspirations of Hmong males?

The following sections provide context for the current study. The next section briefly reviews the literature on factors impacting the college aspirations of Southeast Asian American (SEAA) students, broadly, and Hmong American students, specifically. The rest of the article focuses on a qualitative investigation of how college aspirations were cultivated among 59 Hmong male students who have matriculated into college.

## **Literature Review**

Given the positive impacts of attending college on success outcomes such as degree attainment, and in turn, increased career and economic opportunities (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), scholars have attempted to understand students' college aspirations. The literature on SEAA college students has shown that the aspirational, familial, and navigational capital emerging from immediate and extended family members play an important role in their college aspirations (Maramba et al., 2018; Phommasa, 2015; Tang et al., 2013). For example, Maramba et al. (2018) found that SEAA students were communicated the importance of an education, encouraged to pursue a higher education, and expected to attend college by their parents. Siblings and cousins that have attended college developed SEAA students' college aspirations by providing them guidance and support in navigating decisions about college (Phommasa, 2015; Surla & Poon, 2015). Other scholars have found that the social and navigational capital emerging from SEAA students' network of educators and college preparation programs provided them access to information, opportunities, and experiences critical to their success in college and helped reinforce their aspirations to attend college (Maramba et al., 2018; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). SEAA students also drew from their aspirational capital to be intrinsically motivated to pursue higher education (Museus, 2013). Research from Surla and Poon (2015) indicates that the men in their study were more likely to attend college for upward mobility and financial security than their women counterparts. Collectively, this research has highlighted how SEAA students' aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital contributed to their college aspirations.

For Hmong American college students specifically, research has primarily focused on factors that impact their transition, experience, and success in college (e.g., Gloria et al., 2017; Lor, 2008; Supple et al., 2010; S. Xiong, 2019; Xiong & Lam, 2013; Xiong & Lee, 2011). The limited, but growing, research on college aspirations of Hmong American college students has explored their experiences by gender. For example, Mouavangsou (2018) noted that attending college for Hmong women was a way to break free from cultural barriers and gain gender

equality. The findings of other studies also confirmed these findings and suggested Hmong women draw from their resistant capital to pursue higher education (Lee, 1997; Rubright, 1993). In addition to their desire for gender equality, research from Lee (1997) found that Hmong women's aspirations to pursue higher education were also influenced by their aspirational capital. Hmong women perceived higher education to be the key to financial security and personal independence. They also perceived themselves as pioneers for other Hmong women to be able to pursue higher education as well. These studies indicate that Hmong women's aspirational and resistant capital enhances their aspirations to attend college.

Although there is limited research on the aspirations of Hmong males to attend college, two exceptions have emerged. Findings from K. Her (2022) highlighted the aspirational and familial capital that contributed to Hmong males' college aspirations. K. Her (2022) found that the struggles of their family, financially and linguistically, contributed to Hmong males' decision to pursue higher education. They were also supported and encouraged by their parents to pursue higher education. All the Hmong male participants in K. Her's (2022) study were the oldest sons in their family and were motivated to set a good example for their younger siblings and support them to pursue higher education. Additionally, the social and navigational capital emerging from supportive teachers and counselors whom Hmong males perceived to be caring, nurturing, and understanding also influenced their aspirations to attend college. Research from S. Y. Xiong (2022) complemented findings from K. Her (2022) about the key role of the immediate family members. However, S. Y. Xiong (2022) extended the literature by highlighting how Hmong males were expected to attend college by their parents. This aspirational and familial capital of Hmong males stems from their gender role expectations as Hmong sons to support and take care of their parents financially. S. Y. Xiong (2022) also found that Hmong males drew from their aspirational capital to attend and graduate college. They associated a college degree with greater career opportunities, financial well-being, and improved quality of life. These findings suggest that the college aspirations of Hmong males may be shaped by their aspirational, familial, and social capital.

