A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ACCESS FACING LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. This study employed a qualitative methodology approach involving 10 low-income African American high school graduates from two states. The theoretical framework that guided this study was critical race theory. The central research question was: What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates? The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. The data analysis process involved open coding, axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. Research was needed to understand why low-income African American males graduate high school yet fail to enroll in post-secondary education. This study highlighted some of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers facing low-income African American males as it relates to college access.

Keywords: disadvantaged, African Americans, critical race, college access, low-income students, post-secondary barriers, first generation
Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my father, the late Emmanuel Cherilien. Born in Latibonit, Haiti, my father decided to sacrifice all that he knew to come to America so his children could have a better education. I will always be indebted to my father for giving my siblings and me a better chance at life which he wasn’t afforded. It was because of this sacrifice I was able to reach the pinnacle of the education system. His life lessons were key motivators for me to finish this dissertation process. It is fitting that I dedicate this body of work back to the person who allowed me to dream it. Papi, thank you for everything, I love you.
Acknowledgments

The completion of this dissertation could not have been possible without Almighty God’s blessings, mercy, and grace. I also would like to acknowledge several people whose names cannot all be enumerated. Their contributions over the years are greatly appreciated and I would like to take the time to acknowledge a few of them.

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List of Abbreviations

Advanced Placement (AP)
Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)
Critical Race Theory (CRT)
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Free Application Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
Free and Reduced Meal Program (FARM)
Grade Point Average (GPA)
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)
Human Capital Theory (HCT)
Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS)
Race to the Top (RTT)
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)
Social Reproduction Theory (SRT)
Socioeconomic Status (SES)
Underrepresented Racial Minorities (URMs)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

College degree attainment is regarded as one of the primary vehicles for reducing poverty and closing the wealth gaps between people of color and Whites (Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). Gaining access to higher education for minority groups is critical as it is predicted that within a decade this population will represent approximately half of the U.S. population (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Although more African Americans are attending college than in the past, African Americans continue to be underrepresented in post-secondary institutions relative to their representation in the traditional college-age population (Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). For this particular study, the college enrollment rate was defined as the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds (traditional college-age) enrolled as undergraduate students in two- or four-year institutions (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2018). According to the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) (2018), in 2017, the college enrollment rate was the highest for Asian young adults (65 percent), then Whites (41 percent), and lowest for African Americans and Hispanics (both at 36 percent). NCES (2018) reported that every year between 2000 and 2017, the college enrollment rates for White young adults were higher than the rates for African American young adults. Accessibility to higher education may be contributing to these results; as a result, college access was the primary focus in this study. For this study, college access was defined as a learning environment providing individuals with resources and opportunities to matriculate to postsecondary education (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Schools today recognize that some groups are at a larger disadvantage than others and aim at compensating these students to make sure that everyone is capable of attaining the same academic goals (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019; Welton & Martinez, 2014). However, when gender, class, and race intersect, some of
these challenges become even more pronounced (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; Wilkins, 2014). This particular study highlighted many of these obstacles plaguing low-income African American male high school graduates as it relates to college access. Overall, the literature suggests that the decision for low-income African American male students to go to college is complex, and it is the by-product of numerous family- and school-based factors (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Catí, López, & Morrell, 2015). In some cases, the decision to go to college is made for low-income minority students depending on certain demographics- (including cultural capital, socioeconomic status, school quality, and parental education) (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Catí et al., 2015). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argued that many African American students come from personal environments that block them from pursuing or attending higher education institutions. Unfortunately, most models of college choice almost universally portray the decision as the student’s alone (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). However, what these models fail to consider are the roads these students have to navigate to attend higher education, such as racial discrimination, socioeconomic status (SES), college funding, weak college preparatory curricula, and limited understanding of the college admissions process (Gaxiola, 2017). This study examined how a specific demographic (target population) may have significant barriers to overcome to attend postsecondary institutions. Influenced by Becker’s (2009) human capital theory and Bourdieu’s (1986) social reproduction theory, college enrollment was the construct used to measure success in this study. The more knowledge (capital) one gains, the more valuable they are to themselves and their community (Becker, 2009). Gaining access to higher education can influence many of the generational problems found in low-income African American communities (Wilkins, 2014). By identifying the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers to college access facing this target
population, this study moves the literature forward on how these cyclical obstacles are keeping this specific population locked out of the higher education system.

The research on African Americans in every facet of higher education is lacking, from their decision to attend college to the systemic barriers in place that may discourage college enrollment (Freeman, 2005). As the field of college choice research evolves, researchers cannot only utilize poor schools, achievement gaps, and parental education levels as constructs to understand college choice and access (Chapman, Contreras, & Martinez, 2018). Freeman (2005) posited that the quality of K-12 education that one receives can also be influenced by their SES, especially in low-income African American communities. There seems to be a relationship between income and the achievement gap that may operate in both directions (Owens, 2018). Achievement differences between school districts may contribute to the inequality in housing costs between the districts, which can ultimately shape the residential outcomes as parents strive to live in the best school district they can afford (Owens, 2018). “The relationship is likely cyclical, with income segregation leading to achievement gaps that reify income segregation for future generations through housing market and search processes” (Owens, 2018, p. 5). Hence, when one compares the quality of K-12 education of low-income African American male students to their White advantaged counterparts, one can argue that social class plays a role in achievement, performance, and outcomes (Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015). This specific study identified how low-income African American males’ journey to college may be different compared to their advantaged White peers. Furthermore, the study analyzed how the intersectionality of being low-income, African American, and male may influence the pathway to higher education. Research has shown that the gap in performance and outcomes between African Americans and Whites are a result of a variety of factors and it widens as children
progress through school (Orr, 2003). Children in lower-income households do not perform as well academically as their peers on many outcomes (Barnes & Slate, 2014). Students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, combined with less-educated parents, face incredible odds to be successful in the classroom (Reardon, 2013). Ensuring access to postsecondary education for all Americans continue to be one of the most pressing issues facing American society (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). However, for this particular study, the target population was low-income African American male high school graduates. Low-income African American males in America have traditionally been viewed as a high-risk population (Rhoden, 2017). As for educational aspiration, achievement, and equity, African American males tend to be the least understood community (McGlyn, 2015). As a result, this study exclusively focused on this population, specifically high school graduates to identify the barriers they face to college access. The research questions addressed in this study identified the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers facing low-income African American males in the northeast region of the United States. To gain a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, I began the study detailing the historical background, my biases, the phenomenon, the purpose of this study, the significance of this study, the research questions I sought to answer and concluded the chapter by defining the terms referenced throughout the study. The figures below represent data surrounding low-income students, African American students, and male students as they relate to college access. However, no statistics were found that specifically address the target population (low-income African American males) in this study. As a result, the following charts were employed to highlight the college enrollment rates by socioeconomic status (SES), race, and sex which all impact low-income African American males.
Figure 1. College Enrollment Rates by Income (National Center of Education Statistics, 2016).

Figure 2. College Enrollment Rates by Sex (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).
The data suggest that low-income individuals, African Americans, and males all lag behind their respective peers in college enrollment. This study sought to combine these constructs (gender, class, and race) to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. Historically, SES has always played an important role in shaping academic success and trajectory (Freeman, 2005). Low-income parents tend to have fewer tangible resources available to them and are significantly less likely to be involved in their child’s schooling, thereby influencing the capacity to transmit valued cultural capital (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Cultural capital deficit has long-term consequences on college enrollment due to the high school achievement gaps it often creates (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Indeed, lower SES parents have limited informational, emotional, and financial resources available to assist their children, coupled with distinct class-based cultural beliefs about the role of family in education (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Historically, low-
income students (specifically, low-income African American males) as a group have not performed on most measures of academic success (standardized test scores, grades, high school completion rates, college enrollments, and college completion rates) compared to their higher-income counterparts (Reardon, 2013). The achievement gaps in education continue to exist and are particularly more pronounced for African American male students (Rothstein, 2015).

Students who come from advantaged families with higher SES are privileged with more resources than those of lower classes to gain access to postsecondary institutions (Reardon, 2013). Several decades ago, college was not seen as the natural next step for most American young people who finished high school (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013). Baum et al. (2013) expressed over the past few decades that big changes had occurred not just in the number of people who went to college, but also the demographics of those individuals. The emergence of historically Black institutions was significant in addressing this phenomenon by educating African Americans who were not allowed access to traditional higher education institutions (Patton, 2016). As colleges began integrating, the growing share of low-income students in the college population brought many changes to higher education, including declines in the average level of academic preparation of students and in their ability to finance postsecondary education (Baum et al., 2013). Today, college enrollment rates continue to rise for all demographic groups, but gaps persist across high school graduates depending on their family’s income levels (Ross, 2016). The problem partly lies in the meaning of college access for these communities (Adelman, 2007). The use of the term college access implies that there are barriers in place preventing certain individuals from post-secondary education (Adelman, 2007). Students from economically disadvantaged families confront challenging conditions right from birth—in neighborhood and family circumstances, that limit their educational opportunities available to
them (Baum et al., 2013). The authors posited these differences are large enough and influential enough to make it clear that the gaps in college enrollment and educational attainment do not result solely from an inability to pay for college but from several other factors (Baum et al., 2013). Through this study, I attempted to understand these factors as they relate to a specific group (low-income African American male high school graduates). The barriers to college access that were addressed in this study are categorized into structural, cultural, and racialized barriers. Understanding the background to this phenomenon historically and presently assisted the researcher in highlighting the barriers facing this target population while shaping the theoretical framework for this study.

History

Overt racism has shaped U.S. social institutions for over three centuries and continues, although more subtly, to impact U.S. institutions of socialization in the twenty-first century (Yosso, 2005). Understanding the present context of racism and white supremacy in higher education requires acknowledging its violent, imperialistic, and oppressive past (Patton, 2016). Historically, schools were segregated by race and African American students were not legally allowed to access the same resources as their White counterparts (Cati et al., 2015). Several cases dealt with these racial inequalities directly. The first case was Plessy v. Ferguson (1896); this case upheld the ruling that racial segregation was justified as long as the segregated schools were equal (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). Following that case, the first federal policy aimed at the working-class population was the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which provided funds to prepare students in industrialized areas for working-class jobs through vocational training programs (Anyon, 2005). Several decades later, the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education (1954) overturned the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision (Young et al., 2017). The Supreme
Court ruled the practice of “separate but equal” was a form of racial segregation; therefore, the practices were unconstitutional (Balkin & Ackerman, 2001). As schools evolved from being racially segregated to integrated, there were significant equity concerns between the two groups. Specifically, there were concerns on how to close the achievement gap between White and African American students (Hope et al., 2015). These inequities led to the formation of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) in 1965; the main focus of this policy was to emphasize equal access to education (Wrabel, Saultz, Polikoff, McEachin, & Duque, 2018). This act was responsible for funding elementary and secondary education while holding schools accountable for student outcomes (Wrabel et al., 2018). ESEA was reauthorized several times until it finally transformed into the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 (Lee & Reeves, 2012). NCLB sought to level the playing field by narrowing class and racial gaps in school performance by establishing common expectations for all schools (Lee & Reeves, 2012). The Title I provision in the NCLB was intended to address many of the inequities still found in many low-income high-minority schools by providing additional funds for supplementary services (Lee & Reeves, 2012). For an institution to qualify for Title I funding, at least 40% of the school’s population would need to be eligible for free or reduced lunch (Lee & Reeves, 2012). Unfortunately, there were several loopholes in federal law regulations that reduced the Title I provision meaningless. The last major policy enacted in the field of education equity was the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. ESSA shifted the focus from teacher accountability to educational leaders (Young et al., 2017). It provided an enhanced focus on educational leadership and acknowledged the importance of leaders in achieving federal goals for education (Young et al., 2017). Although schools are now integrated, there are still signs of segregation between affluent White students and low-income African American students (Cati et
Rothstein (2015) claimed that racial segregation of schools has been intensifying due to neighborhoods still being segregated by race. Sharkey (2013) found that young African Americans (13 to 28 years old) are now ten times as likely to live in poor neighborhoods than their White counterparts. Furthermore, for African American families, mobility out of such neighborhoods is much more limited than for Whites (Rothstein, 2015). Sharkey (2013) expressed that 67% of African American families hailing from the poorest quarter of neighborhoods a generation ago continue to live in such neighborhoods today. Like racial segregation, the separation of public-school families by income between school districts has also increased, by over 15 percent from 1990 to 2010 (Owens, 2017). Hence, many of the issues that existed in the past are still present structurally, culturally, and racially for low-income African American males today (Guinier, 2004).

Present

Today SES, gender, and race continue to play significant roles in shaping academic opportunities and success (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). Educational inequality and inequity have emerged and reemerged in various forms throughout the past up to the present day (Parsons & Turner, 2014). These disparities are evident from inadequate instructional facilities to scant course offerings in a school’s curriculum with low-income students of color more likely to be subjected to these conditions (Parsons & Turner, 2014). Furthermore, the graduation rates in many of these low-income, high-minority high schools are appallingly low (Anyon, 2005). Although low-income individuals desperately need a college education to find career employment, only seven percent obtain a bachelor’s degree by age 26 (Anyon, 2005). Low-income African American males as a group continue to struggle on most measures of academic success (standardized test scores, grades, high school completion rates, college enrollments, and
college completion rates) compared to their high-income White counterparts (Reardon, 2013). Today, 54% of African Americans graduate from high school, compared to more than 75% of their White and Asian counterparts (Pruitt, Nicholas-Omoregbe, Bergdahi, Omoregbe, & Mbarika, 2019). African American males’ twelfth grade reading scores are currently lower than any other racial or ethnic group (Pruitt et al., 2019). Lastly, African American males ages 18 and older make up only six percent of college students, and of those who do make it to college, only one out of every six (17%) ultimately graduate (Pruit et al., 2019). I decided to limit the scope of this study to low-income African Americans and high-income Whites, I wanted to understand how the intersectionality of race, SES and sex shape college aspiration, and attendance. Therefore, this study placed low-income African American males against their advantaged White peers and identified the different journeys the two groups traveled yet still held to the same standard of college attendance. Students who come from family backgrounds with higher SES are privileged with more resources than those of lower classes to address many of the issues mentioned earlier (Freeman, 2005). Those parents with higher income can afford luxuries such as better tutors, preparatory classes, high-quality summer enrichment programs, etc., which can position their children for higher education compared to those with limited resources (Freeman, 2005; Reardon, 2013). Income, as a result, creates an unfair advantage and becomes another distinct barrier before low-income African American children before they have the opportunity to start school (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015; Knaggs et al., 2015). It’s a vicious cycle that starts with social class, then disseminates to school funding, teacher quality, and resources ultimately influencing all parts of the education process (Knaggs et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the vast majority of students who are clustered disproportionately in these high-poverty institutions tend to be African American (Parsons & Turner, 2014). Schools that serve low-income African
American males tend to possess fewer and lower quality resources and are typically located in segregated inner-city areas, which can influence these students’ college aspirations (Anyon, 2005; Cox, 2016; Parsons & Turner, 2014). Consequently, concerning the needs of low-income African American males and college access, urban districts are failing to properly prepare these students for post-secondary education (Anyon, 2005).

**Theoretical**

Through Becker’s (2009) human capital theory, college can be the vehicle that can grant an individual more knowledge (capital), as a result, the more capital (social/cultural) people earn, the more valuable they will be to themselves and their community. Brand and Xie (2010) claimed individuals who are the least likely to gain access to higher education benefit the most from attending college. Consequently, access to post-secondary education was the goal of this study for lifting low-income African American males out of their socio-economic condition. Bell’s (1995) critical race theory (CRT) guided this study to better identify the racist undercurrents influencing the various barriers facing low-income African American male high school graduates to college access. Patton (2016) reported how scholars within the field of higher education have begun to incorporate CRT to highlight hidden and blatant inequities towards minority students. As a result, this particular study added to the body of literature by allowing us to hear directly from the target population, which is almost invisible in the college access literature. Welton and Martinez (2014) argued, “An epistemology is needed that better represents the complex process students of color endure in the pursuit of higher education. Educational research is often racially biased leaving out the perspectives of people of color” (p. 204). Further research was needed to understand why low-income African American male high school graduates are graduating high school but not enrolling in post-secondary institutions.
Situation to Self

I am a graduate of a New Jersey inner-city public high school. Today, as a senior adjunct lecturer at a college in New Jersey, I understand my story is the exception and not the norm. Two years after graduating high school I was finally able to enroll in college. Due to not being prepared for college, I had to take several remedial courses in the beginning of my college career. Moreover, I did not know how to navigate basic resources like computers and was ill-informed about the process of matriculating to college. Fortunately, through hard work and persistence, I managed to struggle my way through my freshman year in college until I was able to catch up on the basic skills needed to succeed. Reflecting back on my college journey, no student should have to go through that experience, regardless of their race or social class. I realize too often minority students are blamed for their academic struggles not considering how the education system has failed these students first (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019).

During my years leading up to college, I had only two teachers of color from kindergarten to high school graduation, and both teachers were nonacademic teachers. The public schools I attended were low-income and high-minority schools. Although the students were predominantly African American, there was a lack of diversity within the teaching staff, administrators, and the curriculum. My teachers were not the most qualified, resources were out of date, and the schools struggled with funding. However, we were expected to compete on standardized tests and college applications against students from advantaged backgrounds, who for the most part had a completely different educational experience. Generally, their teachers were better qualified in the subject area, they had better resources at their disposal, their curriculum was more challenging, and the students could identify with the curriculum, teachers and administrators (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Although I am describing my educational
background that took place over 20 years ago, many of these systemic patterns are still present in predominantly African American low-income communities today (Barnes & Slate, 2014). After graduating high school, I was not prepared to go to college, academically, socially, or culturally—hence, why I selected low-income African American male high school graduates as my target population for this study.

This was a backyard study; many of the issues and barriers explored in this study I experienced firsthand during my academic journey. The sites selected to conduct my research I am very familiar with. One location was the school district I attended over two decades ago, while the other setting I have worked for over 10 years. I have a passion for working in low-income communities because I identify with many of the opportunity gaps facing this population. For the purposes of this study, the philosophical assumption used in my research was axiological. My firsthand experience dealing with this phenomenon influenced how I approached this study. My axiological assumption influenced me to select college access as the goal for this study as well as my decision to target low-income African American males due to my experience with applying to college. Through this assumption, I was able to position myself within the study by identifying my positionality in relation to the context and setting of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework utilized in this study was CRT. This interpretive framework granted me the opportunity to present stories about discrimination from the perspective of the target population (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Furthermore, it allowed for counter-stories by African American males that can assist in understanding college access from the perspective of those at the margins of society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, the paradigm that guided this study was constructivism. “One of the most important principles of educational psychology is that teachers cannot simply give students knowledge. Students must construct
knowledge in their own minds” (Slavin, 2012, p. 218). Constructivist theories developed out of the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Slavin, 2012). Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that constructivism is an epistemological position based on the assumption that social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it. One of the concerns that was raised in this study was how low-income African American males are not active participants in their own learning, which can influence their college aspirations.

Problem Statement

Post-secondary enrollment has increased substantially over the past few decades; however, many students, specifically low-income African American males are still underrepresented in higher education (Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, & Umbach, 2016). Higher education enrollment rates for African American students has remained at a virtual standstill compared to enrollment rates of other minorities (Alford, 2000). Not only are students from low socioeconomic backgrounds underrepresented in higher education, their numbers appear to be falling: the proportion of high school graduates from the bottom quintile of family income enrolling in college declined 10.4 percentage points from 2008 (55.9%) to 2013 (45.5%) (Means, Hudson, & Tish, 2019). College enrollment continues to vary based on socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics (Means et al., 2016). In general, the literature suggests that children from lower socioeconomic classes are at a greater disadvantage academically compared to their higher income counterparts; however, there are other underlying constructs that may need to be investigated (Gaxiola, 2017; Ross 2016). Students who come from underprivileged backgrounds, combined with racism, weak curricula, and less-educated parents- face incredible odds to be prepared for college (Cati et al., 2015). In the near future, many of the new jobs in our country will require some form of college
credentials (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). Moreover, with the cost of college tuition rising each year, affordability and funding presents another set of challenges facing these students (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). If these inequities are not addressed, these disparities can continue generationally impacting future low-income inner-city communities (Bourdieu, 2011). See Figure 2 for college enrollment rates of 18- to 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity for 2000, 2010, and 2017 (NCES, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined a problem as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for a study. The current literature on college access tends to focus on socioeconomic status but fails to address how the intersection of race, sex, and class influences college enrollment, specifically for high school graduates (Wilkins, 2014). Furthermore, the current discourse attaches nobility to higher education without examining how it also contributes to the inequality it purports to disrupt (Patton, 2016). Further research was needed to identify why low-income African American male high graduates are not enrolling in post-secondary institutions. See Figure 3 for college enrollment rates of 18- to 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity and sex for the years 2000 and 2017 (NCES, 2018).

The problem is low-income African American males are graduating high school, but a disproportionate amount of them are not enrolling into college. Furthermore, the pathway to post-secondary education for this demographic is plagued with barriers compared to the pathway of their White advantaged counterparts (Cox, 2016). This problem is not specific to the northeastern region of the United States; these systemic barriers can be found in many low-income communities throughout the country (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Knaggs et al., 2019). Through this study, I conducted a collective case study identifying these barriers to understand
how they are contributing to this phenomenon which is disproportionately affecting low-income African American male high school graduates within two communities.

Schools today recognize that some groups are at a larger disadvantage than others and aim at compensating these students in order to make sure that everyone is capable of attaining the same academic goals (Freeman, 2005). Overall, the literature suggests that the decision for a student to go on to college is complex and it is the by-product of numerous family- and school-based factors that in many cases decide for the student (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Parental influence, socioeconomic status, compounded with racial discrimination may have significant effects on students’ educational trajectories (Wilkins, 2014). It is unclear whether improving access to college will ultimately interrupt many of the systemic barriers found in low-income African American communities. However, identifying the categories and themes discovered from the literature can move the research forward around this phenomenon. Furthermore, by hearing from the students directly, this study highlighted some of these cyclical obstacles that keep this specific group (low-income African American male high school graduates) locked out of the higher education system. Utilizing CRT shifted the traditional narrative surrounding college access and African Americans away from a deficit view of low-income African American communities as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages (Yosso, 2005). Instead, the focus will be on learning from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). Currently, our education system seems to simply reinforce the dominant group’s values and history while the remaining groups’ perspectives are not included or celebrated in the curriculum, which can influence post-secondary aspirations (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015).
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers facing low-income African American male high school graduates in the northeastern region of the United States. For the purposes of this study, barriers were generally defined as the limited opportunities for post-secondary education due to structural, cultural, and racialized obstacles (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). The theory that guided this study was CRT, developed by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Bell (1995) maintained that this interpretive framework is ideologically committed to the struggle of racism, institutionally and by law. This theory allowed the voices of these low-income African American male graduates to tell their counter-stories, while providing a framework to highlight how racism is built into the process of matriculating into college. Furthermore, CRT’s approach to education involves a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of minority communities in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Gaxiola, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

Significance of the Study

Having access to quality education should be a human right, but our current system robs low-income African American males of that opportunity (Cati et al., 2015). Through a review of the literature, I identified three overarching obstacles facing low-income African American males’ college aspirations: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. Previous research focused on many of the structural and cultural issues; however, more research was needed to understand how these issues, compounded with racism, influence low-income African American males’ post-secondary enrollment decisions (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The target population selected for this study often experiences racial discrimination throughout their academic career, which may have influenced their educational aspirations (O’Hara et al., 2012).
Lastly, this study highlighted a population (low-income African American male high school graduates) that tends to be ignored by the literature; the focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or students who are enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Further research was needed on low-income African American male high school graduates who are ill-prepared for post-secondary education and ultimately do not enroll. Every year low-income African American students are graduating high school, yet they are not academically prepared for the rigor of college instruction and are not enrolling into higher education (Patton, 2016). There seems to be invisible barriers preventing this group of high school graduates from college enrollment. This study permitted their voices to contribute to the research surrounding this educational phenomenon. The significance of this study was practical, theoretical, and empirical. Highlighting barriers that limit college access benefits all stakeholders experiencing this phenomenon. Moreover, it propels the research forward around this issue while informing policy and practice.

**Research Questions**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to identify the barriers to college access. A qualitative approach was appropriate, as this study aimed to hear the voices of low-income high school graduates who identify as African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. Specifically, a collective case study was the appropriate research design for this study because it provided insight and facilitated understanding of the systemic issues facing multiple cases of African American high school graduates as it relates to college access (Stake, 1995). Stake’s (1995) collective case research design fits better for this particular research plan due to its focus on the issue compared to the individual cases. The following questions guided this study:
Central Research Question

What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates?

This central research question grounded the entire study. The answers to this question allowed us to hear the participants’ voices directly while advancing knowledge to improve practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central phenomenon (barriers) was very broad, so I asked sub questions to get a better understanding of the barriers low-income African American male high school graduates experience as they pursue college. The sub questions were divided into three areas: structural, cultural, and racialized (Gonzalez et al., 2003).

Sub Question 1: What are the structural barriers that low-income African Americans face as they prepare for college?

This first sub question addressed the systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males in the education system as they prepare for college (Cati et al., 2015).

Sub Question 2: What are the cultural barriers that low-income African Americans face accessing college?

The second sub question referred to the social component facing this target population as they attempt to gain access to college. Bottiani et al. (2016) expressed how students of color must traverse significant ethnic borders to feel fully part of a school in which middle-class, majority cultural norms often predominate.

Sub Question 3: What are the racialized barriers to college aspirations?

This final sub question addressed the presence of institutional racism embedded in the college enrollment process. This question granted the counter-stories to take form as the
participants reflect on their experiences with systemic racism (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cati et al., 2015).

**Definitions**

1. *Barriers* - The limited opportunities for post-secondary education due to structural, cultural, and racialized obstacles (Gonzalez et al., 2003).

2. *Structural Barriers* – The systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males (Cati et al., 2015).

3. *Cultural Barriers* – The limitations of norms, values, and history in a learning environment that alienates students from feeling fully acclimated (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cati et al., 2015).

4. *Racialized Barriers* – The presence of institutional racism embedded in the college enrollment process (Hope et al., 2015).

5. *Low-income Graduates* – High school graduates who received free or reduced lunch during high school (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

6. *Intersectionality* – The idea that race, class, and gender (and other ascribes statuses) do not operate as distinct categories of experience but are lived conjointly (Wilkins, 2014).


8. *Socioeconomic Status* – An individual’s social and economic standing in society (Freeman, 2005).

9. *College Aspiration* – The desire to attend higher education (Strayhorn, 2015).

10. *College Ready* – To equip students with the knowledge necessary to prepare for and enroll in a post-secondary institution (Welton & Martinez, 2014).
11. *Income Inequality* – The uneven distribution of income between the social classes (Cox, 2016).

12. *Racial Inequality* – The unequal treatment of individuals based on their race (Freeman, 2005).


14. *NCLB* – The No Child Left Behind Act that sought to level the playing field by narrowing class and racial gaps in school performance by establishing common expectations for all schools (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

15. *Title I* – A provision in the NCLB was intended to address many of the inequities still found in many low-income high-minority schools by providing additional funds for supplementary services (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

16. *Disadvantaged* – The term describes the absence of certain conditions that other more privileged sub-groups have access to (Banerjee, 2016).


18. *Critical Race Theory* – An interpretive framework ideologically committed to the struggle of racism, institutionally and by law (Bell, 1995).


Summary

This study provided all stakeholders with a better understanding of the barriers facing low-income African American male high school graduates to college access. As college education becomes increasingly important, it is estimated many of the new jobs in the future will require some form of college credentials (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). The problem is low-income African American males are graduating high school, but a disproportionate number of these high school graduates are not enrolling into college. Furthermore, the pathway to post-secondary education for this demographic is plagued with barriers compared to the pathway of their White advantaged peers (Cox, 2016). The purpose of this collective case study was to understand these barriers (structural, cultural, and racialized) facing a population of 10 low-income African American male high school graduates in the northeastern region of the United States. The findings of this study were significant, due to its potential of informing future research, educational policy, and practice. The following chapter will review the literature on college access to provide a foundation for the study while identifying reoccurring themes and gaps from previous studies.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The equalizing opportunities for quality K-12 education and fair college access has a long history (St. John, 2017). When one compares the quality of education of low-income African American students to their affluent White peers, social class and racism play a significant role in achievement, performance, and outcomes (Reardon, 2013). Students from lower-income households do not perform as well academically to their higher income peers on many outcomes (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2015). Moreover, family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting student achievement (Reardon, 2013). Students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds combined with less-educated parents face incredible odds to be successful in the classroom (Kaushal, 2014). With income inequality increasing, the quality of education for low-income students (particularly African American males) is of great concern as it relates to post-secondary education (Cox, 2016). Students who do not attend college predominantly come from low-income families, live in underdeveloped areas within major cities, and attend ineffective elementary and secondary schools (Anyon, 2005; Pitre, 2006; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Those who have the opportunity to attend college generally enroll in institutions that are undercapitalized, and they graduate at a rate that is significantly lower than their more advantaged peers (Grodsky, 2010; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Despite the growth and change in the demography of the U.S., higher education is still overwhelmingly White in terms of physical representation of students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, policies, and campus spaces (Patton, 2016). Ensuring access to post-secondary education for all Americans is an important issue facing the nation and was the focus of this study. Higher education has a responsibility to address this challenge and to maintain fair access to all, irrespective of one’s socioeconomic
status, race, or gender (Banerjee, 2016; Hurtado, 1997). Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often face negative obstacles that take them away from continuing their education (Banerjee, 2016; Perna, 2013). This chapter will review the literature on low-income African American male high school graduates and college access.

**Theoretical Framework**

Four theories were leveraged to better understand the research questions in this study, they included Becker’s (2009) human capital theory, Bourdieu’s (1986) social reproduction theory, Tierney and Venegas’ (2009) cultural ecological model, and Bell’s (1995) critical race theory. Human capital theory was instrumental in guiding my decision to utilize college enrollment as the measure of success in this study. Hence, acquiring more human capital can address the phenomenon in this study and influence trajectory for future generations (Becker, 2009). Social reproduction theory was employed to understand how social and cultural capital are passed down from one generation to the next, creating cyclical barriers to college access (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The cultural ecological model assisted me in understanding the college choice process for low-income African American males who are historically underrepresented in post-secondary education (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Lastly, CRT was the theoretical perspective that guided the entire study. This theoretical lens was critical in maintaining how race and power shape many of the barriers presented in this study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Human Capital Theory**

College enrollment is an important determinant of human capital (Huntington-Klein, 2018). Human capital theory was developed by Gary Becker. Becker (2009) defined human capital as an investment in an individual's education and training that is similar to business
investments in equipment. Becker (2009) claimed schooling is a form of capital, in the sense that it can improve health, raise earnings, or add to a person’s appreciation. Brand and Xie (2010) argued, “Individuals who are least likely to obtain a college education, benefit the most from college” (p. 292). Research suggests gaining a college education can solve many of the issues plaguing lower-income communities (Harper & Davis III, 2012; Roderick, 2011). Consequently, college enrollment was the construct utilized to measure success in this study. Through Becker’s (2009) human capital theory, college can grant an individual more knowledge (capital), as a result, the more capital (social/cultural) individuals earn, the more valuable they will be to themselves and their community. Human capital theory and human rights have influenced many educational policies addressing the inequitable opportunities for students pursuing higher education (St. John, 2017). According to Becker (2009), education and training are the most important investments in human capital. Obtaining a college education in the United States can potentially increase income, even after controlling for direct and indirect costs for schooling (Becker, 2009; Perna, 2006). St. John (2017) posited that building human capital can reduce gaps in opportunities to attain a higher education. Becker (2009) argued that the return on investment from a college education can increase one’s capital by 13%. Criticisms against human capital theory argued that a college education does not necessarily increase productivity; rather, productive students go on to college (Becker, 2009). Becker (2009) contended, although this alternative view may explain some of the correlation with education and capital, it does not explain the entire relationship between the two constructs. Through human capital theory, this study suggested gaining access to college can ultimately influence the trajectory of low-income African American males by increasing their cultural and economic capital (Becker, 2009). Additionally, by increasing one’s cultural capital, it can produce more educated people
generationally disrupting many of the cyclical barriers to college access found in those communities (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, this study also utilized social reproduction theory which assisted the researcher in understanding the cyclical nature of many of the barriers presented in this study.

**Social Reproduction Theory**

Social reproduction theory was developed by Pierre Bourdieu, the theory focused on the transmission of cultural capital across generations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Higher education institutions serve as venues through which formal knowledge production rooted in racism and white supremacy is passed down (Patton, 2016). Society is divided into dominant and dominated groups by means of the pedagogic action of the elite group, which imposes its cultural arbitrary as the legitimate definition of the educational culture (Broadfoot, 1978). Bourdieu’s theory claimed that schools will generally ignore the habitus of children of non-dominant classes, which is the primary cause of low attainments of working-class students (Nash, 1990). These dominant groups function within the social structures that enable them to reproduce information and power from one generation to the next (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Bourdieu’s theoretical insight about how a hierarchical society reproduces itself has often been interpreted as a way to explain why the academic and social outcomes of low-income African American males are significantly lower than the outcomes of their affluent White counterparts (Yosso, 2005). Consequently, this theory was significant in understanding why children of college-educated parents are more likely to go to college themselves compared to non-college-educated parents of lower-income children (Welton & Martinez, 2014). The education system contributes to this cyclical pattern by reproducing the distribution of cultural capital and social structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Patton (2016) expressed how “the reproduction of racism occurs without much disruption because those with the
power to change institutions were also educated by these institutions, meaning they graduate from their institutions and often perform their lives devoid of racial consciousness” (p. 324). Thus, the failure to educate students about their own racial biases and attitudes results in racist college graduates who later become racist professionals, lawmakers, educational leaders, and teachers (Patton, 2016). Moreover, the content of the curriculum in a school is but a sampling of the dominant culture and regarded as arbitrary (Nash, 1990). Yosso (2005) argued for a critical examination of the systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. If the cultural arbitrary of the school is not the cultural arbitrary of the students, or a section of its students, then the effectiveness of the school as an agent of social mobility will be weakened greatly (Nash, 1990). To better understand how cultural arbitrary influences college aspiration for low-income African American male high school graduates, the college choice process for this target population must be assessed.

**Cultural Ecological Model**

Research suggests higher education is the great equalizer and affords life opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups (Patton, 2016). A review of the literature revealed that most researchers use the Hossler-Gallagher Model to research the college choice process (Chapman et al., 2018). Employing this model, the prospective student moves through three stages in the college enrollment process: predisposition, search, and choice (Chapman et al., 2018; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The predisposition stage includes parental expectations and encouragement, college-bound curricula, extra-curricular activities, and student ability (Chapman et al., 2018). According to this frequently applied yet inadequate model, students develop college aspirations, then begin a search for colleges, and finally choose a college where they would like to
matriculate (Cox, 2016). Cox (2016) contended this traditional college choice model most accurately describes the navigation processes typical of more advantaged students. However, working within this model to understand historically underrepresented students’ path to college can mislead researchers to attribute disappointing outcomes to students’ deficiencies (Cox, 2016). Patton (2016) claimed this meritocratic discourse is laced with racist and classist assumptions that posits hard work alone is sufficient for marginalized groups to excel. The traditional model does not account for many of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers low-income African American males face in their pursuit of a college education. College access models that are cloaked in the myth of hard work- without acknowledging racism in the college admissions, recruitment, and admissions process is irresponsible (Patton, 2016). Tierney and Venegas (2009) offered an alternative college choice model (cultural ecological model) that took a better account of the broader implications shaping low-income African American communities and their post-secondary aspirations. As a result, for this study I applied the cultural ecological model to assist in understanding low-income African American males’ journey to higher education. Applying this framework involves developing a detailed understanding of the social context in which the students live and interact; while investigating students’ college-related decisions as they engage daily within these environments (Cox, 2016). Lastly, I selected CRT as the theoretical perspective to understand this phenomenon.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed by Derrick Bell and his colleagues (Bell, 1995). Bell (1995) maintained that this interpretive framework is ideologically committed to the struggle of racism, institutionally and by law. The theory first developed as a counter-legal scholarship to the positivist and liberal legal discourse of civil rights (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
CRT was then leveraged as an analytical framework to assess inequity in education (Hiraldo, 2010). This theoretical framework begins with the assumption that racism is normal in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Through the CRT lens, communities of color nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, CRT as a theoretical framework is comprised of the following five tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1998) also argued that this theory also demonstrates how Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) first introduced this concept to the field of education to address racial disparities in the education system. The authors argued that the cause of African American poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling was institutional and structural racism (Delgado, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The CRT approach to education also involved a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of African American students in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Gaxiola, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) claimed that African American youth continue to engage in school contexts that fail to see their cultural diversity as strengths to be built upon. Furthermore, it is necessary to engage in culturally relevant and responsive educational practices that draw upon and support minority students’ multiple and fluid cultural identities while preparing them for college (Knight et al., 2019; Sleeter, 2017).

The field of education identified five tenets of CRT that can and should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum and policy: the intercentricity of race and racism, the challenge to dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge,
and the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) claimed “CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity” (p.73). CRT was instrumental in this study as a theoretical and analytical framework by challenging the ways race and racism influence college access (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, the use of counter-stories in analyzing higher education’s climate provided ways in which an institution can become more inclusive and not simply superficially diverse (Hiraldo, 2010). For this particular study, CRT was the interpretive lens utilized to examine barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates.

**Related Literature**

The college choice literature revealed that low-income students and students of color are being disenfranchised due to structural and cultural practices associated with geography, higher education selectivity, and their relationship to merit, elitism, and prestige (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). Important thinkers in the field of college access include Hossler, Perna, Freeman, Paulsen, McDonough, and Cabrera (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). These authors have made extensive contribution to the work of underrepresented communities and college access. In my synthesis of the literature, barriers to college access for low-income African American males are clustered into three distinct areas: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. Research indicates that African American students who are able to graduate high school, may be less likely than many of their peers to immediately enroll in a 4-year college or university (Holland, 2010). This literature review highlighted these barriers to better understand how they influence low-income African American male high school graduates’ decision to enroll in post-secondary education. The most prevalent barrier found in the literature was structural.
Structural barriers to college access can exist inside and outside of the classroom (Cati et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2015).

**Structural Barriers**

Structural barriers were defined as the systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males (Anyon, 2005; Cati et al., 2015). Post-secondary education is considered one of the main paths leading to opportunity, economic progress, and social mobility (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Perna & Jones, 2013). However, the pathway to post-secondary education is far from equal for all students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Roderick, 2011). There is a close link between the quality of K-12 education one receives and college access (Jackson, Johnson, & Persico, 2015). The findings of racism in K-12 education in the forms of tracking, limited college information, and lack of college preparedness speak to some of the structural barriers found in the education system (Gaxiola, 2017; O’Hara, Gibbons, Weng, Gerrard, & Simons, 2012). Underrepresented groups in postsecondary education include racial/ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and first-generation college students (Knaggs et al., 2015). The significance of the target population in this study (low-income African American male high school graduates) demonstrates how intersectionality also influences the pathways to college. Intersectionality highlights how race, class, and gender (and other ascribed statuses) do not operate as distinct categories of experience but are lived conjointly (Wilkins, 2014). CRT scholarship has advanced educational research by addressing racism at its intersections with other forms of subordination (Gaxiola, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Critics claim that CRT does not include social class and gender as part of its framework due to its emphasis on race (Hiraldo, 2010). However, CRT scholars work to address the intersectionality of race and other social identities within their analysis as well (Hiraldo, 2010).
CRT acknowledges how race, class, sexuality and gender are interrelated and how it furthers the complexity of these social constructions (Hiraldo, 2010). As a result, intersectionality provides a framework and another dimension for understanding how multiple dimensions of identities affect college aspirations, opportunities, and outcomes (Wilkins, 2014). The scope of this study sought to understand how the intersection of being low-income, African American, and male influences the pathway to college. Structural barriers were separated into three main subject areas informed by the literature: school funding, college preparedness, and lack of college information.

**Funding.** A news report from the U.S. Department of Education (2011) documented that schools serving low-income students are being shortchanged because school districts across the country are inequitably distributing their state and local funds. The report revealed that more than 40 percent of schools that receive federal Title I money to serve disadvantaged students spent less state and local money on teachers and other personnel than schools that do not receive Title I money at the same grade level in the same district (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The Title I program was designed to provide additional resources to high-poverty schools to help them meet the greater challenges of educating at-risk students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Educators across the country understand that low-income minority students need extra support and resources to succeed, but in far too many cases, problems with assigning resources are perpetuating the problem rather than solving it (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Orr (2003) posited that school funding is associated with property taxes, which ultimately fund local school districts. “A larger tax base generally translates into a higher per-pupil expenditure. Children who attend wealthier public schools can expect a lower student-to-teacher ratio; higher-quality teachers; better facilities; and the presence of educational resources, such as computers and up-to-date books” (Orr, 2003, p. 283). This analysis suggests that many low-income schools
are receiving less than their fair share of state and local funding, leaving low-income students with fewer resources than schools attended by their advantaged peers (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015; Perna & Jones, 2013). Low-income African American males tend to be concentrated in low-resourced urban neighborhoods; and when the wealthy do not contribute equitably to public expenses, funding for services like education declines and the quality of the services tends to be low (Anyon, 2005). Low-income minority students are more likely than their White affluent counterparts to confront challenges of concentrated poverty (Balfanz, 2009). Not having access to the same resources creates multiple disadvantages for these students after high school graduation (Kaushal, 2014; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). With funds not being distributed equitably, opportunity gaps exist with technology, resource quality, and college preparedness (Knaggs et al., 2015). Reardon (2013) suggested the funding gaps between privileged and underprivileged students are present before low-income African American students start kindergarten. Additionally, these opportunity gaps tend to accelerate when they intersect with poor quality low-income schools (Grodsky, 2010; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Unfortunately, when these students manage to overcome these obstacles and graduate high school, those who qualified to be admitted to the nation’s most selective colleges ultimately never enroll in these institutions (Carnevale, 2017; Perna 2006).

There seems to be a false narrative in low-income African American communities (particularly toward males) that the only way they can attend college is through athletic scholarships (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Consequently, the lack of knowledge around financing college can pose as another barrier to post-secondary education. The students and their families are not privy to the numerous ways to fund a college education; therefore, many do not apply if they are not able to secure athletic scholarships (Wilkins, 2014).
To offset some of these funding challenges, the government offers federal Pell Grants to low-income students as a way to navigate around this structural barrier (Perna & Jones, 2013). The federal Pell Grant is an essential lever for increasing college access and completion for students from low-income families by offering financial aid that does not need to be repaid, specifically targeted to low-income families and students (Perna & Jones, 2013; Perna 2006). However, research suggests African Americans only receive a quarter of all Pell Grants issued (Carnevale, 2017). Therefore, the students who may need the grants the most are not receiving them due to lack of information (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015; Roderick, 2011). Also, the increases in the federal Pell Grant award have not kept pace with the growing costs of attending college, which poses another structural barrier (Perna & Jones, 2013). As states move towards privatization and merit-based grants, it has become increasingly difficult to demonstrate how racism and discrimination is locking out a specific population from college access (Gaxiola, 2017; St. John, 2017). The shift from grants to college loans may also be responsible for the decline in the number of low-income African American males applying to college (Orr, 2003). Orr (2003) claimed if African American adolescents are aware that their parents cannot contribute financially to their education, they may lower their expectations and may therefore not be motivated to attend college. Low-income African Americans appear to be the most impacted by these constrained economic and financial barriers, yet they are the least likely to possess information that can aid in the process of paying for college (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). Although students are receiving billions of dollars in financial aid, individuals with low-incomes, individuals whose parents did not attend college, and individuals who identify as African Americans are still less likely than other individuals to gain access to higher education (Freeman, 2005; Mwangi, 2015). While funding is extremely important, it is just one obstacle; another
structural barrier identified in the literature highlights how underserved students are not being adequately prepared for college (St. John, 2017).

**College preparedness.** College preparedness was defined as the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution (Moore et al., 2010). Balfanz (2009) claimed the primary purpose of high school is to prepare students for college. A case can be made that after decades of reform, high schools are preparing only half of their graduates, while leaving the remainder unprepared for post-secondary education (Balfanz, 2009). Members of low-income African American families are particularly much less prepared for college than their higher income White counterparts (Valentine, Konstantopoulos, & Goldrick-Rab, 2017). The inability of African American students to reach and maintain college-level academic standards is incongruent to their college goals or interest to attend (Alford, 2000). As a result, there are substantive differences in college choice depending on a student’s socioeconomic status and race (Conley, 2010). The idea that high schools should be preparing students to pursue learning beyond secondary education is not novel; what is new is the notion that essentially all students (regardless of race, gender, and SES) should be capable of pursuing college (Gonzalez, 2015). However, when college preparedness intersects with race, SES, and gender, low-income African American male high school graduates are at a unique disadvantage to college access compared to their White affluent peers (Bottiani et al., 2016; Hope et al., 2015). The majority of the lowest-SES students do not obtain the academic qualifications necessary to support college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Grodsky, 2010). Due to the lack of college preparedness found in many low-income African American communities, studies have shown that a disproportionate amount of these students do not even apply to go to college (Wells & Lynch, 2012). In the
landmark study by Cabrera and La Nasa (2001), they found that applying to a four-year institution appeared to be significantly challenging for disadvantaged students; only 65.5% of the college-qualified, high school graduates from the lowest-SES backgrounds actually apply to a four-year institution. With education becoming increasingly important in today’s society, we must ensure that each graduate is able to continue their education regardless of their race or social standing (Conley, 2010). Barnes and Slate (2014) also found that college-readiness rates of White students were higher than the college-readiness rates of African American students in reading and math by significant margins. Consequently, instead of schools breaking the cycle of inequality between the races, the authors argued it was perpetuating the inequality with the lack of college preparation geared towards low-income minority students (Barnes & Slate, 2014).