The current study addresses several gaps in the aforementioned literature. First, research on the college aspirations of SEAA students often explored their experiences as a pan-ethnic group, rarely conducted disaggregated analyses by gender within ethnicity, and did not include any Hmong males in their sample (e.g., Maramba et al., 2018; Museus, 2013; Palmer & Maramba, 2015). Whether and how the community cultural wealth of SEAA students, as a pan-ethnic group, also shapes Hmong male students' college aspirations is less understood. This study represents one of the first studies that not only explores the experiences of Hmong males navigating their ways to higher education but also identifies the capitals contributing to the cultivation of their aspirations to attend college. Second, research indicates that the college aspirations of Hmong women are informed by their aspirational and resistant capital. The extent to which the sources of Hmong men's aspirational and resistant capital are similar to Hmong women is uncertain. This study systematically unpacked the sources of these capitals and examined how these two capitals also shape the college aspirations of Hmong males. Third, the following capitals have been found in the literature to shape SEAA students' college aspirations, including Hmong males: aspirational, familial, social, and navigational. In addition to these capitals, this study explored the ways that other capitals, linguistic and resistant capital, also shape the college aspirations of Hmong males.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model guided the current study. Yosso's (2005) model emerged as a critique of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital that did not account for the cultural resources of students of color. Yosso's (2005) model acknowledges and recognizes the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts" of students of color as types of

capital (p. 77). Yosso's (2005) model identified the following six types of capital: (1) aspirational capital refers to the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77); (2) linguistic capital refers to the "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language" (p. 78); (3) familial capital refers to the "cultural knowledges nurtured among kin that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79); (4) social capital refers to "networks of people and community resources" that provide the support needed for success (p. 79); (5) navigational capital refers to the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80); and (6) resistant capital refers to those "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequity" (p. 80). This model proposed that students of color possess these six types of capital and draw upon them to navigate educational institutions. Instead of focusing on the cultural deficits of Hmong students as previous studies have done, Yosso's (2005) model provided an appropriate theoretical lens to identify and acknowledge their cultural resources. Although Yosso's (2005) model has been used to understand Hmong students' persistence in college (e.g., Her Saychou, 2023; C. Vang, 2022), the current study used this model to understand Hmong male students' aspirations to attend college.

## **Methodology**

Data for the current investigation was originally collected for The Hmong College Student Success Project, a national qualitative study conducted by a team of researchers that sought to explore the lived experiences of Hmong students navigating their ways to and through the American higher education system. The methods employed in this national study followed tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990), where the focus was on the experiences of Hmong students from their perspective and meaning-making of their own lived experiences. According to Van Manen (1990), a written protocol is appropriate to generate phenomenological texts that contain a written description of the lived experiences of participants. As noted by previous scholars (e.g., Harper, 2007; Vasquez et al., 2017), narrative essays written by students, known as trajectory analysis statements, could offer insights into their lived experiences and the factors positively impacting their educational trajectory. As such, trajectory analysis statements submitted as part of this national study were used to explore the college aspirations of Hmong male students.

## **Participants**

Participants for the national study were recruited by reaching out to individuals in the research team's personal networks, virtual networks on various social media platforms, and invitations from peers. Participants were identified using a combination of criterion, snowball, and maximum variation sampling techniques (Patton, 2002). Selection criteria included the following: (1) self-identify as Hmong; (2) are age 18 and older; and (3) have matriculated into an institution of higher education. The use of criterion sampling was to ensure that participants identified for the study were information-rich cases consisting of Hmong students who have lived experiences navigating the American higher education system and can offer insights into this process. Snowball sampling consisted of asking each participant to share the study with others who meet the participation criteria. This sampling technique allowed for the identification of additional participants that would not have been identified through personal and virtual networks. Maximum variation sampling consisted of collecting data from a wide range of perspectives. Sampling for maximum variation ensured that the findings included the experiences of participants who were different from one another by age, nativity, student status, academic degrees, and geographic regions.

The current analysis focused on the 59 participants who identified as male. Most of the participants were second generation, with 45 participants reported being born in the U.S. and 14 born outside of the U.S. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 52, with 13 between ages 18-24, 33 between 25-31, 10 between 32-38, 1 between 39-45, and 2 between 46-52. The participants were from different regions of the U.S., with 47 from the West Coast, 9 from the Midwest, 2 from the Northeast, and 1 from the South. The participants included 16 currently enrolled students and 43 college graduates. The highest degree completed or currently being pursued by participants includes 3 associate degrees, 35 bachelor's degrees, 16 master's or professional degrees, and 5 doctoral degrees. Participants were pursuing or had completed degrees from a total of 34 unduplicated institutions across the U.S., including public and private institutions, as well as community colleges and universities.