One study found that when students perceive that their high schools are not preparing them well for college, the students are less likely to aspire to post-secondary education (Pitre, 2006).

Underrepresented racial minorities (URMs) are not always exposed to rigorous math and science courses taught by well-qualified teachers, a disproportionate amount of these students attend low-performing, high-needs schools (Hope et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2015). URMs have shown to possess both academic and nonacademic (cultural and racial) risk factors that are often interconnected, which can act as barriers to college access (Knaggs et al., 2015; Pitre, 2006). Academic barriers consist of rigorous curricula, up-to-date technology, updated textbooks, qualified teachers, and advanced placement courses (Cox, 2016; Hope et al., 2015; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2015). “Unfortunately, U.S. primary and secondary educational systems often fail to adequately prepare these groups of students for higher education, which leads to lower college entrance rates than for White, more affluent students” (Knaggs et al., 2015, p. 8). Schools are not adequately preparing low-income African American male high
school graduates for post-secondary education or connecting them to the appropriate resources (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Hurtado, 1997). Further research was needed to address low-income African American males who were able to graduate high school, but not given the appropriate resources to prepare for higher education.

**College information.** High schools have structural and cultural conditions that have the potential to either enable or obstruct the distribution of college preparatory information and resources (Holland, 2010). Previous research on college choice typically focused on the impact of economics on students’ choices; however, understanding the matriculation process is fundamentally important to college access as well (Chapman et al., 2018). Low-income African American males are more likely to attend low-income schools, and these high-poverty schools in turn are associated with lower levels of teacher quality and resources (Bottiani et al., 2016). “Many students of color, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation college bound students rely heavily on school personnel to assist them with college planning because adults in their families and communities may not have first-hand knowledge” (Holland, 2010, p.112). Low-income schools often are under-resourced with guidance counselors and college information to inform their students about the process of matriculation to higher education (Conley, 2008; Welton & Martinez, 2014). George-Jackson and Gast (2015) found the following:

Low-income, African American, and Latino students are the most impacted by a lack of counseling resources, as they often attend public schools with higher student-to-counselor ratios, counselors with less knowledge and training, and counselors that use passive information dissemination techniques, such as simply handing out brochures and packets. (p. 215)
Hill (2008) found that college enrollment varied for students of different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds based on the methods their high schools used to distribute college planning information to students and their families. Research has demonstrated that when students have access to, and are engaged in, college planning activities, they are not only more likely to aspire to this level of education; but also more likely to enroll in higher education institutions (Holland, 2010). Conley (2008) claimed in affluent high schools there are opportunities for counselors to be strictly devoted to college counseling, writing letters of recommendations, communicating with admission officers, and having the time to remain current on admission procedures. Whereas in lower-income communities these counselors may not have the time to offer any of these services (Conley, 2008). These counselors, in many instances, are assigned so many students that they get acquainted only with students who seek them out or troubled students who demand their time (Conley, 2008). For low-income African American male high school graduates to be college ready, they will need to be equipped with the college information necessary to prepare for and enroll into a post-secondary institution (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Low-income African American male students tend to be first generation students; as a result, they must rely on others to gain access to this critical information about college matriculation (Freeman, 2005; Ohara et al., 2012). Unlike their advantaged peers who can rely on their cultural or social capital, low-income African American students indicate they rely on school personnel for college information and assistance, specifically guidance counselors and teachers (Mwangi, 2015; Welton & Martinez, 2014). However, in many cases guidance counselors in low-income schools can become part of the structural barriers, due to their varied duties and large caseloads (McDonough, 2005; Mwangi, 2015). Conversely, a high proportion of high-income students are more likely to receive extensive counseling, including receiving
personalized help with filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). Perna and Jones (2013) suggested that schools should be providing the following information to their most vulnerable communities: gathering information about potential college choices, educating students on the college application process, providing college-preparatory courses, college entrance examinations preparation, admission and financial aid counseling, and identifying the best institutional fit. Providing students and parents with accurate and timely information regarding college access can assist them in overcoming many of the structural barriers found in the literature (Gonzalez, 2015; Knaggs et al., 2015). The second set of barriers identified in the literature were cultural barriers.

**Cultural Barriers**

Cultural barriers were defined as the limitations of norms, values, and history in a community and learning environment that alienates students from feeling fully acclimated (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cati et al., 2015). Decades after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) students are still attending schools that are separate and unequal (Balfanz, 2009). Findings have empirically supported the argument that for low-income students, even with the right educational policies in place, school achievement is contingent on the family’s economic and cultural resources (Anyon, 2005). For instance, when parents are unable or unavailable to help their children navigate the college admissions process, the students then become responsible for establishing their own matriculation (Holland, 2010). Yosso (2005) claimed it is because culture influences how society is organized, how school curriculum is established, and how pedagogy and policy are implemented. A significant body of research clearly identifies parents as one of the strongest influences in the student college choice process (Chapman et al., 2018). “Students whose parents have cultivated a K-16 approach, in which higher education is a mandate and not
an option or suggestion, are more likely to believe in their ability to successfully apply to
college” (Chapman et al., 2018, p. 40). Having affluent and educated parents can provide unique
benefits to prospective students (Mwangi, 2015). Parental experience with college allows for
advice and/or support to prepare prospective students for higher education outside of school
resources (Banerjee, 2016; George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). Moreover, studies have
demonstrated that parental influence plays a significant role in student outcomes as well (Ross,
2016). As Reardon (2013) highlighted, the low-income achievement gap is already present
before children enter kindergarten; therefore, cultural barriers can also be a barrier to college
access. Mwangi (2015) claimed parents are the most important source of information and
support as it relates to college enrollment. Educators most often assume that schools work and
that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and
equitable system (Yosso, 2005). However, for the scope of this study, understanding the
controllable cultural barriers facing low-income African American males was of significance.
School environment has been established as an important construct to measure because of its
connections to student psychological, social, and academic outcomes (Salle, Meyers, Varjas, &
Roach, 2015). Thus, the first cultural barrier that will be discussed is the lack of belonging low-
income African American males feel towards the education system (Cati, 2015).

**Sense of belonging.** Understanding how students of color are typically not members of
the “dominant culture” is critical to learning how and why low-income African American
students are less likely to continue their education after high school, relative to their White and
Asian peers (Goldenberg, 2014). Many minority students are attending schools in which they
feel alienated and misrepresented (Childs, 2017). Low-income African American males may
benefit especially from approaches that increase their sense of belonging and connection at
school (Bottiani et al., 2016). “A sense of belonging may be especially critical for young people who must traverse significant ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic borders to feel fully a part of a school in which middle-class, majority cultural norms often predominate” (Eccles & Roeser, 2011, p. 229). African American students from low-income communities who devote their time to their studies can also be ostracized by their African American peers; pursuing college may be viewed as "acting White" in those communities (Alford, 2000). Therefore, when African Americans gain access to college, they are often socially excluded and provided little to no social support from their peers and community (Alford, 2000). The cultural ecological model that was used in this study considered how out-of-school peers, family members, community, and schools undermine or support college values, which can influence a student’s mesosystem and decision to attend college (Alford, 2000). Additionally, Cati et al. (2015) made the case that low-income students feel invisible inside the education system where their voices are often muted. Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) maintained that African American low-income males continue to engage in school contexts that fail to see their cultural diversity as strengths to be built on. As a result, URMs tend to view college as an unsupportive, unwelcoming environment which can discourage college aspirations (Strayhorn, 2015). Engaging with CRT added to the efforts of expanding the dialogue to recognize the ways in which the struggles for social justice are limited by discourses that omit and thereby silence the multiple experiences of students of color (Sleeter, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) posited that it is necessary to engage in culturally relevant and responsive educational practices to address this phenomenon. The cultural-ecological model leveraged in this study assisted the researcher in identifying culture-specific barriers and strategies to promote a positive college going culture for low-income African American males (Salle et al., 2015). This idea of culturally relevant pedagogy is derived from CRT, which can
influence college enrollment for this demographic (Delgado, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The desire of wanting to enroll in college may be perceived as a foreign notion to these students, who may not feel a part of the education system culture (Wells & Lynch, 2012). Welton and Martinez (2014) suggested that there might be a disconnect between what students believe about accessing college and the actual process. Accordingly, Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) called for the creation of culturally relevant, college-going cultures to increase the college readiness and college accessibility of African American students attending urban schools. Research results suggest that sense of belonging may influence student’s self-efficacy (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). How people behave can be predicted by what they believe themselves capable of accomplishing in the learning environment (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). In addition to not being acclimated to the learning environment, lower expectations tend to be placed on low-income African American males in educational settings which can also influence their college aspirations (Cati et al., 2015).

**Low expectations.** Educational research has not properly addressed all of the barriers to college access that surround low-income students of color such as low expectations and cynicism (Anyon, 2005). Low-income students of color who have historically been marginalized within the education system must also contend with negative labeling associated with their race (Hurtado, 1997; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Studies have shown that minority students believe they are frequently required to confront their teachers’ lower expectations of their academic abilities due to their race, class, and/or gender and those types of confrontations negatively influenced the students' schooling and college aspirations (Holland, 2010). What is more disconcerting is that research illuminates that low teacher expectations and associated practices are a form of racial profiling and one of the worst forms of racism (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Deficit
thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for their poor academic performance (Yosso, 2005). These racialized assumptions about low-income minority students are most often based on the notion that these students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and that their parents neither value nor support their child’s education (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, researchers have indicated that school personnel who hold low expectations of students may deliberately withhold critical academic and college preparatory information which can shape their desire to continue their education after high school (Holland, 2010). Due to the negative stereotypes in many cases being internalized by these students, many students of color do not even attempt to pursue higher education (Carnavale, 2017). Strayhorn (2015) claimed “Having reasonable portion of confidence in one’s academic abilities seems important for African American males’ preparation for college and success” (p. 54). Many low-income communities view teachers as the experts; as a result, their opinions on students’ trajectory tend to be trusted and held with high regard (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Research was needed to understand how teachers’ racialized beliefs and expectations of students can be a major systemic challenge to their abilities to fully enact justice-oriented pedagogies (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Problems pertaining to teachers’ expectations have often been determined by ‘high’ versus ‘low’ expectations, but few have captured the contradictions that are deeply embedded in their practices (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Welton and Martinez (2014) claimed teachers and academic counselors often make the executive decision to relegate low-income African American students to lower academic tracks by adamantly coercing them to pursue the minimum graduation plan. Banerjee (2016) claimed racial minority students are disproportionately placed into these lower level academic courses and programs including vocational education, bypassing the college route. Teachers, whether intentionally or unintentionally, tend to set low expectations on
students of color influencing how they view themselves and their post-secondary plans (Banerjee, 2016). Bottiani et al. (2016) coined this phenomenon deficit thinking; it refers to educators’ presumption that within-student deficiencies (family dysfunction, lack of valuing education, etc.) among students of color are the cause of lower achievement among these populations. Hope et al. (2015) expressed, “From race-based schooling experiences, youth come to understand the normative value of their race and the role they are expected to fulfill in society” (p.102). Thus, some of these experiences may influence how low-income African American males view themselves and their post-secondary options (Hope et al., 2015). These low expectations that are placed on low-income African American males can influence how they perceive their cultural capital.

**Cultural capital.** Despite the prevalence of culture in both teachers’ and students’ lives, schools are a pivotal place where culture should be shared and developed (Goldenberg, 2014). It is important to understand how the dominant culture is valued more than others—and how this plays out in low-income schools (Goldenberg, 2014). Yosso (2005) contended that cultural capital can be acquired two ways, from one’s family and through formal schooling. The manner in which schools forcefully assimilate minority students through policies and practices has been well documented as a form of decapitalization, whereby students of color are stripped of their cultural and social assets (Welton & Martinez, 2014). This form of discourse is rooted in racial inferiority of people of color and their lack of capital; rather than focus on what these students possess as capital, the research tends to focus on what they do not have (Patton, 2016). Bourdieu argued that the knowledge of the upper and middle classes is often considered capital which is valuable to a hierarchical society (Yosso, 2005). Cultural capital can be acquired to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and social class-deliberately or unconsciously.
Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction was intended to provide a powerful means of investigating systems of cultural reproduction (Nash, 1990). Cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied as a disposition of the mind, the body, and objectified in cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu’s theory claimed that schools will generally ignore the habitus of children of non-dominant classes, which is the primary cause of low attainments of working-class students (Nash, 1990). Hence, this was how Bourdieu’s understanding of cultural capital informed this study as it relates to understanding low-income African American males’ college aspirations. Bourdieu (1986) used cultural capital to explain unequal educational achievement of youth, as it is a non-financial asset affecting social mobility. However, Yosso (2005) argued that this view of cultural capital often positions affluent White students and their families as having access to cultural capital and students of color as lacking cultural capital. Low-income African American males have to navigate two worlds: the world of the predominantly White, middle-class school community-and the world of their personal cultural identity (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Low-income African American males’ culture is not valued in the dominant culture of the education system (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Students who feel academically marginalized by race or class in the learning environment develop contextually protective identity strategies to retain dignity, thereby losing their sense of cultural capital (Wilkins, 2014). Researchers have used CRT as a framework to explore the strengths and cultural capital of students of color (Means et al., 2019). Cati et al. (2015) argued for the development of an Ethnic Studies curriculum to address this phenomenon; by embracing underrepresented students’ history, culture, and humanity, schools can offer a liberating counter-narrative to the dominant discourse. Through the process of having students learn about their culture in schools, they will be exposed to existing cultural capital and learn to perceive the learning environment as a space
that culturally empowers their community, rather than through deficit lens (Cati et al., 2015). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that the behaviors and attitudes and motivations of African American students towards schooling are not deviant or pathological, but a mode of adaptation necessitated by their ecological structure or effective environment. Therefore, by engaging low-income African American males through culturally empowering pedagogies, it may influence their perception of schooling and higher education. The last barrier discovered in the literature was racialized barriers, these particular barriers highlight the presence of institutional racism embedded in the college enrollment process (Hope et al., 2015).

**Racialized Barriers**

Low-income African American males have learned a well-defined fear of excelling in academic arenas that traditionally have been defined as the prerogative of White Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explained how the long-term subordination of African Americans in the United States has shaped how they define themselves in opposition to their White counterparts. Simply put, what is perceived as appropriate for White Americans (college attendance) may be defined by low-income African Americans as inappropriate for them (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Moreover, in low-income schools, where White teachers often predominate, there tends to be a racist assumption that low-income African American students do not have cultural capital, at least not any that can be beneficial in the classroom (Goldenberg, 2014). Consequently, CRT exposes how racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared ‘normative’ values and ‘neutral’ social scientific principles and practices within the education system (Yosso, 2005). CRT in education serve as a tool and framework to challenge scholars and educators to raise questions and engage in dialogue to unsettle racelessness (Patton, 2016). Racialized barriers tend to be overlooked in the literature of college
access; therefore, identifying ways to close the racial gaps in college access was very important to this study. Research indicates the racial/ethnic composition of the college-age population is dramatically changing (Hope et al., 2015; Perna, 2006). The number of African American high school graduates are expected to increase, while the number of White public high school graduates is projected to decline (Perna, 2006; Perna & Jones, 2013). Although the student body is becoming more diverse, the diversity is not reflected within the curriculum, faculty, and administration (Sleeter, 2017; Strayhorn, 2015). There seems to be a racial “mismatch” between primarily non-White public-school populations and their primarily White teaching forces, which continues to be under-examined through an appropriate cultural lens (Goldenberg, 2014). The majority of teachers, approximately 80% of whom are White women, are educated on college campuses, in schools of education that typically have predominantly White teacher educators (Patton, 2016). Furthermore, these same teachers then create and impart the same racelessness curricular knowledge onto their students, who graduate and go on to teach more students using the same White lens (Patton, 2016). By continuing to engage in a system and curriculum that does not embrace the values of minority students, low-income African American male students are being pressured to assimilate to the dominant group’s values (Welton & Martinez, 2014).

However, when the ideology of racism is examined and racist systems are identified, victims of racism can often find their voice (Yosso, 2005). The issue with longstanding racist systems is that the voices of people of color are not represented in a substantial capacity (Patton, 2016). Through CRT, this study allowed the victims of these racist practices to become empowered participants; by hearing their own stories and the stories of their peers, they were able to articulate the arguments against them and learned how to frame the arguments themselves (Yosso, 2005). Reviewing the literature, the following themes were identified as racialized
barriers to college access for low-income African American male high school graduates: racial
discrimination, hegemony, and exclusive curriculums.

**Racial discrimination.** The establishment of higher education is deeply rooted in racism
and white supremacy (Patton, 2016). Harper (2012) claimed most higher education scholars rely
on everything but racism in their attempts to explain, theorize about, and discuss why a
disproportionate number of African Americans fail to attend post-secondary institutions.
However, when higher education ignores the existence of systematic racism, diversity action
plans become ineffective (Hiraldo, 2010). For the purposes of this study, racial discrimination
was defined as limited access to political power, economic resources, and cultural capital (Hope
et al., 2015). Thus, CRT assisted in analyzing the role of race and racism in perpetuating social
disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups (Hiraldo, 2010). Moreover, CRT in
this study unearthed what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege in higher
education, as well as the profound patterns of exclusion that exist in our society (Hiraldo, 2010).
Low-income African American males experience racial discrimination in their elementary,
secondary, and post-secondary educational experiences (Gaxiola, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Racial
discrimination includes experiences with racial stereotyping, discrimination from teachers and
staff, lack of institutional support for a positive racial climate, and lack of racial diversity in staff
and curricular offerings (Hope et al., 2015). Today, racism is minimized which compels some
Whites to view racial discrimination only through the narrow lens of overt, outrageous acts
(Harper, 2012). Anything that falls short of that is often misinterpreted as people of color being
sensitive or unfairly playing the race card (Harper, 2012). Almost half of the school-aged
students in the country are from racially or culturally diverse backgrounds (NCES, 2013). Yet,
more than 80 percent of current teachers are White females (NCES, 2013). Making strategic
changes to how schools and administrations are staffed, and how the environment embraces diversity, can directly influence minority students’ trust in the education system (Childs, 2017). Allowing racism and classism to complicate the pathway to college by isolating disadvantaged students influence these students from seeing a future with higher education (Knaggs et al., 2015). The subsequent racialized barrier was employed to identify more covert and very difficult to detect racialized practices within the education system. The continued inaccessibility for students of color at two-year and four-year institutions is a result of the failures of addressing how the hierarchy across higher education institutions contribute to hegemony (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). Students of color are consistently funneled into three paths as it relates to higher education: community colleges, for-profit institutions, or no college at all (Dache-Gerbino, 2017).

**Hegemony.** Hegemony is the way in which the hierarchy of schools, sections, teachers and pupils almost inevitably entices lower class pupils into disguised, dead-end branches of the educational system, whilst preserving the illusion of free competition (Broadfoot, 1978). Patton (2016) claimed “the functioning of U.S. higher education is intricately linked to imperialistic and capitalistic efforts that fuel the intersections of race, property, and oppression” (p. 317). For several decades, American cities and suburbs have been divided across racial lines due to the intensification of capital in highly concentrated White suburban areas and the exploitation of labor in highly concentrated African American urban areas (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). In many American cities, a domino effect of concentrating poverty and suburbanizing wealth shapes discourses of local higher education access for residents of color (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). For-profit institutions are overwhelmingly populated in high-minority areas, leaving low-income students swimming in debt from schools with degree mills reputation (Patton, 2016). Through
the lens of CRT, this study explored how the dominant group has a vested interest in the perpetuation of the mainstream academic knowledge that supports the maintenance of dominant structures and restrict the mobility of subordinate racial minorities as it relates to college access (Patton, 2016). Higher education institutions use various semantic substitutes for racism, which makes it harder to detect (Harper, 2012). Hegemony is evident in the practices of K-12 and higher education institutions, for example, what is assigned to read, how the professors/teachers engage race in class discussions and the curriculum, and the normative parameters of racial sensemaking evident in the field of education (Harper, 2012). Because students do not read about racism in the literature or talk about it explicitly in class, many students assume, perhaps unintentionally, that racism no longer exists (Harper, 2012). Bourdieu (1986) expressed how White, middle class culture is positioned as the standard, therefore, all other forms and expressions of culture are judged in comparison to this norm. Although schools contend that they engage in a color-blind education system, these color-blind perspectives perpetuate racial inequality and reproduce racial and cultural hegemony in school practices (Cati et al., 2015). As a result, color-blind ideologies are not color-blind at all; these strategies of erasure are simultaneously practices of whiteness (Cati et al., 2015). These ideologies often support color blindness as an altruistic framework and encourage teachers’ abilities to see race and racism, which can often exacerbate the racial biases that students experience in school (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Harper (2012) argued that Whites use color-blind racism primarily to explain racial differences in ways that exonerate them of any responsibility or guilt. Yosso (2005) claimed the advantage of CRT in education is that it refutes these dominant ideologies and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of minority students. Comprehensive college access literature fails to consider how these practices influence the pathway to college (Welton &
Martinez, 2014). By engaging in culturally empowering pedagogies, educators can supersede many of these irrational and dehumanizing hegemonic forces that discourages low-income African American males from continuing their studies after high school graduation (Cati et al., 2015). The last racialized barrier explored in this study is the curriculum used in predominantly African American low-income schools.