## Data Collection

Each participant was asked to construct a trajectory analysis statement collected through a protocol writing process using an online survey administered via Qualtrics. Consent information was presented on the survey's cover page. Informed consent was given by clicking a checkbox to indicate that the participant had read the consent form, met the criteria for participation, and agreed to participate in the study. Demographic questions included inquiries regarding age, gender, marital status, nativity, student status, college majors, academic degrees, institutions, and graduation information for each degree completed. The trajectory analysis statement focused on their lived experiences pre-college, during college, and post-college. To guide the construction of the trajectory analysis statement, participants were requested to describe factors that influenced their college aspirations, success in college, and success after college, respectively.

First, participants were provided with the prompt, "Describe in as much detail as you can one critical moment, experience, and/or individual that influenced your *college aspirations*. Please write a direct account of what happened in that moment, experience, and/or interaction with that individual." Next, participants were provided the same prompt but instructed to focus on *success in college*. Then participants were provided the same prompt but instructed to focus on *success after college*. For this last prompt, current students were asked to write about what is preparing them to be successful after college (e.g., graduate school, professional career) while college graduates were asked to write about what contributed to their success after college. The online survey was piloted with six Hmong college students and revisions were made based on feedback about the directions, interpretation of the questions, and suggested edits that would contribute to richer and deeper descriptions of participants' lived experiences.

## Data Analysis

Trajectory analysis statements were downloaded from Qualtrics for analysis using the free and open-source software QualCoder version 3.3 (Curtain, 2023). A combination of detailed, selective, and wholistic reading approaches were used to identify themes as described by Van Manen (1990) for thematic analysis. First, a detailed reading approach was used to examine every sentence or sentence cluster to determine what the data revealed about the college aspirations of the participants. Next, each trajectory analysis statement was read several times, and a selective reading approach was used to isolate statements and phrases related to how the college aspirations of the participants were cultivated. Commonalities among the isolated statements and phrases helped discern the thematic aspects in their descriptions of the experience. Then, a wholistic reading approach was used to examine each trajectory analysis statement as a whole to identify themes reflective of the sources of each capital that cultivated participants' aspirations to attend college.

## Trustworthiness

Thick description, peer debriefing, and an audit trail were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). For transferability, thick descriptions of the study were provided. This included providing sufficient information about the study context so others could replicate the study and consider the application of the findings to different settings and populations. In addition, direct quotations from participants are also provided in the findings section to contribute a thick description of the study. For credibility, peer debriefing was employed. Feedback from peer debriefers who are active researchers and knowledgeable of Hmong college student experiences was solicited during research design, data collection, and data analysis. For dependability and confirmability, an audit trail was maintained. This included keeping documentation of the raw data, evidence of data analysis, and synthesis of the findings.

## Researcher Positionality

I identify as a Hmong man who has navigated my way to and through the American higher education system and a researcher who has studied the Hmong college student experience extensively. My hope is that this study contributes to advancing a body of anti-deficit research on Hmong student success in higher education. In this study, I used an asset-based framework in order to shift away from focusing on the cultural deficits of Hmong male students toward a thorough examination of their cultural resources. In doing so, my broader purpose is for institutions and educators to understand better the cultural wealth of Hmong male students and their experiences navigating their way to college.

## Findings

Five themes emerged from the data about the college aspirations of Hmong males in this study. The first two themes reflected how their college aspirations were cultivated with capitals emerging from parents and siblings. The third and fourth themes accounted for how their college aspirations were cultivated with capitals emerging from educators and college and career preparation programs. Finally, the fifth theme described how their college aspirations were cultivated with capitals emerging from within themselves. Phrases and statements reflective of the thematic aspects of each theme are presented in this section. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, Hmong names are used as pseudonyms, and names of institutions and individuals mentioned in selected phrases and statements are redacted.

### Theme 1: College Aspirations Cultivated by Parents

The first theme highlighted the aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital emerging from parents who cultivated their college aspirations. In describing the influence of parents, participants repeatedly shared that they were encouraged and supported by their parents to pursue a higher education and discussed how their parents' desire for them to attend college directly impacted their decision. Cai, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in physics, for example, stated:

*The biggest factor that contributed to me going to college was my parents' support and desire for me to go to college...Even before I made the decision to pursue higher education for myself, my parents were always encouraging me to strive higher.*

Huas, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, discussed the significance of the desire, support, and encouragement from his parents:

*Growing up, my siblings and I were taught to value education. My parents were very clear that education is the key that will open many opportunities in our futures and lifetime. They also made sure that we understood their struggle and decisions to immigrate to the United States to give us a life that they would never have in Laos and Thailand.*

Similarly, Tsu, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in plant science, described how his mother reminded him of the importance of an education:

*As long as I can remember, she was always my backbone when it came to education. Even though she did not speak or write English, she always told me, "Rau siab kawm ntawv lwm hnub koj thiaj muaj lub neej ua." This translates to: Study hard in school so you will have a better life.*

Participants' comments also illustrate how they understood that the decision to pursue a higher education was not only for themselves but also for their parents. Participants perceived a college degree to be what they needed to pursue a career that allows them to support and care for their parents financially. Xyooj, a college graduate with a master's degree in public health, echoed this understanding with the following statement:

*For as long as I can remember, I was expected to further my education after high school...Since I was the youngest in a Hmong family, the responsibility of caring for my parents as they entered their older years was placed on me...I knew I needed to become stable in the future, enough to be able to care for my parents in their old age...I needed to attend college to maximize my chances of financial stability in the future.*

Thus, parents' desire, encouragement, and support were critical factors influencing participants' decision to pursue higher education. Comments from Xyooj, however, also indicate how their decision to pursue higher education was influenced by the sacrifices of their parents and the gender role expectations for them to attend college.

## **Theme 2: College Aspirations Cultivated by Siblings**

The second theme reflected the aspirational, familial, and navigational capital emerging from siblings who cultivated their college aspirations. Participants discussed how witnessing their siblings get accepted, attend, and graduate from college contributed to them learning about college and making their decision to attend college. For example, Meej, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in pharmacological chemistry, shared how he learned about college from his sibling: "I learned of college, specifically a four-year university when my eldest sister graduated from high school and was admitted to the local [university]. I was in the 4th grade. That was my first realization that higher education included college." Foom, a current student pursuing a bachelor's degree in communications, shared about the influence of his siblings on his decision to attend college:

*I, being the youngest in my family, had an opportunity to see all my siblings go through and graduate from college. Just that initial exposure at a young age was enough for me to make my decision to go to college.*

This theme also reflected the different ways that siblings nurture their college aspirations. Zeb, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in biological science, shared the important role of his sibling and the mentoring he received:

*My aspiration to attend college was my eldest brother, who was the first to graduate college in my family. He was knowledgeable and someone I could relate, as well as look up to. He obtained his B.S. in Biological Science despite the socio-economic struggles my family went through...My eldest brother was always there to help whether it is topics about life or subjects in school...If I am struggling in a course he will try to help. If there is a roadblock in my educational path, he will help find a solution for it. It was because he is experienced in navigating through the education system that he was able to assist me...My older brother was the first to go through the college system and set an example for me...He was a mentor to me.*

Xais, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in business administration, also shared the influence of his sibling on his college aspirations through the coaching he received:

*An individual that influenced me to go to college and to where I should go is my older brother...He provided a blueprint of what it's like to attend [university] and what opportunity I can take when I'm at [university]. Our conversation talked about the possibilities that I can get if I were to go to college...I was unsure of what I wanted to be and what career is right for me. He was throwing all different kinds of majors that [university] provided and how big the campus is. The most crucial moment in our conversation as he said was, to take a chance. Believe it or not, this was huge to me in making my decision to go to college...I can't really explain my emotions and everything that happened that day, but I was certain that it was a go. That is why I decided to apply for [university] and got in.*

Indeed, having a sibling who attended college as a role model and mentor to coach and support them appeared to cultivate participants' aspirations to pursue a higher education.