**Exclusive curriculum.** Patton (2016) argued that the curriculum excludes the diverse perspectives of all students and allows for a Eurocentric perspective that aligns more with the experiences of White students. Moreover, due to its normalcy, the curriculum is never questioned (Patton, 2016). The curriculum continues to be passed down through generations without accounting for the benefit it accrues for White students (Patton, 2016). The lack of inclusivity in the academic curriculum supports the notion of colorblindness that works against dismantling social inequities (Hiraldo, 2010). In order to take a closer step towards eradicating racism on college campuses and the matriculation process, students, teachers, and administrators need to incorporate dialogues around race throughout the curriculum and student activities (Hiraldo, 2010). The literature on college readiness and access has been monolithically based on students’ standardized test scores, prompting this study to highlight other significant constructs such as racialized barriers—specifically, exclusive curriculums (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Research on higher education has yet to consider whether the climate for racial/ethnic diversity specifically within the curriculum may affect the enrollment of students of color into these institutions (Garibay & Vincent, 2018). This study defined an inclusive curriculum as a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse individuals in a learning environment (Childs, 2017). Whereas an exclusive curriculum does the opposite, it may communicate to young low-income African American males that they are unwelcome in school
or college, and because of it, they may experience a reduced sense of belonging within the education system (O’Hara et al., 2012). Higher education research has yet to incorporate how components of the climate for racial/ethnic diversity may affect college choice for students of color (Garibay & Vincent, 2018). Given the salience of race/ethnicity and racial climate for students of color in higher education, expectancies for success, attainment value, utility value, and curriculum are linked to the climate for racial/ethnic diversity (Garibay & Vincent, 2018). Schools largely engage in a “one-size-fits-all” curricular approach to instruction and expect that approach to meet the diverse needs of every student in the school (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Faculty and administration are not challenged to rethink their curriculum, address their biases, and engage with minority students in the classroom (Patton, 2016). Teachers and students need to reconstruct the meaning of a racialized school structure, and they must do so through curriculum and instructional strategies (Liou & Rojas, 2018).

Inclusive multicultural education is often taught in an isolated manner (Childs, 2017). Schools tend to promote an inclusive curriculum by selecting books and activities that celebrate holidays, historical figures, and special events from various cultures periodically throughout the year (Childs, 2017). By focusing on a culture a few times out of the year, the educational system is indirectly sending a message to low-income minority students that their perspectives are not valued which may play a role in post-secondary aspirations (Childs, 2017). A host of courses that fall within the category of diversity really do not promote a deeper learning or understanding of what it actually entails (Patton, 2016). As a result, courses focusing on diversity become so broad that dealing with constructs like racism and dismantling oppression get neutralized (Patton, 2016). Additionally, Patton (2016) claimed “the curriculum is a form of property that belongs to White people, thus, the experiences and perspectives are primarily limited to White
interest, and dismissive of the experiences of people of color” (p. 321). By placing the epistemologies of low-income African American males at the center of their curriculum, both in its construction and in its execution, new conditions can be created for teachers and students to reposition themselves with equity and the reciprocal recognition of their collective struggles and capabilities (Liou & Rojas, 2018).

**Summary of Literature**

Superficial gains made by African American students in the United States have created an illusion that college access and retention rates have improved (Alford, 2000). Despite documented improvements in the rates of college admission for minority students over the last few decades, research continues to show that pathways to higher education remain inequitable for underserved youth and are stratified by race and social class (Means et al., 2019). Having access to quality education should be a human right but our current system robs low-income African American males of that opportunity (Cati et al., 2015). It is important for students, families, educators, and policymakers to understand why there is a disconnect between college aspirations and college enrollment for this population, and more importantly, what can be done to reduce and eventually eliminate it (Holland, 2010). Through a review of the literature three overarching obstacles face low-income African American males with regard to college access: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. Previous research focused on many of the structural and cultural barriers; however, more research is needed to understand how these issues compound when intersected with racism and how that intersection influences low-income African American males’ post-secondary enrollment decisions. Disadvantaged students not having access to the same resources as their advantaged peers experience multiple disadvantages after high school graduation (Kaushal, 2014; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Furthermore, an
exclusive curriculum may communicate to young African Americans that they are unwelcome in school or college, and because of it, they may have a reduced sense of belonging or motivation to continue their studies (O’Hara et al., 2012). The target population (low-income African American male high school graduates) tends to be a group ignored by the literature; the focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or with students who are already enrolled in college (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Further research was needed to understand why low-income African American males are graduating high school but ultimately not enrolling into college. Moreover, more research was needed to understand why this particular population is disproportionately unprepared structurally, culturally, and academically for the rigor of higher education (Patton, 2016). There seems to be a disconnect between the quality of education of low-income African American males receive and their preparation to attend post-secondary institutions (Kaushal, 2014). By employing a qualitative methodology this study allowed the research participants’ voices to contribute to the research surrounding this educational phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The significance of this study was practical, theoretical, and empirical. Highlighting barriers that limit college access benefits all stakeholders experiencing this phenomenon (Gonzalez, 2015). Moreover, this study propelled the college access research forward by targeting a specific population whom the literature seemingly overlooked (Cox, 2016). Lastly, this study will inform future policy and practice by suggesting changes be made to reduce hegemony and discrimination in educational practice.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Stake (1995) introduced the concept of collective case study, which emerged out of the instrumental case study approach. Collective case studies are instrumental studies that involve more than one case, linked by coordination between individual studies (Stakes, 1995). A collective case study may be designed with more concern for representation (Stake, 1995). For this particular study, a collective case design was used to conduct a cross case synthesis among 10 represented cases. This research design aligned best with my study due to the need for general understanding surrounding multiple cases; furthermore, the focus is not restricted to just the case itself but the issues surrounding the case (Stake, 1995). Utilizing a collective case study assisted me in identifying barriers to college access for 10 bounded cases (low-income African American male high school graduates) from two different states in the northeastern region of the United States. My target population (low-income African American male high school graduates) tends to be a group ignored by the literature; the focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or students already enrolled in college (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Further research was needed on low-income African American male high school graduates who are ill-prepared for post-secondary education and ultimately do not enroll. This chapter covers the data collection and analysis portion of the study in more detail. The following subjects will be discussed in this chapter: research design, setting, participants, procedures, my role in the study, data collection, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study.

Design

For this particular study, a qualitative collective case study design was used to conduct a cross case synthesis among 10 represented cases. A qualitative methodology was employed to
better understand this phenomenon (barriers to college access). Qualitative research is multimethod in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodology allowed me to study the participants in this study in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, the phenomena through their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The cases in this study were bounded by socioeconomic status (free/reduced lunch during high school years and currently on public assistance), gender (males), race (African Americans), age (18 to 24 years old), years of schooling (high school graduates), location (northeastern region of United States), and post-secondary status (never enrolled in higher education). Bounding the case involves defining the case, distinguishing between those who were to be included in the study and those who were outside of it (Yin, 2017). A collective case study research design informed my study by identifying the various barriers to college access for 10 bounded cases located in the northeastern region of the United States. This specific design also aligned with the research questions presented in this study, trying to understand the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers to college access facing the participants in the study. Researchers must establish a list of questions, progressively redefine the issues, and explore the opportunities to learn the unexpected (Stake, 1995). Two major researchers in the field of case study design are Robert Yin and Robert Stake. Although there are some similarities in their approaches, there are significant differences on how they interpret the research design. Both Stake and Yin grounded their approach to case study research through a constructivist paradigm (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin suggested four major types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and multiple case (Yin, 2017). Whereas Stake (1995) introduced intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies. Furthermore, Yin’s multiple case study focuses on how and why the outcomes might have occurred and hope for literal
replications of these conditions from case to case (Yin, 2017). Stake’s (1995) collective case study emphasized the abiding tension between the case and the issues, ultimately to facilitate later cross-site analysis. Baxter and Jack (2008) claimed that Yin uses propositions to guide the research process, while Stake applies what he coins as issues as the focus. I utilized a qualitative case study approach—specifically, a collective case study research design—to examine the issues in these specific cases. This particular design was selected due to its ability to provide insight and facilitate understanding around the systemic issues facing low-income African American male high school graduates as they pursue higher education. Stake (1995) claimed one can approach case study research in two ways, as an intrinsic study or as an instrumental study. Intrinsic studies are geared towards a specific issue that a researcher would like to explore; the problem is particular to the case and not a general problem (Stake, 1995). However, an instrumental study is focused on a need for general understanding surrounding a case; the focus is not the case itself (Stake, 1995). The concept of collective case study emerges out of the instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995). Collective case studies are instrumental studies that involve more than one case, linked by coordination between individual studies (Stakes, 1995). A collective case study may be designed with more concern for representation in comparison to other approaches (Stake, 1995). Case studies are undertaken to make the case understandable; the case will be studied primarily for generalizing to other cases (Stake, 1995). This particular research design assisted me in understanding the barriers facing low-income African American male high school graduates as outlined with the research questions presented in this study.

**Research Questions**

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology to identify the barriers to
college access. The following research questions guided this study:

**Central Research Question**

What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates?

**Sub Question 1:** What are the structural barriers that low-income African Americans face as they prepare for college?

**Sub Question 2:** What are the cultural barriers that low-income African Americans face accessing college?

**Sub Question 3:** What are the racialized barriers to college aspirations?

**Setting**

Qualitative case studies provide tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The setting for this collective case study took place in two large inner-city towns located in the northeastern region of the United States. The towns were selected due to my familiarity with the areas. One location was the school district I attended over two decades ago; I was interested to understand why this particular community continues to struggle with college enrollment. This particular community has an estimated population of 128,000 residents, where approximately 60% are Hispanic, 20% are White, and 20% are African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Moreover, the median family income is approximately $45,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Lastly, the educational attainment for that community (25 and older) is the following: 39% possess a high school diploma and 9% have earned a college degree. The second setting I decided to study was also a location I am very familiar with. I have worked in that community for over 10 years; the education system continues to be ranked one of the lowest nationally and struggles to transition students to higher education. That specific
location has an estimated population of 1,600,000 residents, where approximately 44% are White, 44% are African American, and 14% are Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The median family income is approximately $40,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Lastly, that area’s education attainment is as follows (25 and older): 34% graduated high school (includes equivalent) and 16% earned a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Although the high school graduation rates were low for both settings, the participants who were engaged in this study were all high school graduates to better understand the phenomenon in this study. I was passionate about understanding this educational phenomenon because I identified with many of the opportunity gaps facing these two communities. A product of an inner-city, low-income school, I was interested in understanding the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates in these two inner-city communities in the northeastern region of the United States. Many of the issues that were investigated in this study I experienced firsthand. Students who live in low-income communities (particularly African American male high school graduates) are underrepresented in higher education compared to their White affluent peers. This particular phenomenon is not specific to just one community; these systemic barriers can be found in many low-income African American communities throughout the country. Through this study, I conducted a collective case study to identify these barriers to understand how they are contributing to this educational phenomenon that is disproportionately affecting low-income African American male high school graduates within these two communities.

Participants

I employed a purposeful sampling approach targeting low-income African American males ages 18 to 24 from two states, this particular age group was the focus for this study
because it is the average age range of traditional college students (Mayhew et al., 2016). The sampling procedures utilized were convenience sampling and snowball sampling. To take part in the study the participant had to be classified as low-income, African American male, and a high school graduate from one of the two low-income communities located in the two states involved in the study. Low-income was defined as individuals who received free lunch during their high school academic years and were currently on public assistance (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). As stated earlier, the sample size consisted of 10 participants to reach saturation. Since the study focused exclusively on men, female participants were not included in the study. I generated the questions for the survey, interview, and focus group. To ensure the questions actually measured the content it intended to explore in the study, I engaged in face and content validity. Face validity involved a subjective inspection of the questions presented to judge whether they cover the content that the questions purports to measure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Content analysis referred to any qualitative data reduction effort that takes a volume of qualitative data and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2015). Stake (1995) posited researchers must recognize the need not only for being accurate in measuring things but logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements. As a result, the questions developed for the survey and interviews were specifically framed to address the study’s research questions and purpose by highlighting themes discovered in the literature.

This study specifically targeted low-income African American male high school graduates from ages 18 to 24 who were not enrolled in higher education. Data collection methods began with purposeful sampling, identifying potential participants who met the study requirements through social media (primarily Facebook) and in their respective communities. When recruiting efforts failed to meet my target of 10 potential participants, snowball techniques
were leveraged to increase participation rates in the study. After the purposeful sampling selection took place, I narrowed the volunteers down using an eight-question questionnaire to confirm eligibility (low-income African American male high school graduates) to participate in the study. After the questionnaires were completed, I narrowed down the research participants to 10 individuals (five from each state), who were then scheduled for personal interviews. I conducted a personal interview with each research participant in the study.

**Surveys/Questionnaires**

The questionnaire ensured the cases involved in the study were bounded correctly. The eight questions determined an individual’s socioeconomic status, accessibility to documents, racial identity, gender, high school graduation status, post-secondary status, and participation availability. The survey allowed me to filter through the potential participants and select my target population. A survey or questionnaire may ask both fixed-choice and open-ended questions; this is an example of how quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry are often combined (Patton, 2015). This survey was appropriate for this research design to ensure the intended voices and experiences were represented in the study. The questions developed for the surveys were designed to identify my target population highlighted in the literature. I generated the questions for the survey to confirm the correct questions were asked and validity concerns were addressed.

**Survey Questions**

1. Are you male?
2. Do you identify as African American?
3. Did you receive free/reduced lunch during your high school years?
4. Have you received government assistance for either food or rent since graduating high school?
5. Did you graduate high school?
6. Did you ever attend college?
7. Do you have access to your high school records?
8. Select your availability and willingness to participate in this study from the following:

**Procedures**

Before data was collected, I applied to Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB approval was granted, I began recruiting participants leveraging social media (specifically Facebook), text messaging, and phone calls to recruit community leaders and residents in those towns to assist me in enlisting potential research participants. Surveys (physical, electronic, and phone) were disseminated utilizing purposeful sampling and snowball techniques to recruit potential participants for the study in the two communities selected. I surveyed over 30 individuals. The participants were then narrowed down to 10 individuals based on eligibility, geographical location, availability, and willingness to participate in the study. Once the participants were selected, I began the data collection process. For this collective case study, I utilized interviews, document analysis, and a focus group as the primary data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I developed a semi-structured template for the interview process and traveled to the two locations to meet with the participants. Individuals who could not meet with me in person were interviewed using FaceTime. I also visited the two high schools the participants attended to observe the setting and collect documents to review during document analysis. Lastly, I conducted a focus group consisting of two participants from each setting to determine any similarities or differences among the cases. Due to the reflective nature of this study, I did not engage in participant observations; as a result, there was no need to follow any of the subjects in this study. The multiple uses of data collection instruments provided for
triangulation, allowing for a more trustworthy and valid study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). After all data was collected, I began the data analysis procedures. Data from the interviews and focus group were transcribed by Rev.com and manually coded to ensure for confidentiality and accuracy. The notes were member-checked after the interviews and focus group session to ensure the true meaning was captured during these sessions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The Researcher's Role

Creswell and Poth (2018) claimed the researcher is the primary measuring instrument. As a result, the researcher carries out data collection and becomes personally involved in the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I understand that I am biased due to many of the issues and barriers that were explored in this study I have experienced firsthand. The sites I chose for this study were selected due to my familiarity with these communities. One location is the school district I attended over two decades ago; consequently, I have developed great working relationships with many stakeholders in that community. Identifying appropriate settings and working with gatekeepers to obtain necessary permissions are critical steps in a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gaining access to low-income African American male high school graduates should not be too difficult due to my relationship with the gatekeepers, parents and students in the town. The second site was selected based on my 10-year working experience within the community. I am a general manager for a Fortune 100 company; as a result, I have several colleagues who also work for the company in the same capacity. Each general manager manages an operation that employs roughly 20-50 employees per location in that particular community. Due to the community being predominantly African American, most of their employees fit the description of my target population, since high school diploma is one
of the preferences to gain employment. Once I obtained IRB approval, I asked my colleagues whether they could allow me to present the purpose of my study to their employees. I was able to gather a few African American male participants after presenting to the employees. I had no direct relationship with the research participants in this study; I was able to gain access to them due to the relationships I have developed in both of these low-income communities. I selected a collective case study research design so the voices and experiences of the participants can inform the study; furthermore, this design can assist with understanding this phenomenon from multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995).

**Data Collection**

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that enhances data validity and credibility (Yin, 2017). Potential data sources may include documentation, records, interviews, artifacts, and observations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (1995) proposed that researchers engage in triangulation to increase credence in the interpretation of the study. Researchers must engage in data collection to gain access to triangulating data, which need to be guided by the research questions (Stake, 1995). Data was collected from 10 participants through various data collection methods. For this particular case study, I utilized interviews, document analysis, and a focus group as the primary data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yosso (2005) posited that CRT offers an approach to identify, analyze, and challenge distorted notions of people of color. Thus, I developed interview and focus group questions that put my target population’s voices at the center of the study. Specifically, I developed a template for the semi-structured interview process and traveled to both locations to meet with the participants in person. Individuals who could not meet with me were interviewed using FaceTime. I also visited the high schools these participants attended to
observe the setting as well as collect any documents that could inform the study (FASFA forms, college literature, SAT prep classes, etc.). Due to the reflective nature of this study, I did not engage in participant observations, as a result, there was no need to follow any of the subjects.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The questions focused on the individuals’ experience deciding not to attend college, family background, structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers that they faced in their pursuit of higher education. After all participants were interviewed, select individuals were invited to a focus group. The focus group consisted of two research participants from each state. I utilized the focus group to understand the similarities and differences across the cases. Every participant involved in this study was asked for the following data: high school transcripts, grade point averages, SAT test scores, and any acceptance or rejection letters from universities or colleges they applied to. The data collection process followed the following sequence: surveys, interviews, document analysis, and lastly a focus group. I chose to collect the data in this sequence to ensure I have the right participants depending on the stage of the data collection. The surveys allowed me to select my target population, the interviews provided me with the oral experiences, document analysis granted me the written experiences, and the focus group brought both locations together to determine any similarities or differences on how the two groups experienced the phenomenon.

**Interviews**

The interview process is the main road to multiple realities in case study research (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). What is covered in the interview is targeted and influenced by the interviewer (Stake, 1995). Yin (2017) claimed that case study interviews resemble guided conversations rather than structured questions. Interviews involve an exchange between the interviewer and research participants by asking oral questions and receiving oral responses (Creswell & Poth,
This particular study employed a semi-structured interview with 22 questions covering the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. An interview is appropriate for this research design, as this study aimed to hear the voices and explore the lived experiences of low-income students that identify as African American male high school graduates. I traveled to both states to conduct the personal interviews with all of the research participants. Individuals who were not able to attend in person interviews were asked to be interviewed over FaceTime. The questions developed for the interviews were grounded in the literature; the questions were divided into the three distinct barriers: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Please describe your life experiences after graduating high school?
3. How did your high school experience influence your decision to attend college?
4. What is the process of applying to college?
5. What resources were available to you to ensure you were able to attend college?
6. Describe your decision not to attend college?
7. What makes the pathway to college difficult for African American males like yourself?
8. Describe any structural barriers to college access you encountered in pursuing higher education?
9. How did college affordability impact your decision to attend higher education?
10. How did your high school prepare you for college?
11. How were you made aware of the steps to apply to college?
12. Describe any cultural barriers to college access that may have influenced your decision to attend?

13. How was your culture included and/or dismissed during your high school education?

14. What expectations, if any, were set by your family or school that influenced your perception of college?

15. Why are low-income African American males at a disadvantage when they attempt to enroll in college?

16. Describe any racialized barriers to college access that may have influenced your decision to attend college?

17. What racist practices in secondary education do you believe shape the low college enrollment rate for low-income African American males?

18. How are sports scholarships being promoted to African American males compared to academic scholarships?

19. How was race reflected in the curriculum at your school?

20. How did that (race reflected in the curriculum) influence your college aspiration?

21. How did some African American males you graduated high school with overcome many of the barriers you highlighted in this interview and attend post-secondary education?

22. Looking back across your educational journey, what other challenges not discussed in this interview you believe influenced your educational trajectory?

Question one allowed for a general introduction of the participant. Granting the candidate time to introduce himself, may reduce nervousness and allow for a more conversational-style interview compared to a structural one. This question assisted in the development of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Patton, 2015).
Questions two through seven were general knowledge and experiential questions to determine what the participant viewed as the problem with college access (Patton, 2015). These questions were intended to be relatively straightforward and non-threatening and served to help develop rapport with the participant (Patton, 2015). The general idea behind these set of questions was to determine whether there were any other barriers not addressed in the study or literature.

Questions eight to eleven were grounded in the literature. These questions were concerned about the structural barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. These questions highlighted the structural barriers or systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males as they pursue higher education (Cati et al., 2015).

Question 12 to 15 continued to draw from the literature highlighting the cultural barriers to college access facing the participants. These probing questions were concerned about the limitations of norms, values, and history in the learning environment that alienates students from feeling fully acclimated (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cati et al., 2015). Question 12 focused on the general cultural barriers to college access, the subsequent questions collapsed the barrier into different cultural obstacles found in the literature: sense of belonging, low expectations, and cultural capital.

Questions 16 through 20 presented the final barrier identified in the literature, racialized barriers. These questions focused on racial discrimination, hegemony, and the racial undertones in the school’s curriculum. The point of these questions was to understand how limited access to political power, economic resources, and cultural capital influenced college aspiration (Hope et al., 2015). The participants were able to respond to these questions of discrimination from the
perspective of people of color (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Furthermore, these questions allowed for counter-stories by the target population to help bring more understanding around systemic racism present in the college enrollment process (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Question 21 and 22 were close-out questions. In closing open-ended interviews, it is important in qualitative interviewing to provide an opportunity for the interviewee to have the final say (Patton, 2015). Question 21 offered the participants an opportunity to address how their peers overcame the phenomenon. Whereas question 22 concluded the interview in the same manner in which it started; the question granted the interviewee the occasion to discuss anything he would like before ending the interview as it relates to barriers to college access.

**Document Analysis**

Records, documents, artifacts, and archives constitute a particularly rich source of information regarding cases in case studies (Patton, 2015). Every participant involved in this study was asked for the following data: high school transcripts, grade point averages, Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) test scores, and any acceptance or rejection letters from universities or colleges they applied to. Moreover, I visited the two high schools serving these communities to collect any college enrollment information (pamphlets, resources, handouts, presentations, etc.) available to students regarding higher education. These documents included college preparatory classes, SAT prep classes, FASFA information, college tours, scholarship information, and other college enrollment information. Perna and Jones (2013) suggested schools should be providing the following to the most vulnerable communities: gathering information about potential college choices, educating students on the college application process, providing college-preparatory courses, college entrance examinations preparation, admission and financial aid counseling, and identifying the best institutional fit. Providing students and parents with accurate and timely
information regarding college can assist them in overcoming many of the structural barriers found in the literature (Gonzalez, 2015; Knaggs et al., 2015).

**Focus Group**

I also employed a research focus group to better understand this phenomenon. A research focus group consists of an interview with a small group of relatively similar people (homogeneity sampling) on a specific topic of research (Patton, 2015). The focus group is a collectivistic rather than an individualistic research method, this form of data collection has also emerged as a collaborative and empowering approach in case study research (Patton, 2015). The focus group provided an opportunity to bring both locations together to determine any similarities or differences among the cases. Additionally, it granted further clarification on how the two groups experienced the phenomenon within the two different contexts. The advantage of this data collection method was it allowed me to interact with multiple participants from the two states at the same time. I selected two participants from each location to participate in the focus group. The focus group consisted of eight questions. These questions highlighted the similarities and differences between the cases within and across the two settings while addressing the research questions in the study.