### **Theme 3: College Aspirations Cultivated by Educators**

The third theme emphasized the social and navigational capital emerging from educators who cultivated their aspirations. Participants had educators who believed in them and encouraged them to pursue higher education. Keej, a college graduate with a master's degree in public health, reflected on his interaction with an educator who developed his college aspirations:

*I was in High School NJROTC and was getting inspected by an officer for our annual NJROTC inspection event. He asked me if I'm planning to apply for the ROTC scholarship and for college. I said "no" because*

*I didn't feel I was good enough. I told him my GPA was 3.6 and he quickly was shocked that I didn't feel I could apply with such a solid GPA. He encouraged me to apply and quickly moved on to inspect other students. The moment was brief...However, that moment was profound since no one has ever said I could make it in college before...I don't blame them, I grew up with developmental disabilities and had mental retardation for 10 years of my life prior to that moment. However, it was that sole moment that made me feel I had the potential, and potential was all I needed.*

Participants also had educators who proactively provided them access to opportunities and experiences that prepared them for college. Vaj, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in computer information system, reflected on the role of his teacher:

*At first, I never thought I would be interested in IT or related areas. But Mr. [teacher] really brought the best out of his students. I can see how much he wants to help the students and prepare them for college. This got me really motivated to learn more about computers hardware and software...He actually gave me my first IT job in high school...I realized this career was for me...[he] asked me if I would like to volunteer and help organize a major IT conference meeting with local IT teachers in the valley. I accepted with no hesitation because this would benefit me to learn more and network with people...Thanks to Mr. [teacher] and the ROP class, this prepared me for college.*

Vaj's statement also underscored the importance of educators who invested in them. Yaj, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in criminology, reflected on the investment of his counselor to know important personal information about him:

*Throughout my high school years, my counselor happened to be Hmong. I believe it helped and made me feel more comfortable sharing my situations because she would understand what I am going through...I remember she told me the same thing that my parents would always tell me, "Your parents brought you here to the United States for one purpose, that is to have a better life by going to school and obtaining knowledge. You have the opportunity that they did not."...Without her help and encouragement, I would have never gone to college...I probably would have not attempted college. She was Hmong; therefore, it showed me that if she could do it I could do it as well...I have an older brother who dropped out of high school. My counselor knew that we were brothers. She reminded me that by going to college, I could carve the path for my younger siblings who are looking up to me.*

Participants felt that educators who contributed to the development of their college aspirations included those who: (1) invested their time to learn important personal information about them, (2) genuinely communicated their belief in them to pursue a higher education, and (3) proactively provided them with opportunities and experiences that will prepare them for college.

#### **Theme 4: College Aspirations Cultivated by College and Career Preparation Programs**

The fourth theme accounted for the social and navigational capital emerging from college and career preparation programs that cultivated their college aspirations. College and career preparation programs provided participants access to information, opportunities, and support critical to their success in college. For example, Vwj, a college graduate with a master's degree in mathematics, described the different types of college information he was provided with through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program that influenced his college aspirations:

*In high school, I was part of programs like AVID for several years and Turning Points Academy (TPA)...In AVID, I got to learn about how to prepare for college. I learned the A-G requirements. I knew about exams like SAT and ACT, when registration deadlines were, and even got to take Saturday classes that prepared one for these exams...I got to take several trips to multiple colleges and universities...Another key aspect that AVID helped me was the FAFSA. I remembered the seniors in AVID were among the first to complete their FAFSA. Lastly, AVID helped expose me to scholarships and how to find them...In TPA, we were bused to [university] for the second half of our sophomore year. We were also enrolled in several college courses and received college units. We got to experience what college was like, first hand.*

In addition to college information, Vwj's statement also illuminated the opportunities participants were provided with that impacted their decision to go to college. Tsheej, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in biomedical physics, described the career-related opportunities that led him to attend college:

*The Junior Doctor Academy (JDA) and the Doctor Academy (DA) influenced my college aspirations...the program helps me focus and narrow down my interest towards the medical field...I job shadow as a red wave volunteer at Veterans Affairs Hospital...I job shadow in the Operating Rooms at Community Regional Medical Center and help turn over rooms before and after operations. Furthermore, it allows the opportunity to go in and watch surgery with permission from both the patient, the doctor and/or surgeon in charge...I felt that this was a major experience of pushing me into college.*

In describing his experiences, Xyoob, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in accounting, made the statement below about the opportunities to experience college on his college aspirations and enrollment:

*TRIO Upward Bound was a major part of my attendance to college...Aside from helping students with tutoring after school, they provide so much guidance on how to get into college and how to best prepare for it. They offered college tours where they would take students on overnight trips to see all the colleges nearby so that they can get an idea of what campus and college life is like. The best thing about the Upward Bound is their summer program. This was a program where students went to the college that hosted Upward Bound and stayed in the dorms over the summer. They would take college classes*

*that would count towards college credits as well as get a feel of what it's like to live there and be a student...I would consider TRIO Upward Bound to be the biggest factor as to why I was able to get into college.*

The information, opportunities, and support provided by college and career preparation programs cultivated participants' college aspirations because they felt prepared to attend and thrive in college.