**Semi-structured Focus Group Interview Questions**

1. Please introduce yourself to the group.
2. When you think about college, what comes to mind?
3. What do you believe are the reasons that contribute to higher college attendance rates for Asians and Whites compared to African Americans?
4. What uncontrollable barriers do you believe complicate the pathway to college for low-income African American males?
5. How does the culture of low-income schools particularly towards African American males influence college aspiration or college attendance?

6. What is the biggest barrier with college access facing low-income African American males with regard to racism?

7. What are the benefits of not attending higher education for low-income African American male high school graduates?

8. Looking back at your decision not to attend college, what other challenges not discussed in this interview you believe influenced your decision?

Question one allowed the participants to introduce themselves to the group. This first question granted each participant the opportunity to speak early in the discussion while reducing any nervousness before the group interview began. By bringing together individuals from two different states who share a similar background, this form of data collection created an opportunity for the participants to engage in meaningful dialogue about the topics being raised in this study (Patton, 2015).

Question two served as an introduction to the topic and determined what the participants knew or understood about higher education. This second question was intended to be non-threatening and ideally served to develop rapport with the participants (Patton, 2015). The emphasis of this question was to discover the general knowledge of the participants around college and college access.

Questions three to seven were grounded in the literature. These questions were concerned about the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. Specifically, question three introduced the concept of barriers and why African Americans continue to be underrepresented in post-
secondary institutions relative to their peers (Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015). Question four targeted structural barriers: the systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males (Cati et al., 2015). Question five highlighted the cultural barriers: the limitations of norms, values, and history found in low-income schools that alienate African American students from feeling fully acclimated with the education process ultimately influencing college aspirations (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cati et al., 2015). Question six focused on the racialized barriers: the presence of racism throughout the pathway to college enrollment (Hope et al., 2015). Lastly, question seven sought to uncover why the decision not to attend college is popular among low-income African American males. Although a college education is regarded as one of the primary vehicles for reducing poverty and closing the wealth gaps between people of color and Whites, only seven percent obtain a bachelor’s degree by age 26 (Anyon, 2005; Tsoi-A & Bryant, 2015).

Question eight was the last question. This question offered the participants an opportunity to address any other barrier that may not have been included in the study. Moreover, it allowed the participants to have the final word in the discussion and end the focus group in the same manner in which it started. Close-out questions are very important to focus groups especially when hearing from groups whose voices are often marginalized within the larger society (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

It is at this point in the research process where qualitative and quantitative techniques offer stark differences (Stake, 1995). Qualitative researchers concentrate on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together more meaningfully (Stake, 1995). Quantitative researchers seek a collection of instances, expecting that, from the aggregate, issue-relevant
meanings will emerge (Stake, 1995). With regard to data analysis, scholars must follow certain protocols that can help them draw systematically from previous knowledge and cut down on misperception (Stake, 1995). Triangulation protocols were leveraged to increase credence in the interpretation of the data (Stake, 1995). Data source triangulation is the effort to see whether the observations and reports carry the same meaning when found under different circumstances (Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). The advantage of this collective case study was that it provided the opportunity to view the phenomenon from two different states and observe whether there were any similarities or differences based on the location.

Upon collecting the data from the surveys, interviews, documents, and the focus group I began the first step of data analysis: transcribing the data. The data needed to be transcribed so it could be in textual form to start the categorical aggregation process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995). The data was then transcribed using the transcription company Rev.com. After all data was transcribed it was read multiple times to ensure the participants’ stories were grasped. Furthermore, I also employed member-checking to allow the research participants to judge the accuracy and completeness of their statements made in the report (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After data was checked for accuracy, I started the process of open and axial coding. “One of the most critical steps of interpretational data analysis is developing a set of categories that adequately encompass and summarize the data” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 467). Open coding allowed me to collapse the data into segments or themes- so the data could be more meaningful (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After compiling different segments, the data needed to be grouped into different categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the number of cases in this case study I also conducted a cross-case thematic analysis to compare and contrast the multiple cases involved in this study by interpreting and assigning meaning to a documented
pattern (Stake, 1995; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2017). This process took place for each bounded case represented in this study, as well as between the two settings. The main reasons for engaging with cross-case thematic analysis was to improve the likelihood of generalizability or transferability as it relates to the understanding or explanation of this phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Next, I analyzed the documents obtained from the participants and their respective high schools. Every participant involved in this study was asked for the following data to be reviewed: high school transcripts, grade point averages, Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) test scores, and any acceptance or rejection letters from universities or colleges they applied to. I also analyzed any college enrollment information (pamphlets, resources, handouts, presentations, etc.) available to students from their high schools. These documents included college preparatory classes, SAT prep classes, FASFA information, college tours, scholarship information, and other college enrollment information. These documents were analyzed to identify any themes that connected them to the literature and other forms of data collected to ensure triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009). Lastly, the information was validated and compared to the studies highlighted in the literature review. The combined information from all the data sources previously mentioned allowed for triangulation as well as replication of this study. Stake (1995) posited data source triangulation is the effort to determine if what we observed and reported carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness in the study, I employed participant validation techniques to check for the accuracy of the participants’ experiences (Patton, 2015). Research participants can provide critical observations and interpretations to help with triangulation (Stake, 1995). One process utilized was member-checking; this process allowed the participants to check for the
accuracy and credibility of the results (Patton, 2015). Also, to assist with replication of the study I engaged in memoing, tracking the development of ideas through the process into high-level analytical meaning (Patton, 2015). Trustworthiness also includes the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Credibility**

Researchers recognize the need for being accurate and credible (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) suggested triangulation and member-checking as ways to ensure the interpretation to the study is valid and credible. Triangulation took place in this study due to the various sources being collected, including pertinent documents, interviews, and the focus group. Member-checks took place after the interviews and during the focus group. Lastly, I had my peers review my interview questions to ensure it was consistent with my research questions and purpose of this study. As a result, credibility also depends on the richness of the information gathered; therefore, thick description was used to provide the reader with what the experience itself would have conveyed (Stake, 1995).

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability was addressed by very thick descriptive data, which developed and certified that the design, collection, and implementation were very detailed in the language. The collection of the data was systematic in order for it to be replicated. The use of the bounded systems increased the accuracy of the data collection (Yin, 2017). The fact that a collective case study was utilized also provided some level of dependability, due to cross-case synthesis ability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Transferability

Yin (2017) argued that the objective of research is to ensure if a later researcher follows the same procedure as described by an earlier researcher, the later investigator will arrive at the same findings. By employing thick descriptive data, transferability will be much easier to obtain. Documentation can also assist with the transferability of the study. Yin (2017) claimed in the past that case study research procedures were poorly documented. Therefore, Yin (2017) suggested that proper documentation must be in place to ensure one’s work can be repeated.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made to ensure the researcher-participant relationship was professional and protected the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. Also, informed consent was carried out to respect the subjects’ participation in the study. Furthermore, this study did not harm the participants, I was aware of any potential harms that might have been inflicted upon study subjects. I ensured that all participant information was protected. I understood that it was my responsibility to ensure that ethical considerations were a vital part of my research. I engaged with pseudonyms and other strategies to protect the participants’ information and provide confidentiality.

Summary

This study applied a collective case study research design to understand the barriers to college access among 10 represented cases. This chapter demonstrates why this research design aligned best with this study. This particular design was useful in understanding this phenomenon surrounding multiple cases. The target population (low-income African American male high school graduates) tends to be a group ignored by the literature, the focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or students already enrolled in college (Welton &
Martinez, 2014). Therefore, further research was needed on low-income African American male high school graduates to understand their post-secondary decisions of not enrolling to college. This chapter covered the data collection and analysis process in detail; I ultimately decided to utilize interviews, document analysis, and a focus group as my data collection methods. Additionally, data analysis procedures included open coding, axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. Participant validation techniques were used to check for the accuracy of the participants’ experiences (Patton, 2015). Lastly, ethical considerations were made to ensure the researcher-participant relationship was professional and protected the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality. By conducting this study, these participants highlighted the various structural, cultural, and racialized barriers facing low-income African American males to college access.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. The data analysis process involved open coding, axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. This chapter focused on the findings as they relate to the research questions outlined in Chapter One. The following subjects will be discussed in this chapter: summary of the participants, summary of the high schools they attended, results of the study, themes developed out of the data, and the responses to the research questions. The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. This study employed a qualitative methodology approach involving 10 low-income African American male high school graduates from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. The knowledge gained from this study may assist with understanding some of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers facing low-income African American males as they pursue higher education.

Participants

The participants involved in this study included 10 bounded cases located in northeastern United States. The cases consisted of 10 self-identified low-income African American male high school graduates from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The participants were split into two groups based on geographic location, five of the participants attended E High School and the other five, O High School. All participants were between the ages of 18 to 24 and did not attend post-secondary institutions. The themes developed from this data analysis derived from reviewing school practices, documents, interview responses, and transcripts from the individual
participants. Table 1 displays a demographic breakdown of the participants; it contains their pseudonyms, age, household makeup, parental education, academic expectation, employment status, and their family background.
Table 1.

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Two-Parent Household</th>
<th>Parental Education</th>
<th>Education Expectation</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Family Attended College?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth (23)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoine (22)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steffen (22)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raseem (20)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Dropout</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby (24)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Unloader</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laron (18)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Dropout</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shon (20)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Life Guard</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon (23)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Dropout</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (21)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Dropout</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (18)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>HS Dropout</td>
<td>HS Diploma</td>
<td>Life Guard</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kenneth**

Kenneth is a 23-year-old African American male who was born and raised in New Jersey. He graduated from E High School and is one of two participants who was reared in a two-parent household. He was never against the idea of attending college; however, he did not pursue the option either. His passion was for music, following the footsteps of his father who is an accomplished singer and musician. He is an extremely talented drummer and continues to play after graduating high school for local bands and churches. He is currently unemployed and
looking for work to support himself. Today, he is more open to the idea of going to college; if he decides to attend, he will be the first person in his family to attend college.

**Antoine**

Antoine is a 22-year old Haitian American male who was born and raised in New Jersey. Antoine was raised by a single mother due to his father passing away. Suddenly losing his father during his high school years affected Antoine immensely. He had a difficult time dealing with the loss and navigating school at the same time. He became very aggressive, depressed, and started abusing drugs. He also became disengaged with school and ultimately was kicked out of school for fighting. He was transferred to an alternative school where he eventually graduated from high school. Today he is employed as a cook and wants to eventually go back to school due to low wages.

**Steffen**

Steffen is a 22-year old Haitian American who was born and raised in New Jersey. He is a hard worker and believes he can do anything he puts his mind to. He found school to be boring because he is more of a hands-on person. He loves to read and thought it was pointless to go to class if they are just regurgitating the information back to you that was in the textbook. Since he did not like high school, he had no desire to go to college. His assumption was that college would just be more of the same experience he observed in high school. He is currently unemployed and looking for work. One of the few cases in this study who had siblings who went to college, he just decided he didn’t want to go that route himself.

**Raseem**

Raseem is a 20-year old African American male living on his own. He was raised in a challenging single-mother household that forced him to move out on his own at the age of 18.
He currently lives in a studio apartment in New Jersey with a roommate and works as a cashier. He did really well in school and felt that he was prepared to go to college. However, he was only expected to graduate high school since his mother did not have the opportunity to finish high school due to being pregnant with him. His goal is to be an entrepreneur, and he has no interest in college. He is very critical of the education system and how it has not changed for over 200 years.

**Bobby**

Bobby was the oldest participant in the study at the age of 24-years old. He is an African American male from New Jersey who had a troubled past and really had a difficult time acclimating to school. He was raised in a single-parent household and does not know his biological father. He began cutting class and skipping school at the age of 14. Instead of going to school he began hanging around older kids and eventually began selling drugs. He was in and out of school until he was eventually kicked out. He ended up having a son and graduated high school from an alternative school. He was always told school was not for him by his parents and teachers. As a result, he never applied himself to school and didn’t even think college was a viable option for him.

**Laron**

Laron is an 18-year old African American male who was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He attended O High School and frequently would miss school and cut classes. He did not take education seriously because no one in his family did. He is the first person to graduate high school in his family, with a single mother and two older brothers. One brother is in prison and the other one is currently selling drugs. He ultimately was kicked out of school and had to complete high school at an alternative school. He was the only participant who actually
applied to college; he was accepted to a historically Black college and university (HBCU). However, due to financial constraints, he did not attend.

**Shon**

Shon is a 20-year old African American male who currently works at the YMCA. He was raised by a single mother in Pennsylvania. His mother was a strong believer in education although she was not able to finish herself. She managed to pay for him to go to private school because she did not want him to attend the public schools in the community. He ended up attending a predominantly White school that had an abundance of resources. However, his mother was not able to continue paying for private school, so he was pulled out and placed in public school when he reached high school. It was a totally different world for him, the resources were scarce, and he was now in a high-poverty, high-minority school setting. He found the curriculum to be unchallenging and he did very well in high school. He decided not to go to college because he did not want to abandon his mother and he wanted to help her out financially. He felt that going away to college would be a selfish move and he needed to be with his mother. As a result, he decided to stay home and work. He plans on joining the military in the future and going to college later in life.

**Devon**

Devon is a 23-year old African American male residing in Pennsylvania. He was reared in a single-parent household with his mother; although he knew his father, his dad was not involved in his life. He described how school was always difficult for him; he never earned a grade higher than a C his entire life. At the age of 23, he confessed that he still reads on a 7th grade level and felt that he was just pushed through to the next grade throughout school just to get rid of him. He was told school was not for him by his teachers and family, which made him
resent school. Today, he is a physical trainer and still struggles with basic math and reading skills. His perception of college was that it was for the real smart kids, not for him.

**James**

James is a 21-year old Jamaican American from Pennsylvania. He was reared in a single-parent household and used sports to keep out of trouble. He played football and basketball but did not play well enough to secure a sports scholarship to college. He is more concerned about making money than going to college. He knows a couple of people who went to college and couldn’t find a job. Therefore, his focus is on making money first then maybe he will think about going to college later. Consequently, he believes learning a trade is probably a better option than college. His family made a lot of mistakes in the past that he doesn’t want to repeat. His main goal is to keep himself busy so that he doesn’t get “caught up in the streets.” He is one of the few members in his family to graduate high school.

**David**

David was the youngest participant in the study at 18-years old. He is an African American male who had strong opinions about the education system. He had a complicated upbringing, not living with either of his parents. Both parents abandoned him due to drug abuse and he was forced to live with his grandfather. He has such a love and respect for his grandfather because he sacrificed his retirement to raise 8 grandchildren. He was not fond of his experience with Pennsylvania public schools; he felt that it was a culture of disengaged teachers and students. Due to his grandfather’s limited income, David felt his top priority after high school was to work to help out with some of the bills. He believed that was more important than pursuing college. Furthermore, if high school was indicative of college at all, he did not want any part of it.
E High School

E High School is a magnet school located in the center of the community with an estimated population of 128,000 residents, where approximately 60% are Hispanic, 20% are White, and 20% are African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Moreover, the median family income is approximately $45,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Lastly, the educational attainment for that community (25 and older) is the following: 39% possess a high school diploma and 9% have earned a college degree. The information gathered from E High School was obtained through the research participants, school observation, and online statistics. According to the Public School Review website, this high school has a population of 979 students, 87% of those students are minorities, and 57% of their students are receiving free lunch. Moreover, the school provides a teacher ratio of 20:1 and a counselor ratio of 421:1, as indicated by the Great Schools website. According to the discussion with the counselors, students have the same counselor all four years of high school. Also, the school offers an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and ASCENT (Accelerating Students Through Concurrent Enrollment) program to assist with college attendance.

O High School

O High School is a charter school positioned in the northern section of the city with an estimated population of 1,600,000 residents, where approximately 44% are White, 44% are African American, and 14% are Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The median family income is approximately $40,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Lastly, that area’s education attainment is as follows (25 and older): 34% graduated high school (includes equivalent) and 16% earned a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). According to the information from the Great Schools website, O High School has 1,784 students, 99% of the students are
minorities, and the school maintains a 70% graduation rate. The school is ranked last (1 out of 10) for college readiness, manages a proficiency level of 17% for math and 21% for reading. Lastly, according to the Public School Review website the school ranks in the top one percent in the state for the largest percentage of students eligible for free lunch. After conducting interviews and visiting the school, I observed the following as it relates to college readiness: counselors are based on grade levels (different counselor every year), college tours are based on GPA, and the counseling department did not have a functioning website or college materials for students to take home to parents.

Results

The researcher utilized a qualitative collective case study design. For this particular study, a collective case study design was appropriate to conduct a cross case synthesis among the 10 represented cases. A qualitative methodology was employed to better understand this phenomenon (barriers to college access) and allow the researcher to study the participants in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, the phenomena through their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The cases in this study were bounded by socioeconomic status (free/reduced lunch during high school years and currently on public assistance), gender (males), race (African Americans), age (18 to 24 years old), years of schooling (high school graduates), location (northeastern region of United States), and post-secondary status (never enrolled in higher education). A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that enhances data validity and credibility (Yin, 2017). Data sources included in this study were documents, records, interviews, artifacts, and observations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this particular case study, I utilized interviews, document analysis, and a focus group as the primary data collection methods (Creswell & Poth,
This specific design also aligns with the research questions presented in this study, understanding the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers to college access facing the participants in the study.

**Document Analysis**

The documents collected for this study included school visits identifying college preparedness programs, high school transcripts, school district demographics, college acceptance and rejection letters. E High School had two programs geared towards promoting college attendance. The first program is called AVID; it is an instructional model that encourages students to participate in a challenging college preparatory curriculum. The second program is called ASCENT. This program allows eligible students to take a full schedule of college courses immediately following their senior year of high school, with the tuition being paid by the district. Furthermore, there are several guidance counselors to assist students with the college enrollment process if they need assistance. Throughout the academic year, the guidance counselors conduct college tours and assemblies to promote the value of a college education. O High School offers one program; the school partnered with Pennsylvania Education Fund’s College Access Program (CAP). This program essentially promotes awareness of the value of a college education and provides readiness services to O High School students. The school also has in-house programs, such as assemblies and college tours where they promote the benefits of a college education. Moreover, participants were asked for their high school transcripts and grades to determine their performance during their last year of high school. Lastly, statistics surrounding school demographics were reviewed as well as college acceptance or rejection letters from the participants.
Table 2 displays a breakdown of the documents collected; it contains the participants’ respective high school, cumulative GPA, college ready courses or programs they attended, and their status as it relates to applying to college. The average GPA for all participants was 2.1 (C average): 2.26 for E High School and 2.12 for O High School. Fifty percent of the participants were exposed to some form of college ready course or program; however, only 20% were exposed to college ready programs in E High School and 80% in O High School. Twenty percent of the participants actually applied to attend post-secondary education. One participant from each setting applied to attend college; they both were accepted. The one participant from E High School was accepted into a community college; however, he did not attend due to complications with financial aid. The other participant from O High School applied and was accepted to a HBCU (Cheyney University); however, he declined the offer due to college affordability.
Table 2.

**College Readiness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Cumulative GPA</th>
<th>College Ready Courses</th>
<th>College Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E High School</strong> *New Jersey*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoine</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steffen</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raseem</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **O High School** \*Pennsylvania* | | | |
| Laron       | 1.5            | yes                   | yes                 |
| Shon        | 3.3            | yes                   | no/military         |
| Devon       | .8             | no                    | no                  |
| James       | 2.8            | yes                   | no/military         |
| David       | 2.2            | yes                   | no                  |
| Total       | 2.1            | 50%                   | 20%                 |

**Thematic Development**

Data collection began with 22 semi-structured interview questions covering the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. The questions developed for the interviews were grounded in the literature; the questions were divided into the three barriers identified in Chapter Two: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. Each participant was interviewed individually at the town’s public library or YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association). Two interviewees were not able to meet with the researcher in person; as a result, those interviews were conducted as a video conference call.
(FaceTime). Following the interviews, the researcher visited both high schools involved in the study to observe practices and gather data. Lastly, a focus group was conducted with two participants from each state to create an opportunity for the participants to engage in meaningful dialogue about barriers to higher education (Patton, 2015). All interviews were digitally recorded and member-checked to ensure for accuracy. At the conclusion of each individual interview, participants were asked to provide high school transcripts, SAT scores, and college acceptance letters, which were juxtaposed with the high school observations.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; participants were asked to engage in member-checking to ensure the accuracy and completeness of their statements made in the report (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to time constraints, a professional transcription company (Rev.com) transcribed 91% of the audio-recordings, including the focus group, with the remaining interview transcribed by the researcher. The data collection process provided a thick description of the phenomenon, which included 10 individual interviews which lasted 30 to 50 minutes each, a focus group which lasted approximately an hour, observations of the two towns and high schools, and documents obtained from the participants. Once all the data were transcribed, they were read multiple times to ensure the researcher grasped the participants’ stories. The researcher then began the process of open coding. The first cycle of coding began by employing open coding; the researcher was able to establish the major categories of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After a detailed analysis of the data collected, the researcher resulted with 159 codes from the 10 bounded cases. This type of initial coding is especially useful at extracting a subculture’s unique way of speaking or use of metaphors to frame them in context (Saldaña, 2015). The researcher then began the second cycle of coding, the process of axial coding. In axial coding, the researcher assembles the data in new ways after
open coding to establish a theme or coding paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through axial coding, the 159 codes were reduced to 28 codes. Two strategic ways researchers are able to obtain new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation or through categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). The search for meaning is a search for patterns, consistency, or correspondence (Stake, 1995). The researcher initiated a within-case analysis and then a cross-case analysis to condense the 27 codes into nine overall themes based off how many times they appeared in the data and by how many cases. Sometimes, the significant meanings come in a single instance, other times through coding the data, aggregating frequencies, then finding patterns (Stake, 1995). Using the collected data, the codes were developed into nine overall themes and separated into three categories (types of barriers) identified in the literature: structural, cultural, and racialized. Categorical aggregation depends greatly on the search for patterns; often, the patterns will be known in advance, drawn from the research questions (Stake, 1995). The following nine themes were identified after completing categorical aggregation: (a) disengaged school system, (b) working is more of a priority than college, (c) college affordability, (d) the culture of low-income environments, (e) cultural deficits, (f) negative perceptions of college, (g) college is for White people, (h) lack of Black history education, and (i) the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. The first set of three themes that will be discussed are the structural barriers identified in the literature. The following tables display the initial codes identified through open coding (Table 3), the identified codes after axial coding (Table 4), and the themes that emerged from the data after conducting categorical aggregation (Table 5).
Table 3.

Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Barriers</th>
<th>Cultural Barriers</th>
<th>Racialized Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged Schools 10</td>
<td>Negative Perceptions 7</td>
<td>Assimilation 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Preparedness 1</td>
<td>Low-Income Environment 13</td>
<td>Designed for Whites 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Pressure 9</td>
<td>Cultural Deficits 15</td>
<td>Black Stereotypes 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Recruitment 1</td>
<td>Generational Influence 10</td>
<td>Black History 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping Out 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Quality 6</td>
<td>Unexpected Codes 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Teachers 10</td>
<td>College Preparation Classes 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Guidance Counselors 6</td>
<td>Caring Teachers 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Credits 1</td>
<td>College Tours 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Affordability 14</td>
<td>Mentoring Day 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Application 4</td>
<td>Advanced Placement Class 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying 3</td>
<td>Cultural Capital 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Grades 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number represents the frequency of the code in data collection.

Table 4.

Axial Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Barriers</th>
<th>Cultural Barriers</th>
<th>Racialized Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged Schools *</td>
<td>Negative Perceptions *</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Preparedness</td>
<td>Low-Income Environment *</td>
<td>Designed for Whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Pressure *</td>
<td>Cultural Deficits *</td>
<td>Black Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Recruitment</td>
<td>Generational Influence *</td>
<td>Black History *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropping Out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Quality *</td>
<td>Unexpected Codes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Teachers</td>
<td>College Preparation Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Guidance Counselors</td>
<td>Caring Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Credits</td>
<td>College Tours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Affordability *</td>
<td>Mentoring Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Application</td>
<td>Advanced Placement Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Cultural Capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Codes that were presented by more than 50% of the participants. Bolded codes were identified for theme development.
### Table 5.

*Categorical Aggregation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Barriers</th>
<th>Cultural Barriers</th>
<th>Racialized Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged with school system</td>
<td>Living in low-income communities</td>
<td>College is for White people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working is more of a priority than college</td>
<td>Negative perception of college</td>
<td>Lack of Black history education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College affordability</td>
<td>Cultural deficits</td>
<td>Sports scholarship or no college ultimatum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structural barriers.** Structural barriers were present in several of the participants’ interviews. The participants were asked to think about barriers they had no control over that influenced their decision not to go to college. Furthermore, the researcher examined both towns and the high schools the participants attended to identify whether there were any other structural barriers through observations. One structural barrier identified by the researcher was the guidance counselor ratio for students. This position is critical in low-income schools due to their understanding of the college enrollment process. It is critical that counselors are able to engage with students and parents to assist with college enrollment; however, if the ratio is too large, they may not have the opportunity to get to every student. We can see this phenomenon play out at O High School where the guidance counselor ratio is 421:1. Through data analysis, the researcher discovered three structural barriers identified in the cases: disengaged with the school system, working is more of a priority than college, and college affordability.

**Disengaged with school system.** Sixty percent of the participants expressed being disengaged with the school system. David stated, “I didn’t really focus on school or care much for school because I felt like the teachers didn’t care much. It’s a, it’s a job to them.” More than half the cases did not feel school was for them. Bobby expressed how he was raised to see
college as “the best option for everyone, but my mother always told me school wasn't for me.”

Raseem noted, “Right after high school, I would say I wasn’t really the best suited for school. I don’t really like fitting into everything. I’m not really the type of person to sit in lectures. I will fall asleep.” James added, “Personally I wasn’t really big on school. I just feel as though college is like not for everybody.” The participants discussed a variety of reasons why they felt that way. Furthermore, the consensus was if they did not enjoy high school, they certainly would not enjoy college either. Antoine expressed some concerns that college would be the same as high school. He stated, “When I was in high school, I wasn’t really all into the classes. I didn’t pay attention to nothing. Basically, I feel like it’ll be the same thing in college.” The majority of the cases blamed grades, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum, and poor school quality for not attending college. Raseem stated, “I’m doing bad in school, school’s not for me.” Devon added, “I did bad in high school. It’s going to be the same thing there.” As a result, 80% of the participants did not even apply to college after graduating high school. Devon confessed, “I never really liked being in school. It always wasn't the best experience.” Antoine agreed with that assertion, “Basically, like high school, like school period, I never felt like school was for me.” Lastly, there was a consensus that teachers and the way they taught disengaged them with school. The participants wanted the teachers to be more engaged but more importantly teach material that was more relatable to their experience. Raseem suggested, “So I'm like, you know what? Let me try to learn a little bit on the outside world, like how to pay bills, get credit, start building it. The outside world experience.” Steffen noted, “I wanted to go to college is that, I felt like college wasn't right for me cause I'm a hands-on person.” Therefore, many of the participants believed they wanted practical skills that can help them navigate the real world; consequently, college was not the vehicle to get them there.
Working is more of a priority than college. Living in low-income communities there is pressure for many of these students to start working and contributing to the household as early as junior year in high school. David expressed it this way, “If I see something that might bring wealth to the table or- food to the table, happiness to the table for my family, I’d go do that and college might not be one of those things. It might bring debt.” Many of the participants had to grow up much faster than their White affluent peers. Once they were eligible to work, there was significant pressure on them to find a job, which made going to college not a priority. As demonstrated in Table 2, 80% of the cases were reared in single-parent households, which can often put a lot of financial pressure on these students and their families. Antoine stated, “My mother’s a single mother. So yeah, I got to hook her up. You feel me, she got bills all that other shit. I can’t put that burden on her. I got to do it by myself.” Raseem added, “I was looking for a job. I didn’t really have any money. My mom was pretty much going through it with the bills and everything, so I’m like, I need to find a way in order to help her first.” Several of the participants discussed how pursuing college would be a form of family abandonment. Shon emphasized this point in his interview, “I care about my family; I want to care about my family. Feels like a sense of abandonment, if I was to go far out, anything like that, to college.” Consequently, after high school, there is significant pressure to get a job to support oneself and the family; going away to college might be adding more financial burden to the family. Raseem highlighted a situation where he had a disagreement with his mom about going to college instead of working. Raseem stated, “I was like 17…I still didn't have a job. My mom said I wasn’t looking. We got into a little mishap with that. The class (college) is going to have to be postponed. I’m like, okay, I can go next year.” James also highlighted how the pressure of work can really present a barrier to college due to money being so important after graduating high
school. James noted, “After high school, it’s been a little struggle. You know, because paying bills, because you’re no longer under your mom authority, whatever. Basically, you’re on your own into the real world after high school, basically.” This leads us to the third subtheme under structural barriers, college affordability.

**College affordability.** College affordability was the number one structural barrier presented by the cases, with 70% of the cases suggesting this barrier played a significant role in the decision not to attend college. David reported, “The money. That was the number one reason—” that he did not attend college. Antoine added, “It’s basically the money. I got to pay for college, I got to pay for books. Financial aid, they help you a little bit, and still you got to pay out the money. I don’t got money.” James expressed, “I feel as though most of our race is not financially stable because a lot of people is not able to afford for those kids’ loans. And plus, some parents don’t really push the issue.” Twenty percent of the cases applied to college. Those cases were accepted; however, they did not attend higher education due to college affordability. Laron expressed, “Yeah. I actually got accepted to Cheyney, I was ready to go, but then I got an email for me, all the deposits and how everything was going to go, I’m like, damn how do I get this money now?” Laron continued, “That just stopped me right there. I had to put a $250 security deposit down, then I had to pay another $500 for housing. I didn’t have it. It came up too short and everything was coming back to back.” Another concern for the participants around college affordability was loans and debt. David was really concerned about the debt, “Six thousand dollars, a hundred thousand dollars worth of debt, I ain’t bout to spend nuttin I ain’t got. I just can’t do it; I can’t see myself doing it.” He added, “I would say- the money. It’s not worth debt, I would say. It’s not worth some of the time that you spend there because I feel like it’s just, I feel like- for me personally.” For David, he would rather learn a trade than to pay for
college and be in debt with no guarantee that he will have a job afterwards. Antoine also shared the similar concern, “They don’t see the outcome of it, of getting a job.” Raseem and Kenneth pointed to an additional barrier, the difficulty of filling out the FASFA. Raseem expressed that the “FASFA is the biggest barrier.” There seems to be some ambiguity around the FASFA, filling the form out, and submitting it on time. Kenneth explained the FASFA in this manner, “There’s so much that FAFSA doesn’t cover. They have to come out of their pocket, and they have to take out loans, and then they have to keep going on and on and on.” Bobby noted, “I knew about FASFA, that’s like a financial aid thing, but I knew that I would have to pay them back and from my knowledge and what I heard that it’s like a lump sum of money. That discouraged me.” The participants were ill-informed about the FASFA process and were making decisions not to attend based off of that information. Therefore, the priority for many of the participants after graduating high school was to work; if they could save enough money to go to college, then they would pursue higher education at that point. Laron stated, “Yeah, I don’t want student loans. I feel as if I can work and grind and save my money.” He continued, “I had no money, I had no money. I didn’t want to go to school broke. I didn’t want to have student loans, I know I’m going to need them, I don’t want them though.” The following set of three themes move from structural barriers to cultural barriers.

**Cultural barriers.** The participants were also exposed to cultural barriers that influenced their decision not to attend higher education. These barriers included norms, values, expectations, and the environments they were exposed to while growing up. The three themes that developed from the data analysis were living in low-income environments, negative perception of college, and cultural deficits. Living in low-income environments can present
unique challenges; trying to navigate these challenges and successfully enroll in college at the same time can be overwhelming.

**Living in low-income communities.** Low-income African American males tend to be concentrated in low-resourced communities which pose significant challenges to pursue higher education. Shon described some of these barriers in his interview, “Lot of people growing up in Black communities where it’s a lot of crime and everything else. A lot of people, and your parents are telling you to do the things that they haven’t done, and they regret not doing.” The participants explained how living in low-income communities can play a significant role with the decision not to attend college. For many of these cases, the problem wasn’t only the school system but life outside of school. David discussed this problem at length, “I wouldn’t even listen. I mean, certain things we’ve learned about was kind of interesting, but, I really wasn't paying attention. I was really worried- I was worried about other stuff, like what’s going to happen after school.” Sixty percent of the participants discussed how the “hood” makes the process of going to college much more difficult. Antoine noted, “All right, we Black, we live in the hood. All right, people clown people for going to college. I make my money, but college is not for me, college is not for so many Black kids.” Antoine referred to the slang term “clown,” which means to make fun of. Thus, Antoine is articulating the idea that kids in the “hood” are made fun of culturally when they attempt to go to college. Antoine added, “They don’t worry about getting a job, they’re just worried about rapping, making money on the street and doing all that. I’m tired of all that shit. And these White kids, they have better opportunities, you feel me.” Bobby articulated how he had dreams and aspirations growing up but was affected by what he saw in his environment. Bobby expressed it this way, “Like me, when I was young, I wanted to. I had a dream, aspiration- but once I started, like I said, once I started being in the streets it
just was all right, whatever with high school.” James agreed with that assertion, “Once you surround yourself a bunch around negativity, you become a product of your environment. So, for example, public schools, you’re around project kids, a mixture a little of suburban kids- and all the project kids wind up selling drugs.” James then made an analogy that his father taught him, “My grandfather told me bad people corrupt good moves. So, surrounding it, you might be a good kid but like being around that much negativity or so-called bad kids can poison your mind a little bit.” Devon summed up the same point in his interview:

Their environment. Like I said before in my previous questions is a lot of what happens is based around what we see growing up. And so oftentimes in my environment, like I said, we don’t see many other Black men go to college. We see them at the corner, but we don’t see them at college. We don’t see them at schools. The ones that we do see in schools that you idolize are the ones that you see get up and walk out of school. There’s just nothing. You do everything else except for doing your schoolwork. Yeah, you become a product of your environment. There’s no thought of why. It’s a dumb decision, but yeah.

The participants discussed other situations that may become barriers when living in low-income communities including prison, having children, mental health, unstable homes, bad parenting, and survival instincts. Laron talked about how his brothers were victims to the streets. He explained, “I had two older brothers- one of them got locked up, so he never finished [high school]. Other brother he got all the way to the 12th grade here and had a baby. He just said, forget it, too much before graduation.” David pointed out that many of the things done in inner-city communities are done out of necessity to survive, whereas their White counterparts don’t have that same pressure. He stated, “I feel like some of the things we do is just to get by or
survive. Then some of the things they [Whites] do, they don’t do it because life or death. We do it because we have to sometimes.” These behaviors tend to be cyclical and generational in nature. David suggested, “I would say the environment we grow up in, I would say communities, I would say family mental issues, cause we go through things that passed down from generation, like maybe abuse.” These generational patterns may also suggest why there is a negative perception of college amongst the students and parents.

**Negative perception of college.** All of the cases examined had negative perceptions towards college. For the participants, college was perceived as stressful, a lot of debt, a lot of work, and too expensive. Antoine articulated the struggle, “Sometimes you want to go to college, but then you think about it, I’m going to have to go to college for this amount of years, pay this amount for books. So how am I supposed to pay for that?” David alluded that college is a trap financially; by choosing not to go, “You not trapped in college.” The majority of the participants explained how they viewed college through the lens of their parents, specifically their mothers. Bobby reiterated that point, “My mom didn’t push me. She maybe brought it up once. ‘Yeah. Finish high school, get your diploma. I’m okay, I’m satisfied, I’m content with that. Anything else is on you and that’s your life and decision.’” The perception of college was not only negative but also promoted as not necessary. Raseem recalled his mother’s perspective, “My mom, she never really had that expectation. She never really had that. So, she’s like, ‘Okay, yeah. Once you graduate high school, you can do whatever you want. I honestly don’t even care.’” Bobby had a similar experience, “Because I didn’t really want to be in school. My mom, she said that’s all she really wanted from me. So, once I graduated, she was pretty much okay with that.” The mentality of the participants suggested that if school is not being pushed culturally, it must not be that significant. Raseem articulated, “But all honesty, I feel like I’m
actually doing a lot better than half of the people that actually went to college that I know. I have my own place. I have majority of the time to myself.” He continued, “Sometimes you just want to go out and make your money and find a way to do that. I found a way to do that. I’m working good, I’m living good without it. I don’t really need it.” In one case the mom specifically told the participant not to attend and to consider other options than school. Laron stated, “My mom she told me to fall back for a little bit, try finding something else you can do besides school. I know how to cook, so I was using my cooking plan to go to trade school and take up that trade, culinary arts, carpentry also.” These cultural barriers are developed due to a lack of cultural capital as it relates to college access; therefore, the last cultural theme was coined cultural deficits.

**Cultural deficits.** Low-income African American males’ culture is not valued in the education system. Their voice and perspective tend to be excluded from the general curriculum. These students are forced to assimilate to the dominant culture or risk being left behind. There is also a culture of low expectations surrounding these students. They are not expected to pursue higher education by their families, peers or schools. Not only is their culture not being valued in the school system, but it is also not valued within their communities. Cultural assets can be stripped by family, school, and community. The following data was collected from the bounded cases regarding cultural deficits.

Laron discussed cultural deficits in his interview. He noted, “Low expectations from parents, don’t see people going to college in the community.” Raseem spoke about it from a family perspective, “My mom, she got pregnant early, so she didn’t really have the opportunity to even graduate high school.” Bobby added, “Mom went to college for only two years, no one else I knew went. I can’t even say. I don’t know because like I said, my mom didn’t push me.”
Shawn explained how low expectations is a norm in the community. Shon stated, “They have lower expectations of themselves in a lot of situations. They work at McDonald’s making $7.50 an hour, $300 check thinking that’s something you make for 40 hours. I’m looking like, that’s horrible compared to what people really make.” Laron continued with the community position, “A lot of my friends downplayed me going to college. ‘You’re not going to school. What you going to do? Why are you going to school?’ Why do y’all want me out here? There’s really nothing for me, out here.” Laron added, “I actually got homies telling me, ‘School ain’t for you, I already know. From what I seen you do in regular, in high school, it ain’t going to be for you.’” Laron explained for many in the community the goal was not college; it was to finish high school. Laron noted, “My two cousins, only two out of both sides of the family that graduated high school. Besides them two, and me, we the only ones that did high school like all four years.” David described cultural deficits as a generational problem:

> Cause they come from families with no- I would say- no structure, they come from families with no wealth- families with- no- assets- and then what they have is usually passed on, and, remember where we come from. We know where we come from- so if you pass on that, what you expect to get out of it? Same results, man same results. We pass on the same things. Yea so, I feel like- that’s what it is.

Therefore, not knowing anyone who went to college can pose as a cultural barrier for these young men. Shon alluded to that point, “So when I decided not to go to college, it was hard for me because [inaudible 00:03:33] a lot of my peers, family members, and the generation right before me didn’t go to college. I would’ve been the first generation.” Shon discussed, due to not feeling adequately prepared for college and financial constraints, how he decided to take the military route instead. Shon stated, “I always had to think about, financially was I prepared,
anything else that I wanted to do. And I noticed that I’m not ready for college and I have another choice, that’s why- my cousin went to the army.” Many of the participants witnessed how their decision was influenced by the lack of cultural capital as it relates to college attendance. Laron reflected on his family background:

My mom dropped out of high school, my dad dropped out of high school, my brothers all- all dropped out of high school. So, it was what it was. I’m just trying to break the chain, because I’m trying to show my little sister and my little brother that there’s more to just being out here.

Devon explained how cultural deficits may influence future decisions because people tend to just imitate what they see culturally:

The motivation isn’t there. I mean, we don’t really have any people that we actively see get up and go to college. We see go to work. So, a lot of times we’re just stuck in the house with mom and that’s all we really see is mom there. And you don’t see anybody else getting up and doing things. I think it’s just the environment that they’re we grew up I would say. Or did well in school in general and they really didn’t push for me to go to college. It was always like, ‘Why don’t you go to a trade school?’ A good amount does come from the fact that, again, we never really saw someone actually get up and go to college.

Shon pointed out that cultural deficits unfortunately damage the elders’ credibility in the community to inspire the youth to go to college. He posited that this is one of the problems, “They haven’t been there their self, and then you look at it like. Wow. Yeah, you haven’t been there yourself, but they don’t want you to be like you are [inaudible 00:14:12] and I think that’s the real problem.” As a result, to overcome this cultural barrier and attend higher education can
be a huge undertaking. Laron understands education is the key to breaking this cycle of cultural deficiencies. He expressed, “Our brothers ain’t show me that better way, I was always around, and we used to be drunk. I got younger siblings that need- my family didn’t show me what school was, so I got to show them.” Antoine did not know one African American male in his entire life who ultimately went to college. Antoine stated, “College, male college, no- I only know females that went to college.” Not knowing anyone who went to college who looked like them highlights the power of cultural capital; however, the data also emphasized the influence of racialized barriers as well.

**Racialized barriers.** The last set of barriers discovered in the data were racialized barriers, these particular barriers highlight the presence of individual and institutional racism within the college enrollment process. Through the data collection process, the participants expressed how they felt alienated throughout their education journey. There was a lack of African American teachers, administrators, and the curriculum did not reflect their values. As a result, they were disengaged with the education system and did not want to continue their education after high school. After data analysis, several themes developed out of the racialized barriers: college is for White people, lack of Black history education, and the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum.

**College is for White people.** Almost half of the cases presented incidents where they witnessed some form of racial discrimination during their academic journeys. Many of the perspectives shared by the participants were also discussed in the literature in Chapter Two. Laron argued that schools are still segregated today, evident in his school’s demographics where 99% of the student population consist of minorities. Furthermore, he alleged that this problem is also present in higher education institutions; he just doesn’t believe higher education was
designed for Black people. You would feel as though the experience would be boring.” Shon continued, “That’s the honest truth to me. It’s not, without sugar-coating it, but you want to be around your people sometimes.” Shon is presenting a case that since African Americans are not going to college, it is discouraging future students to aspire to go as well. As a result, “to be around your own people” would explain why many individuals do not leave their communities after high school. Laron stated, “Yeah, because of things like racism. There are a lot of places that are still segregated. So, I’ve been to campuses that are mainly Caucasian, European, and I’m like, man, where are all the Black people?” Laron was one of the few participants who applied to college; he ultimately applied to a HBCU, not a predominantly White institution (PWI). Raseem agreed with the segregation point but from a teaching perspective. Raseem articulated, “It goes all the way back to segregation days, everything. And it hasn’t changed. They probably changed some things that we learned about, but it hasn’t changed any way that was taught at all.” Devon did not experience much diversity in his school either. He remarked, “My school was predominantly Black and Hispanic. There were very few White people there.” All of the participants attended high-minority schools with low college participation; the perception was that White people go to college, not them. Furthermore, in these high-minority, high-poverty schools, the teachers and administrators tend to be predominantly White. These practices can indirectly tell students that they don’t have the capacity to hold positions that require a college education. Antoine hinted towards this inferiority complex when he stated, “And it could be because of a racist thing too. You never know. And the Whites, they do their academics because they smart. I ain’t going to lie, White people are smart as hell.” Devon suggested something similar, “It’s natural, it’s a thought, oh White people are going to go through school and then you got lawyers, doctors and everything else. Black people have
another chance, we might not make it through school, but we’re more athletically gifted.”

Antoine highlighted one of the reasons for this through his assertion that there is a difference in support between White and African American students when it comes to attending college.

Antoine stated, “They got their parents support. My parents support me, but she do all she can, she can’t do everything. That’s basically it. I don’t got the same support the White people got.”

Shon witnessed some of the support when he attended a predominantly White school:

St. Joseph’s Prep was $24,000 a year. Even while I was in there, you would notice a difference between teaching and everything else. Most of the schools- it was predominantly a White school and just going in there you would really see the differences in where everybody’s taught. And when I came to a public school, I think the real, what you really notice coming from a private to public school, is the teachers. That is the difference. The teaching and everything else. In a private school, they care more about what you do, where in a public school, you get the F, you get the F. In a private school, you’re getting, you listen your [inaudible 00:05:38] are telling you, ‘Stay up on this,’ or ‘Hey, homework coming up.’ Hey, even when you miss a day of school, the two guy teachers emailing you, telling you- you need to catch up on this, do this. They won’t let you fail. They tell your parents that you’re not doing your work before you even get a chance to fail. That’s a big difference.

Several participants communicated how school is designed to help Whites but not African Americans. One point brought up by 30% of the cases was how African American students are dealt harsher punishments compared to their White peers. Thirty percent of the cases were kicked out of high school and had to graduate in alternative high schools. This was a pattern that seemed consistent in both states. Antoine contended, “I ain’t going to say all teachers was
assholes, but my principal, he did not want to hear anything I was saying. He just straight kicked me out.” Steffen added, “My junior year I got kicked out of school because I had moved like far from the school, and I kept being late, so they had to move me somewhere else to a different school.” These cases complained that they didn’t see the same repercussions happening to their White male counterparts. Moreover, the participants also expressed how African Americans are invisible, not only in the design of school but in the curriculum as well.