### **Theme 5: College Aspirations Cultivated from Within Themselves**

The fifth theme emphasized the aspirational capital in connection with resistant capital emerging from the participants themselves that cultivated their college aspirations. Participants were intrinsically motivated to pursue higher education. For example, Tooj, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering, stated: "If I had to single out a motivating factor to pursue college, it will be my own self-belief that I will eventually go to college and get a degree." Similarly, Nplooj, a current student pursuing an associate degree in radiologic technology, also shared how he was his own motivation to attend college:

*The one person that influenced me to go to college to do something meaningful in my life is myself...I tell myself all the time, I am going to college not because I'm pressured to do so. It's simply because I want to secure my future with something that will promise me a better future for myself and my future family...At the end of the day, you have to be at least one of the reasons why you're influenced to grasp that college dream of yours.*

Xab, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in industrial technology, also reflected on his motivation with the statement below:

*Growing up, I never felt that the adults in my life had high expectations of me to succeed in life or thought I would make anything of myself or become anyone. I sought to prove to myself that I could become someone my parents & family would be proud of...I sought to become self-sufficient.*

Xab's statements also highlighted how low expectations from others shaped his college aspirations. Similarly, Lwm, a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in criminology, shared about how being looked down upon by others motivated him not just to attend but also graduate from college:

*Coming from a family with little to no education, I was determined to be one of the first to obtain my bachelor's degree. Being from a low-income family, most of my relatives that are educated tend to look down upon my family. This motivated me to strive through any education route, no matter how difficult it was.*

In addition to pursuing higher education for themselves, participants' statements suggest that their intrinsic motivation to attend and graduate college was shaped by other individuals' deficit perspectives of themselves and their families.

## Discussion

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, the current study found that Hmong males utilized their aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital to navigate their ways to higher education. Participants in this study emphasized how these capitals were important to their aspirations to attend college. These findings provide support for previous research indicating the importance of SEAA students' aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital on their aspirations to attend college (Museus, 2013; Palmer & Maramba, 2015; Tang et al., 2013). These findings also provide support for research on the important role of Hmong male students' aspirational, familial, and social capital on their college aspirations (Her, 2022; S. Y. Xiong, 2022). The findings from the current study indicate that linguistic and resistant capital also shape the college aspirations of Hmong males. This study adds empirical evidence that all six capitals from Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model may be critical in cultivating the college aspirations of Hmong males.

Second, the current study found that the cultural resources from immediate family members were the sources of participants' aspirational, linguistic, familial, and navigational capital. The findings from this study indicate that Hmong males were encouraged, supported, and expected to pursue higher education by immediate family members, specifically parents and siblings. The findings from this study confirm research on the critical role of immediate family members in influencing the college aspirations of SEAA students (Maramba et al., 2018; Sural & Poon, 2015; Tang et al., 2013), including Hmong males (Her, 2022; S. Y. Xiong, 2022). This study adds to the literature by highlighting the gender role expectations and "rau siab" (hard work) messages communicated by parents specifically to Hmong males that seem to foster the growth of their college aspirations. This study also adds to the literature that siblings who attended college are role models and mentors that not only influenced Hmong males' decision to attend college but also provided them access to college information and coached them through the decision of which institution to attend.

Third, this study found that the cultural resources from educators and college and career preparation programs were the sources of participants' social and navigational capital. In particular, the findings from this study suggest that caring, supportive, and invested high school teachers and school counselors helped develop participants' college aspirations. These findings are consistent with previous research that identified high school teachers and school counselors as positive factors contributing to SEAA students' aspirations to attend college (Maramba et al., 2018; Palmer & Maramba, 2015), including Hmong males (Her, 2022). Similar to findings from Maramba et al. (2018), the findings from this study also suggest that college preparation programs allow Hmong males to develop the academic skills to thrive academically, encourage them to consider and attend college, teach them about the college experience, and support them to navigate the college choice process. However, this study extends the current literature by highlighting how the career-related opportunities provided by career preparation programs that allowed Hmong males to explore potential career pathways and narrow their college academic majors prior to enrolling in college might also be critical in cultivating their aspirations to attend college.