**Black history education.** Teaching about African American history and culture can appeal to these students’ cultural capital, making them feel welcome and a part of the education process. One way this can be done is through the curriculum and teaching. Seventy percent of the cases described their educational experience as having a lack of diversity in the curriculum, staffing, and practices. Bobby articulated that the only time they spoke about African Americans was during Black History Month. He said, “Black people were talked about more so on Black History month.” Shon added, “Lot of the teaching they would teach White history and at the same time we had also discussed that it was written by White people, it’s a lot of things that’s not included that we have actually done in there.” The criticism against the curriculum was that it was not representative of all the voices in history, moreover the textbook may not have been accurate. Shon expressed how the textbooks are putting Whites in a favorable light and dismissing African American history altogether. Shon suggested, “Like the book basically doesn’t specify how much that we have done in history compared to another group of people. They show more White people, basically it’s not that much history of us.” Laron noted he had to correct many facts he saw in his textbooks about history. He stated, “We used all the old books and I don’t agree with a lot of them, I really didn’t agree with it because I did- I do deeper research in advance. So, I was correcting certain stuff that was in the book.” He continued,
“The White man that sat on top and ruined it. It’s a lot of books in schools that tell you the White man invented a lot of stuff, but when you really research, it’s really a Black man.” This assertion articulates the distrust found in many low-income African American communities regarding education, specifically Black history education. Kenneth expressed his distrust with Black history education:

No, no they lie to us. They lie. So, they tell us things that’s like, aight so- did you know that America wasn’t originally called America. So, things like that, I never learned that in school, I learned that out- in these streets. You know what I’m saying? I learned that from other people who wanna actually help me that’s not going through a book- and saying, aight they told me to teach you this, so I’m a teach you this. I learned this from people that care about me and want me to know things that I should know. Know what I’m saying, the history of our country they teach us off of a lesson plan.

Consequently, this distrust spills over from Black history education to the curriculum, to teachers, to the education system, and eventually to higher education aspirations. Antoine insisted he learned all of his Black history education from his mother and the internet, not through the curriculum. Antoine recalled, “I learned it from my mother and basically Google. I learned Harriet Tubman on Google. They didn’t even speak about that shit in school. I learned about Harriet Tubman, I learned about Martin Luther King, what’s the Muslim again?” David contended, “Schools are not about learning. It is all about tests.” Raseem suggested the problem was “schools have a really difficult way of teaching all of the basic stuff. It really hasn’t changed at all, since like the 1800’s. So, the same concept of school, they’ve been teaching you the same thing that they’ve been teaching.” With the students’ distrust of the education system
mounting, those who do choose to continue their education tend to be individuals who earned a sports scholarship.

**Sports scholarships or no college.** There seems to be a false narrative in low-income African American communities (particularly toward males) that sports scholarships are the only ways to pay for a college education. Consequently, the lack of knowledge around financing college can pose another barrier to post-secondary education. The students and their families are not privy to the numerous ways one can fund a college education. Unfortunately, this phenomenon tends to affect low-income communities of color the most due to their unfamiliarity with the college enrollment process. Antoine confessed, “I don’t know how to apply to colleges and stuff like that. No, they just told me college is the best option.” Not one case in this study accurately described the steps to enroll to college. Some did not know any of the steps; however, most knew a few steps on how to enroll to higher education. Yet, all of the cases were aware of sports scholarships as the main way to college enrollment. When asked about academic scholarships, very few cases were aware that these scholarships even existed. James posited, “The best way was to try to get a scholarship. Because my mom wasn’t ever able to afford it for that, like basketball scholarship. Yeah. I was good at it. Football scholarship or try through other programs.” James continued, “Like my mom wanted me to get scholarships for doing sports and stuff like that, but as far as really attempted and going to help me, do the research with me, she really didn’t attempt it.” Laron had a different stance; he believed that African Americans were being used by the colleges and universities as entertainment, either with sports or performing arts. Laron asserted, “Yeah, now they could freely do it, just because they know how we get used for entertainment, that’s the way it is- we not making no money off this. But the coaches in the school bringing in multimillion dollars.” Laron continued, “That’s how they
look at us, entertainment. So, they feel as though they could get us- they can feed us these sports scholarships and feed us a million-dollar contracts once we leave school.” Bobby added, “I just feel like they feel like we- I’m not going to say they don’t feel like we nothing, but they feel like we just there.” It appears as if only African American athletic students are being pushed to go to college. Devon summed up this phenomenon in his interview:

I think they're promoting [sports] far more aggressively. They really pushed in your face to get that [sports] scholarship because many people, especially young Black men, that’s all you grow up seeing is, oh, we see them become a football player or a boxer. That’s all they see. They don’t, I said they don’t see anything academic. They just see rapper, boxer, football player, basketball player. Just like this is the only way that they feel is their way out. I think it’s the only thing we see that we’re good at. That’s really about it. It’s the only thing that we see that we’re good at and we always seem to dominate. We always seem to dominate when there’s anything physical.

Bobby agreed with Devon’s assertion:

I feel as though if you’re talented with anything that relates to sports, then they would push you. They would find any way to talk to a teacher for them to give you extra, give you a retry on a test. Or give you more time. They do a lot of favoritism with sports and African Americans rather than- they let you figure it out on your own. Like literally- literally, if you’re not good at no sports they’re not going to push you. I feel as though that’s literally our only way out.

Several of the participants suggested African American students who are gifted athletically are the ones being pushed to go to college; the remaining students are just simply being left behind. Shon pointed out, “Like even if we don’t go to high school, we can make our way up through
[school] going through football or basketball or anything else because we’re naturally more athletically gifted.” Raseem countered how African Americans may be focusing too much on sports and not on their academics like their White counterparts. Raseem expressed, “But at the same time, their [Whites] academic level was a lot better. They focused on their grades a lot more than the sports. But I feel like the African Americans, they do stuff that they like to enjoy.” Laron highlighted that this trend of sports over academics will eventually catch up to African Americans. He added, “If you’re paying any attention to the NFL now, a lot of people are leaving the league to go back to school, just so they can get their education that they needed- they not giving people the right education.” Despite the large number of African American males who participate in sports, less than six percent of all athletic scholarships granted in the United States actually go to African Americans (Majors, 2017).

**Unexpected codes.** This study specifically focused on barriers facing low-income African American males accessing college. The researcher did not expect to uncover advantages regarding college access. Eleven codes were discovered from the data that assisted the participants with accessing higher education. These unexpected codes highlighted college preparation courses, caring teachers, college tours, leadership days, and peers who attended college. Sixty percent of the cases contributed to the development of these 11 codes, these codes assisted the researcher with understanding some of the opportunities that were available to this target population to gain access to post-secondary education.

Several participants discussed how they had a specific class focused on college preparedness. This class was offered to some of the participants in Pennsylvania but not in New Jersey. James noted, “Well, my old school was like a college prep school; so, it basically like every day be doing this, preparing for college. So, they basically drill that in your head since
your freshman year.” Shon added, “We even, so in my senior year of high school, even my junior, we had a whole class dedicated directly to getting prepared for college. And it’s mandatory, if I’m correct. It was mandatory.” Fifty percent of the cases took some form of college ready or advanced placement classes. Raseem noted, “I was relatively very prepped for college, because I mean, I did a lot of AP (Advanced Placement) courses since freshman year. At least like 10 AP courses.” One case discussed how his teacher played an important role with explaining the college enrollment process. David stated, “My high school counselor, she’s there to help students get, well go- go from college, I mean go from high school to college. So, she helps us set up FAFSA.” A few cases discussed programs like college tours and male leadership days. Raseem explained, “Well, it was a lot of- how do you call it? It’s when the colleges show up to your school. Interventions, I guess, you could say. They’ll come, explain the school a little bit.” Laron added, “See when I was at XXXX, we had something called Male Leadership Day. So, like a bunch of African American males, they would come in and talk to us about successful males.” Lastly, two cases explained how they had cultural capital with regard to college access. James stated, “My tech teachers told me and plus me being around people that went to college because I got family members that went to college and friends I went to college.” Although these codes were unexpected, the results did not change, not one case in this study successfully matriculated to college.

**Research Questions**

The interviews, document analysis, and focus group attempted to answer four research questions that guided this study. A total of 30 questions were asked to uncover the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates. Interviews
were appropriate for this research design, as this study aimed to hear the voices and explore the experiences of low-income high school graduates who identify as African American males.

**Central Research Question**

What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates?

Low-income African American male high school graduates face a series of barriers to college enrollment. Through a review of the literature, data collection, and data analysis, this study was able to identify three major types of barriers facing these students as it relates to higher education. The barriers to college enrollment were divided into structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. The structural barriers were disengaged with the school system, the priority of work over going to college, and college affordability. The cultural barriers referred to the pressures of being a low-income African American male trying to pursue higher education. The participants described these cultural barriers as living in low-income communities, the negative perception of college, and the cultural deficits that persist in low-income minority communities. Lastly, the racialized barriers to college enrollment were the following: college is for White people, the lack of Black history education, and the ultimatum of either earning a sports scholarship or not attending college. Through data collection and analysis, this study assisted with understanding some of the barriers in the pathways to higher education for low-income African American male high school graduates.

**Sub Question 1:** What are the structural barriers that low-income African Americans face as they prepare for college?

There were three structural barriers identified in this study after conducting data analysis. The structural barriers were disengaged with the school system, the priority of working over
going to college, and college affordability. Sixty percent of the participants expressed being disengaged with the school system. Antoine expressed some concerns that college would be the same as high school. He stated, “When I was in high school, I wasn’t really all into the classes. I didn’t pay attention to nothing. Basically, I feel like it’ll be the same thing in college.” The majority of the cases blamed grades, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum, and poor school quality for not being engaged with the school system. As a result, 80% of the participants did not even apply to college after graduating high school. The next structural barrier that influenced the participants as they prepared for college was the pressure of having to get a job. Living in low-income communities there is significant pressure for many of these students to start working and contributing to the household immediately, some as early as junior year in high school. Eighty percent of the cases were reared in single-parent households, which can often put a lot of financial pressure on these students and their families. Raseem noted, “I was looking for a job. I didn’t really have any money. My mom was pretty much going through it with the bills and everything, so I’m like, I need to find a way in order to help her first.” Several of the participants discussed how pursuing college would be a form of family abandonment. Shon emphasized this point in his interview, “I care about my family, I want to care about my family. Feels like a sense of abandonment, if I was to go far out, anything like that, to college.” Furthermore, the lack of college preparedness and access to college information was demonstrated during the researcher’s observations. There were some challenges disseminating college information to all students; one example of this was in O High School where the guidance counselor ratio was 421:1. Thus, none of the cases were able to accurately describe the process to apply to post-secondary education. The last structural barrier these students faced as they prepared for post-secondary education was college affordability. College affordability was
the number one structural barrier presented by the cases, with 70% of the cases suggesting this barrier played a significant role in their decision not to attend college. David reported, “The money. That was the number one reason,” why he did not attend college. Antoine added, “It’s basically the money. I got to pay for college, I got to pay for books. Financial aid, they help you a little bit, and still you got to pay out the money. I don’t got money.” Although 20% of the cases were accepted to college, those cases were still not able to attend due to college affordability.

**Sub Question 2:** What are the cultural barriers that low-income African Americans face accessing college?

The cultural barriers refer to the social component facing this target population as they attempt to gain access to college. Bottiani et al. (2016) expressed how students of color must traverse significant ethnic borders to feel fully part of a school in which middle-class, majority cultural norms often predominate. Through data analysis three cultural barriers were identified: living in low-income communities, the negative perception of college, and the cultural deficits that persist in low-income minority communities. These cultural barriers were consistent with the researcher’s observations and data collection. The participants expressed how they did not feel a part of the education system which influenced their decision to attend college. Moreover, the majority of the cases expressed how there was no expectation to attend college just to graduate high school. Not having friends or family members in the community who attended college influenced how they perceived higher education. College tends to be viewed negatively in these communities, it is perceived as a continuation of high school and a financial burden to the family. The culture of low-income communities can make it extremely difficult to access college. Shon described some of these barriers in his interview, “Lot of people growing up in
Black communities where it's a lot of crime and everything else.” For many of these cases, the problem wasn’t only the school system but life outside of school. David shared, “I wouldn’t even listen. I mean, certain things we’ve learned about was kind of interesting, but I really wasn’t paying attention. I was really worried- I was worried about other stuff, like what’s going to happen after school.” Sixty percent of the participants discussed how the “hood” makes the process of going to college much more difficult. Bobby expressed, “Like me, when I was young, I wanted to [go to school]. I had a dream, aspiration- but once I started, like I said, once I started being in the streets it just was all right, whatever with high school.” The second cultural barrier to college access was the negative perception of college that thrives in these low-income, high-minority communities. All of the cases reviewed in this study had negative perceptions towards college. Raseem argued, “But all honesty, I feel like I’m actually doing a lot better than half of the people that actually went to college that I know.” David alluded that college is a trap financially, by deciding not to go, “You [are] not trapped in college.” The majority of the participants explained how they viewed college through the lens of their parents, specifically their mothers. Bobby reiterated that point, “My mom didn’t push me. She maybe brought it up once. ‘Yeah. Finish high school, get your diploma. I'm okay, I'm satisfied, I'm content with that. Anything else is on you, and that’s your life and decision.’” The perception of college was not only negative, but also promoted as not necessary, which influenced college access. The last cultural barrier to college access was cultural deficits. Laron discussed cultural deficits in his interview. He noted, “Low expectations from parents, don’t see people going to college in the community.” Shon articulated the same point, “So when I decided not to go to college, it was hard for me because [inaudible 00:03:33] a lot of my peers, family members, and the generation right before me didn’t go to college. I would’ve been the first generation.” Therefore, not
having peers, family, or resources to leverage, pose a significant threat to low-income African American males accessing higher education.

**Sub Question 3: What are the racialized barriers to college aspirations?**

This final sub question addresses the racialized barriers to college aspirations. The presence of individual and institutional racism is embedded within the college enrollment process. After completing data analysis, the following themes were identified to respond to this research question: the belief that college is for White people, the lack of Black history education, and the ultimatum of either earning a sports scholarship or not attending college. The first racialized barrier focuses on how college was designed for Whites. Shon stated, “So honestly I can’t really sugar-coat this answer, but you wouldn’t want to go to college and not had any of your own people around.” Laron stated, “Yeah, because of things like racism. There are a lot of places that are still segregated. So, I’ve been to campuses that are mainly Caucasian, European and I’m like, man, where are all the Black people?” Devon added, “It’s natural, it’s a thought, oh White people are going to go through school and then you got lawyers, doctors and everything else. Black people have another chance, we might not make it through school, but we’re more athletically gifted.” The participants expressed how college is for smart White people not them. Antoine argued, “Whites, they do their academics because they smart. I ain’t going to lie, White people are smart as hell.” Twenty percent of the cases expressed how Whites are also being better supported to go to college than African Americans. Antoine suggested, “I don’t got the same support the White people got.” These racialized barriers were also present with the lack of diversity with the teaching staff, curriculum, and Black history education. Seventy percent of the cases described their educational experience as having a lack of diversity in the curriculum, staffing, and practices. Bobby articulated that the only time they spoke about African Americans
was during Black History Month. He said, “Black people were talked about more so on Black History month.” Shon added, “Lot of the teaching they would teach White history and at the same time we had also discussed that it was written by White people, it’s a lot of things that’s not included that we have actually done in there.” Antoine suggested, “It’s the White teachers too. They be thinking Black people are stupid. I don’t like how they talk to me. If you’re going to treat me lesser than the White kid, I don’t want to be in your class.” Exclusive curriculums referred to how the current curriculum and teachers do not reflect the perspective or values of African American males and how that may disengage these students from continuing their education. The final racialized barrier presented by the bounded cases was how sports scholarships are also a form of racial discrimination against African American males who don’t play sports. Devon summed up that point in his interview:

I feel as though if you’re talented with anything that relates to sports, then they would push you. They would find any way to talk to a teacher for them to give you extra, give you a retry on a test, or give you more time. They do a lot of favoritism with sports and African Americans rather than- they let you figure it out on your own. Like literally-literally, if you’re not good at no sports they’re not going to push you. I feel as though that’s literally our only way out.

As a result, the consensus of the cases was that African American males who play sports are pushed to go to for college, while those who do not are ignored or dismissed.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of the data analysis. The data analysis process involved open and axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. This chapter focused on the findings related to the research questions outlined in
Chapter One. The chapter summarized the participants in the study, the high schools they attended, results of the study, themes developed out of the data, and the responses to the research questions. The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. The study involved 10 low-income African American male high school graduates from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. The knowledge gained from this study assisted with understanding some of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers facing low-income African American males as it relates to college access. Using the collected data, the codes were developed into nine overall themes and separated into three types of barriers identified in the literature: structural, cultural, and racialized. The following nine themes were highlighted after completing categorical aggregation: (a) disengaged school system, (b) working is more of a priority than college, (c) college affordability, (d) the culture of low-income environments, (e) cultural deficits, (f) negative perceptions of college, (g) college is for White people, (h) lack of Black history education, and (i) the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. The research questions were answered indicating how structural, cultural, and racialized barriers influence the pathway to college for low-income African American males. The combined information from all the data sources previously mentioned allowed for triangulation as well as replication of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Post-secondary enrollment has increased substantially over the past few decades; however, many students, specifically low-income African American males are still underrepresented in higher education (Means et al., 2016). Not only are students from low socioeconomic backgrounds underrepresented in higher education, but also their numbers appear to be falling: the proportion of high school graduates from the bottom quintile of family income enrolling in college declined 10.4 percentage points from 2008 (55.9%) to 2013 (45.5%) (Means, Hudson, & Tish, 2019). The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. This study employed a qualitative methodology approach involving 10 low-income African American male high school graduates from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. The data analysis procedures involved open coding, axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. The following subjects will be discussed in this chapter: summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study assisted with understanding some of the barriers facing low-income African American males to college access. Using the collected data, codes were developed into nine overall themes and separated into three types of barriers which were identified in the literature: structural, cultural, and racialized. The following nine themes were highlighted after completing categorical aggregation: (a) disengaged school system, (b) working
is more of a priority than college, (c) college affordability, (d) the culture of low-income environments, (e) cultural deficits, (f) negative perceptions of college, (g) college is for White people, (h) lack of Black history education, and (i) the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. These themes indicated how structural, cultural, and racialized barriers influence the pathway to college for low-income African American male high school graduates. A total of 30 questions were asked to uncover the barriers to college access facing this target population.

Interviews were appropriate for this research design, as this study aimed to hear the voices and explore the lived experiences of low-income students that identify as African American male high school graduates. Four research questions guided this study, the research questions were answered indicating how there are specific barriers that influence the pathway to college for low-income African American males.

Central Research Question
What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates?

This central research question grounded the entire study. The answers to this question allowed us to hear the participants’ voices directly while advancing knowledge and improving practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central phenomenon (barriers) was very broad; therefore, sub questions were developed to gain a better understanding of the barriers low-income African American male high school graduates experience as they pursue college. These individuals face a series of barriers to college access. Through a review of the literature, data collection, and data analysis, this study was able to identify three major types of barriers facing these students as they pursue higher education. The major type of barriers to college enrollment were structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. The structural barriers were the following:
disengaged with the school system, the priority of work over going to college, and college affordability. The cultural barriers referred to the cultural pressures of being a low-income African American male trying to pursue higher education. The participants described these cultural barriers as living in low-income communities, the negative perception of college, and the cultural deficits that persist in low-income minority communities. Lastly, the racialized barriers to college enrollment were the following: college is for White people, the lack of Black history education, and the ultimatum of either earning a sports scholarship or not attending college.

**Sub Question 1:** What are the structural barriers that low-income African Americans face as they prepare for college?

This first sub question addressed the systemic conditions and norms that perpetuate inequity and oppression for low-income African American males in the education system as they prepare for college (Cati et al., 2015). There were three structural barriers identified in this study after conducting data analysis. The structural barriers were disengaged with the school system, the priority of working over going to college, and college affordability. Sixty percent of the participants expressed being disengaged with the school system. The participants also expressed some concern that college would be the same as their high school experience. Antoine stated, “When I was in high school, I wasn’t really all into the classes. I didn’t pay attention to nothing. Basically, I feel like it’ll be the same thing in college.” The majority of the cases blamed grades, teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum, and poor school quality for not being engaged with the school system. As a result, 80% of the participants did not even apply to college after graduating high school. The next structural barrier that influenced the participants as they prepared for college was the pressure of obtaining a job. Living in low-income communities there is significant pressure for many of these students to start working and contributing to their
household immediately, some as early as junior year in high school. Eighty percent of the cases were reared in single-parent households which can often put a lot of financial pressure on these students and their families. Raseem noted, “I was looking for a job. I didn’t really have any money. My mom was pretty much going through it with the bills and everything, so I’m like, I need to find a way in order to help her first.” Several of the participants discussed pursuing college would be a form of family abandonment. Shon emphasized this point in his interview, “I care about my family, I want to care about my family. Feels like a sense of abandonment, if I was to go far out, anything like that, to college.” The last structural barrier these students faced as they prepared for post-secondary education was college affordability. College affordability was the number one structural barrier presented by the cases, with 70% of the cases suggesting this barrier played a significant role in their decision not to attend college. David reported, “The money. That was the number one reason,” he did not attend college. Although 20% of the cases were accepted to college, those particular cases were still not able to attend due to college affordability.

**Sub Question 2:** What are the cultural barriers that low-income African Americans face accessing college?

The second sub question referred to the social component facing this target population as they attempt to gain access to college. Bottiani et al. (2016) expressed how students of color must traverse significant ethnic borders to feel fully part of a school culture in which middle-class, majority cultural norms often predominate. Through data analysis three cultural barriers were identified: living in low-income communities, the negative perception of college, and the cultural deficits that persist in low-income minority communities. These cultural barriers were consistent with the researcher’s observations, literature review, and data collection. The
participants expressed how they did not feel a part of the education system which influenced their decision not to continue their education. The culture of low-income communities can make it extremely difficult to access college. Shon described some of these barriers in his interview, “Lot of people growing up in Black communities where it’s a lot of crime and everything else.” Bobby expressed, “Like me, when I was young, I wanted to [go to school]. I had a dream, aspiration- but once I started, like I said, once I started being in the streets it just was all right, whatever with high school.” For many of these cases, the problem wasn’t only the school system but life outside of school. David shared, “I wouldn’t even listen. I mean, certain things we’ve learned about was kind of interesting, but I really wasn’t paying attention. I was really worried- I was worried about other stuff, like what’s going to happen after school.” Sixty percent of the participants discussed how the “hood” made the process of going to college much more difficult. The next cultural barrier highlighted was the negative perception of college found in these low-income, high-minority communities. College tends to be perceived as a continuation of high school and a financial burden to the family. All of the cases reviewed had negative perceptions towards college. Raseem argued, “But all honesty, I feel like I’m actually doing a lot better than half of the people that actually went to college that I know.” David alluded that college is a trap financially, by choosing not to go, “you [are] not trapped in college.” The majority of the participants explained how they viewed college through the lens of their parents, specifically their mothers. Bobby reiterated that point, “My mom didn't push me. She maybe brought it up once. ‘Yeah. Finish high school, get your diploma. I’m okay, I’m satisfied, I’m content with that. Anything else is on you, and that’s your life and decision.’” The perception of college was not only negative, but also promoted as not necessary, which influenced college aspirations. The last cultural barrier to college access was cultural deficits. Laron discussed cultural deficits in
his interview. He noted, “Low expectations from parents, don’t see people going to college in the community.” Shon articulated the same point, “So when I decided not to go to college, it was hard for me because [inaudible 00:03:33] a lot of my peers, family members, and the generation right before me didn’t go to college. I would’ve been the first generation.” Therefore, not having peers, family, or resources to leverage, pose a substantial threat to low-income African American males accessing higher education.