Lastly, this study found that the cultural resources within the participants themselves were also the sources of their aspirational and resistant capital that cultivated their college aspirations. The findings from this study reinforce earlier studies highlighting that economic factors contribute to the aspirational capital of Hmong students to attend college (Her, 2022; Lee, 1997; S. Y. Xiong, 2022). This study, however, advances the literature to include gender differences among the factors contributing to the resistant capital of Hmong students in their pursuit of higher education. Indeed, the sources of Hmong women's aspirational capital in connection with resistant capital stem from their desire for gender equality within the Hmong community (Lee, 1997; Mouavangsou, 2018; Rubright, 1993). This study helps shed light on

how the aspirational capital in connection with resistant capital among Hmong male participants seem to stem more from others' deficit perspectives of them and their family.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Findings from this study have important implications for research and practice. There are several limitations in the current study that warrant consideration and inform directions for future research. First, although this study provided insights into how Hmong males' community cultural wealth cultivated their college aspirations, this is one of the first studies to focus on this population and topic. Future qualitative studies can use Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model to further explore the college aspirations of Hmong males and confirm the findings from the current study. Future quantitative studies are also needed to examine the statistical significance and influence of each capital from Yosso's (2005) model on Hmong males' college aspirations. Such studies would expand an empirical knowledge base on the experiences of Hmong males navigating their ways to higher education and provide insights that educators can use to cultivate the college aspirations and support the college enrollment of this population.

Second, the current study focused on Hmong males currently enrolled or have completed a college degree, and the findings may not be reflective of those who have stopped out, dropped out, or have not attended college. Future qualitative and quantitative studies should incorporate the lived experiences and perspectives of those who are not currently enrolled. The inclusion of these individuals will provide a more holistic understanding of the aspirations to attend college among Hmong males who have and have not matriculated into college.

Third, the current analysis focused specifically on how the college aspirations of Hmong males were cultivated, but analysis for differences by various identities among the participants was beyond the scope of the current study. Future studies employing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods should conduct analyses that examine differences by age, nativity, and other aspects of the participants' identities that may shape Hmong males' college aspirations. Such studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of how the aspirations to attend college may vary among Hmong males.

Regarding practice, educators must understand their direct influence on Hmong males' college aspirations and use that understanding to support them. For example, high school educators should consider how communicating genuine belief in Hmong males to pursue higher education can develop their aspirations to attend college. Teachers should consider ways to cultivate Hmong males' college aspirations by allowing them to explore potential academic majors and career pathways. School counselors should consider the ways that cultural factors such as gender role expectations and deficit perspectives shape Hmong males' aspirations to pursue higher education and allow time for the exploration and processing of these factors with them.

Student affairs educators in TRIO and college preparation programs should consider how these programs influence the college aspirations and enrollment of Hmong males and consider targeted outreach and recruitment efforts to ensure that eligible Hmong male students at participating high schools are equitably represented among students served by these programs. Student affairs educators in prospective student advising should consider how older siblings who attended college support Hmong males to navigate questions about college and consider ways to work collaboratively with these siblings, who are role models and mentors to them. Student affairs educators in family orientation programs should consider how parental encouragement, support, and expectations contribute to Hmong males' college aspirations and create programming that centers Hmong cultural values and honors their ways of supporting.

Finally, it is important for educators to engage with Hmong males from a community cultural wealth perspective that acknowledges and values their cultural resources from within their families, communities, and themselves. For example, high school and student affairs educators can use Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model to guide the types of questions to ask Hmong males about the cultural resources they draw from to navigate their ways to college. Such efforts can help educators to identify and understand how the various cultural resources are contributing to Hmong males' aspirations to attend college. These types of efforts from educators can also help demonstrate their investment and commitment to learning important personal information about their Hmong male students, which is a characteristic of educators whom Hmong male students have identified to cultivate their college aspirations.

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