**Sub Question 3:** What are the racialized barriers to college aspirations?

This final sub question addressed the presence of institutional racism embedded in the college enrollment process. This question granted the counter-stories to take form as the participants reflected on their experiences with systemic racism (Bottiani et al., 2016; Catı et al., 2015). After completing data analysis, the following themes were identified to respond to this research question: the belief that college is for White people, the lack of Black history education, and the ultimatum of either earning a sports scholarship or not attending college. The first racialized barrier focused on how college was designed for Whites. Shon stated, “So honestly I can’t really sugarcoat this answer, but you wouldn’t want to go to college and not had any of your own people around.” Laron stated, “Yeah, because of things like racism. There are a lot of places that are still segregated. So, I’ve been to campuses that are mainly Caucasian, European and I’m like, man, where are all the Black people?” The participants expressed how college is for smart White people not them. Antoine argued, “Whites, they do their academics because they smart. I ain’t going to lie, White people are smart as hell.” Twenty percent of the cases also expressed how Whites are being better supported to go to college than African Americans. Antoine suggested, “I don’t got the same support the White people got.” The next racialized barrier articulated the lack of diversity within the teaching staff, curriculum, and history
education. Seventy percent of the cases described their educational experience as having a lack of diversity in the curriculum, staffing, and practices. Bobby articulated that the only time they spoke about African Americans was during Black History Month. He said, “Black people were talked about more so on Black History month.” Shon added, “Lot of the teaching they would teach White history and at the same time we had also discussed that it was written by White people, it’s a lot of things that’s not included that we have actually done in there.” Antoine suggested, “It’s the White teachers too. They be thinking Black people are stupid. I don’t like how they talk to me. If you’re going to treat me lesser than the White kid, I don’t want to be in your class.” Exclusive curricula which was discussed in Chapter Two describes how the current curriculum and teachers in low-income minority schools do not reflect the perspective or values of African American males. Furthermore, an exclusive curriculum may communicate to young low-income African American males that they are unwelcome in school or college, disengaging these students from continuing their education. The final racialized barrier presented by the bounded cases was how sports scholarships are also a form of racial discrimination against African American males who don’t play sports. Devon summed up this point in his interview:

I feel as though if you’re talented with anything that relates to sports, then they would push you [to go to college]. They would find any way to talk to a teacher for them to give you extra, give you a retry on a test. Or give you more time. They do a lot of favoritism with sports and African Americans rather than- they let you figure it out on your own. Like literally, literally, if you’re not good at no sports they’re not going to push you. I feel as though that’s literally our only way out.

As a result, the consensus of the cases was that African American males who play sports are getting pushed to go to college, while those who do not are ignored or dismissed. Despite the
large number of African American males who participate in sports, less than six percent of all athletic scholarships granted in the United States actually go to African Americans (Majors, 2017).

**Discussion**

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers facing low-income African American male high school graduates in northeast United States. Utilizing a collective case study research design, the researcher identified barriers to college access for 10 bounded cases (low-income African American male high school graduates) from two different states. The target population (low-income African American male high school graduates) tend to be a group ignored by the literature, the focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or students already enrolled in college (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Further research was needed to understand why low-income African American male high school graduates are ill-prepared for post-secondary education and ultimately do not enroll. Research was conducted in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The data collection process included individualized participant interviews, focus group interview, and document analysis. The majority of interviews and the focus group interview were professionally transcribed by Rev.com. The data collection process provided a thick description of the phenomenon which included: 10 individual interviews which lasted 30 to 50 minutes each, a focus group which lasted approximately an hour, observations of the two towns and high schools, and documents obtained from the participants. After a detailed analysis of the data collected, the researcher resulted with 159 codes from the 10 bounded cases. Through open and axial coding, 159 codes were identified and then reduced to 28 codes. Two strategic ways researchers are able to obtain new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation or through categorical aggregation.
The researcher engaged in categorical aggregation to condense the 28 codes into nine overall themes based off how many times they appeared in the data and by how many cases. The following nine themes were identified after completing categorical aggregation: (a) disengaged school system, (b) working is more of a priority than college, (c) college affordability, (d) the culture of low-income environments, (e) cultural deficits, (f) negative perceptions of college, (g) college is for White people, (h) lack of Black history education, and (i) the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. The tables in Chapter Four displayed the initial codes identified through open coding (Table 3), the identified codes after axial coding (Table 4), and the themes that emerged from the data after conducting categorical aggregation (Table 5). The themes that developed aligned with the research findings discussed in Chapter Two. CRT was instrumental in this study as a theoretical and analytical framework by challenging the ways race and racism influence the pathway to college (Yosso, 2005). This chapter outlines and discusses the findings of this study. The following sections discuss both the theoretical and empirical results along with the practical implications of the study.

Theoretical

Four theories were leveraged to better understand the research questions in this study, they included Becker’s (2009) human capital theory, Bourdieu’s (1986) social reproduction theory, Tierney and Venegas’ (2009) cultural ecological model, and Bell’s (1995) critical race theory. Human capital theory was instrumental in deciding to utilize college access as the goal for this study. This study sought to understand why low-income African American males are graduating high school but not enrolling into college, which could improve their human capital. Through Becker’s (2009) human capital theory, college can grant an individual more knowledge (capital), as a result, the more capital (social/cultural) individuals earn, the more valuable they
will be to themselves and their community. According to Becker (2009), education and training are the most important investments in human capital. Many of the cases described how they did not see the value of a college education and saw more value in obtaining a job after high school.

The cultural ecological model informed this study by suggesting that the traditional college choice model most accurately describes the navigation processes of typical advantaged students (Cox, 2016). However, working within this model to understand historically underrepresented students’ path to college can mislead researchers to attribute disappointing outcomes to students’ deficiencies (Cox, 2016). Patton (2016) claimed this meritocratic discourse is laced with racist and classist assumptions that posits hard work alone is sufficient for marginalized groups to excel. The traditional model does not account for many of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers found in this study when low-income African American males pursue higher education. College access models that are cloaked in the myth of hard work, without acknowledging racism in the college enrollment process are irresponsible (Patton, 2016). This study highlighted some of the racialized barriers at play for this target population, from racial discrimination to the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum.

Social reproduction theory and CRT were the theoretical perspectives that guided the entire study. Bourdieu’s theory claimed that schools will generally ignore the habitus of children of non-dominant classes, which is the primary cause of low attainments of working-class students (Nash, 1990). The participants in this study expressed how they struggled in school due to feeling out of place (sense of belonging) throughout their educational journey. Furthermore, they articulated how school, specifically college, was designed for White people; as a result, it was not a place for them. These dominant groups function within the social structures that enable them to reproduce information and power from one generation to the next (Welton &
Martinez, 2014). Social reproduction theory assisted the researcher in understanding how systemic educational problems can easily become generational problems. With regard to college access, many of the participants’ parents faced the same barriers they face today. The lack of power and the lack of access to college enrollment resources continue to transfer from one generation to the next. CRT was critical in understanding how race and power shape many of the barriers presented in this study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT as a theoretical framework is comprised of the following five tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010).

As college enrollment rates continue to vary based on SES, race/ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics; CRT assisted the researcher in understanding some of the underlying barriers that may complicate the pathway to college for low-income African American males. This study’s theoretical framework allowed the voices of these individuals to surface and to tell their counter-stories- while providing a framework to highlight how racism is built into the process of matriculating into college. The results of this collective case study directly supported many of the tenets of CRT. Through a synthesis of the literature, barriers to college access for low-income African American males were clustered into three distinct areas: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. The structural barriers were identified as school funding, college preparedness, and lack of college information. The cultural barriers were sense of belonging, low expectations, and cultural capital. Lastly, the racialized barriers highlighted in the literature were racial discrimination, hegemony, and exclusive curricula.

The bounded cases of this collective case study presented nine barriers to college access that aligned with many of the barriers discovered in the literature. The following nine themes
were highlighted after completing categorical aggregation: (a) disengaged school system, (b) working is more of a priority than college, (c) college affordability, (d) the culture of low-income environments, (e) cultural deficits, (f) negative perceptions of college, (g) college is for White people, (h) lack of Black history education, and (i) the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. Many of the participants in this case study provided responses that were consistent with the literature with regards to barriers to college access. Some form of structural, cultural, and racialized barriers were present in all of the cases in this study.

Seventy eight percent of the barriers identified in Chapter Two were also highlighted in the participants’ interviews. Only 22% of the barriers drawn from the literature (school funding and hegemony) were not consistent with the participants’ interviews. However, these barriers were indeed present, just not identified by the participants. These barriers were apparent during the researcher’s observations of the schools. Many of the issues that are plaguing these two communities in New Jersey and Pennsylvania are the effects of lack of funding. A news report from the U.S. Department of Education (2011) documented that schools serving low-income students are being shortchanged because school districts across the country are inequitably distributing their state and local funds. The report revealed that more than 40% of schools that receive federal Title I money to serve disadvantaged students spent less state and local money on teachers and other personnel than schools that don't receive Title I money (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Many of the opportunities discovered in this study- such as the 421:1 guidance counselor ratio, quality of college enrollment programs, and lack of curricular offerings could easily be addressed with more funding. Conley (2008) claimed that in affluent high schools, there are opportunities for counselors to be strictly devoted to college counseling, writing letters of recommendations, communicating with admission officers, and having the time
to remain current on admission procedures. However, in lower-income communities these counselors may not have the time to offer any of these services (Conley, 2008). Furthermore, the lack of diversity in the faculty, administration, and curriculum at both of these schools speak to the presence of hegemony in low-income, high-minority schools. The results of this study demonstrate how low-income African American males must overcome significant barriers to attend post-secondary education.

Empirical

Through a detailed analysis of the documents, interviews, focus group transcriptions, and observations, themes emerged from the data that aligned with Chapter Two’s review of the literature. The results obtained from this study were consistent with the results gathered from the literature review. The college choice literature revealed that low-income students and students of color are being disenfranchised due to structural and cultural practices associated with geography, higher education selectivity, and their relationship to merit, elitism, and prestige (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). Important thinkers in the field of college access include Hossler, Perna, Freeman, Paulsen, McDonough, and Cabrera (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). These authors have made extensive contribution to the work of underrepresented communities and college access. In my synthesis of the literature, barriers to college access for low-income African American males were clustered into three distinct areas: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. The literature review in Chapter Two examined these three distinct barriers to college access facing low-income African American males.

Structural barriers. Multiple researchers postulated several structural obstacles these students face as they pursue post-secondary education. Reardon (2013) focused on family income, he argued family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting
student achievement. This was evident in many of the cases within this study, family income played a major role in determining whether one can continue his education. All of the cases were from low-income families, which made finding a job more important than pursuing higher education after high school. The research indicated students who do not attend college predominantly come from low-income families, live in underdeveloped areas within major cities, and attend ineffective elementary and secondary schools (Anyon, 2005; Pitre, 2006; Reardon & Owens, 2014). Researchers also highlighted intersectionality, explaining how race, class, and gender (and other ascribed statuses) do not operate as distinct categories of experience but are lived conjointly (Wilkins, 2014). With the target population being low-income, African American, and male, intersectionality must be a concern for this population as it relates to college access.

The participants discussed in several interviews how race and class influenced their decision to continue their education. None of the cases suggested sex; however, African American females attend college at a much higher rate than their male counterparts. African American females have doubled their college enrollment rates in the past thirty years, and they are outperforming their male counterparts academically (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Other structural barriers in the literature included racism in K-12 education in the forms of tracking, limited college information, and lack of college preparedness (Gaxiola, 2017; O’Hara et al., 2012). Forty percent of the cases discussed how the expectation to perform academically and attend college were lower for students of color. The only exception found in the data was if those students were in position to obtain a sports scholarship. According to the participants, students who were eligible to obtain a sports scholarship were the only ones pushed to attend college. Therefore, if you were not eligible for sports scholarships you were not pushed or
prepared for college due to the lack of resources. Orr (2003) posited that children who attend wealthier public schools can expect lower student-to-teacher ratios, higher-quality teachers, better facilities, and the presence of educational resources to ensure they are able to attend post-secondary education. One of the cases was exposed to an affluent school system and a low-income school system; he was able to outline the major differences in resources between the two types of schools. In his interview, he argued that the affluent school had teachers who cared, a curriculum that was more challenging, and the school ensured everyone was on track to be successful. Conversely, at the lower-income school, he contended the curriculum was weak, resources were scarce and out of date, and it was a culture of disengaged teachers and students. Additionally, these students and their families are not privy to the numerous ways to fund a college education; therefore, many do not apply if they are not able to secure athletic scholarships (Wilkins, 2014). Consequently, students who may need the grants the most are not receiving them, due to the lack of information around the process (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015; Roderick, 2011). An example of this was displayed in the data: 20% of the cases were accepted to college but did not attend due to college affordability. The participants assumed obtaining a loan was the only viable option available to them without a sports scholarship. The lack of information around college enrollment was also displayed with seemingly all of the participants; not one participant knew all of the steps to matriculating to college.

**Cultural barriers.** The cultural barriers presented different sets of challenges for these students as they pursued higher education. Findings have empirically supported the argument that for low-income students, even with the right educational policies in place, school achievement is contingent on the family's economic and cultural resources (Anyon, 2005). When parents are unable or unavailable to help their children navigate the college admissions
process, the students then become responsible for establishing their own matriculation (Holland, 2010). Eighty percent of the cases were reared in single-parent households, of these cases, only one case was not led by a single mother. Only 50% of the cases had a parent who graduated high school and just 10% of the cases had a parent who attended post-secondary education. These statistics articulate the cultural deficits these participants have around the college enrollment process. Other cultural barriers involve how students of color are not members of the dominant culture; this is critical to understanding how and why low-income African American males are less likely to continue their education after high school, relative to their White peers (Goldenberg, 2014). In these low-income communities, the data demonstrate that college is considered a White process; they don’t believe college is a realistic goal for African Americans.

One of the themes out of the data analysis was that college is designed for White people. As a result, when one is able to attend college, that individual can be ridiculed for acting “White” in low-income, high-minority communities. African American students from low-income communities who devote their time to their studies can also be ostracized by their peers, pursuing college may be viewed as "acting White" in those communities (Alford, 2000). Therefore, when African Americans gain access to college they are often socially excluded and provided little to no social support from their peers and community (Alford, 2000).

The participants also explained how they felt that they were invisible in school through the curriculum and teaching methods; there were concerns that college would just be a continuation of these practices. Catí et al. (2015) made the case that low-income students feel invisible inside the education system where their voices are often muted. Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) maintained that low-income African American males continue to engage in school contexts that fail to see their cultural diversity as strengths to be built on. These cultural barriers
compound the negative perception of college for these students. Moreover, researchers have
indicated that school personnel who hold low expectations of students may deliberately withhold
critical academic and college preparatory information which can shape their desire to continue
their education after high school (Holland, 2010). Due to the negative stereotypes in many cases
being internalized by these students, many students of color do not even attempt to pursue higher
education (Carnavale, 2017). This point was demonstrated in this case study, where 80% of the
participants did not attempt to enroll in college. Studies have shown that minority students
believe they are frequently required to confront their teachers' lower expectations of their
academic abilities due to their race, class, and/or gender, and those types of confrontations
negatively influenced the students' schooling and college aspirations (Holland, 2010). Lastly, the
manner in which schools forcefully assimilate minority students through policies and practices
has been well documented as a form of decapitalization, whereby students of color are stripped
of their cultural and social assets (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Through data analysis, the
researcher identified this theme as cultural deficits.

Students who feel academically marginalized by race or class in the learning environment
develop contextually protective identity strategies to retain dignity, thereby losing their sense of
cultural capital (Wilkins, 2014). For the particular cases in this study, they decided to not
continue their education after high school. Additionally, when asked if they knew anyone in
their family, community, or school who attended post-secondary education, only 20% of the
participants were able to respond with an affirmative. Being a first-generation potential college
student, majority of these students did not know anyone who went to college who looked like
them, which is a significant cultural deficit which can influence the college enrollment process.
Cultural capital deficit has long-term consequences on college enrollment due to the high school
achievement gaps it often creates (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Consequently, not having peers, family, or resources to leverage, these cultural barriers pose a significant threat to low-income African American males continuing their education.

**Racialized barriers.** Low-income African American males have learned a well-defined fear of excelling in academic arenas which traditionally has been defined as the prerogative of White Americans (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Three racialized barriers developed out of the literature review: racial discrimination, hegemony, and exclusive curricula. However, the racialized barriers discovered through data collection and analysis were the following: college is designed for White people, lack of Black history education, and the sports scholarship or no college ultimatum. One of the themes discussed by the cases was this idea that college is designed for White people. One of the cases expressed how academics is for White people and sports and entertainment are for African Americans. This form of discourse is rooted in racial inferiority of people of color and their lack of cultural capital (Patton, 2016). One can argue that this is learned from years of racial discrimination, hegemonic practices, and cultural deficit teachings.

Racialized barriers tend to be overlooked in the literature of college access, therefore identifying these racial obstacles to college access was very important to this study. There seems to be a racial “mismatch” between primarily non-White public-school populations and their primarily White teaching forces, which continues to be under-examined through an appropriate cultural lens (Goldenberg, 2014). During the focus group, the participants agreed that there was a lack of diversity with their curriculum, teachers, and administrators. One case complained that he only had one Black history class and even that class was taught by a White female teacher. Ironically, when asked who their favorite teachers were and why, they highlighted the few
African American male teachers who took the time to teach them skills that were relatable to their real-life experiences. Raseem noted, “My forensic science teacher. His name was Mr. Randall. He’s a pretty cool person. He’s of African descent as well. He’s a relatively cool person. Whenever I was struggling, he was there. He was like a second parent for me.” The majority of the cases complained that their White teachers did not care and could not relate to their life outside of school. The participants also pointed to racial discrimination within the education system, how African American students are treated differently, especially with suspensions and expulsions. Thirty percent of the cases were expelled and had to finish high school at another school. The majority of teachers in low-income, high minority schools, approximately 80%, tend to be White women, educated on predominantly White college campuses by predominantly White teacher educators (Patton, 2016). The participants described the learning environment as a place where their race and culture were not valued or wanted. These direct and indirect messages were passed to them through the curriculum, the way they were treated, and faculty representation. Therefore, making strategic changes to how schools and administrations are staffed; and how the environment embraces diversity; can directly influence minority students’ trust in the education system (Childs, 2017).

Ninety percent of the cases wanted to learn more about African American culture within the curriculum. One case remarked the only time they felt included in school was during Black History Month. Although schools contend that they engage in a color-blind education system, these color-blind perspectives perpetuate racial inequality and reproduce racial and cultural hegemony in school practices (Cati et al., 2015). Hegemony was a reoccurring theme that came out of the literature. Hegemony is apparent in the practices of K-12 and higher education institutions, for example, what is assigned to read, how the professors/teachers engage race in
class discussions and the curriculum, and the normative parameters of racial sensemaking
evident in the field of education (Harper, 2012). Unfortunately, the participants interpreted these
hegemonic practices as college not being designed for them. They articulated how the content
taught in school either dismissed African American contributions or misinterpreted their cultural
involvement. Furthermore, the few who were able to attend college tours; expressed how
segregated college campuses were. They reported they saw very few African Americans on
campus. One participant expressed that was one of the reasons he did not go to college; he
didn’t find the idea of being in an all-White learning environment appealing. Many of these
participants are a product of majority-minority schools; as a result, being around their own
community brings a sense of comfort. Moreover, only 20% of the cases actually applied to
college; when they did, it was to community colleges, and HBCUs which are known to be more
diverse. Research on higher education have yet to consider whether the climate for racial/ethnic
diversity, specifically within the curriculum, may affect the enrollment of students of color into
these institutions (Garibay & Vincent, 2018). Hence, the participants posited that college was
not designed for them, the curriculum was unrelatable and exclusive to Whites, and the only way
to make it to college was through sports scholarships. The consensus from the cases was that
African American male athletes were the only individuals being pushed to go to college. As a
result, if you were not an athlete, college was not for you. They did not see those same
restrictive options for their White counterparts; many of the cases were not even aware of
academic scholarships or grants. Consequently, funding a college education for low-income
African American males in this study were narrowed down to three options: sports scholarships,
student loans, or paying out of pocket.
Implications

This collective case study was driven by four research questions. The results of this study suggested that there are substantial barriers low-income African American male high school graduates must overcome to access post-secondary education. Through a review of the literature, data collection, and data analysis, this study was able to identify three major types of barriers facing these students as they pursue higher education. The barriers to college enrollment were divided into structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. The structural barriers range from funding issues and the lack of college enrollment information; to the pressures of working being more important than attending college. The cultural barriers highlighted disengaged schools in low-income communities, low expectations placed on students, and the cultural deficits around college enrollment. Lastly, the racialized barriers focused on racial discriminatory practices, hegemony, and the exclusive curriculum. The results of this research study include theoretical, empirical and practical implications for education researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

CRT was the theoretical perspective that guided the entire study. This theoretical lens was critical in maintaining how race and power shape many of the barriers presented in this study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Racism tends to be overlooked in the literature of college access; therefore, identifying how race and power plays a role within the college access literature was very important to this study. Additionally, the theoretical implications of this study are significant due, in part, to the limited amount of research available that explores why African American male high school graduates are choosing not to pursue higher education. By employing the cultural ecological model for this study, it suggests that future college access
studies should not simply use the traditional college choice model as a one-size-fits-all model for all populations. The traditional college choice model most accurately describes the navigation processes of typical advantaged students (Cox, 2016). This study utilized a model that can account for many of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers that hinder low-income African American males from pursuing higher education. Engaging CRT as a theoretical framework, allowed the voices of these low-income African American male high school graduates to tell their counter-stories, while providing a framework to highlight how racism is built into the process of matriculating into college. Furthermore, CRT’s approach to education involves a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of minority communities in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Gaxiola, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

The results of this study provided meaningful theoretical data to researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders. The 159 codes that were identified during data analysis can provide great insight to all regarding the barriers to college enrollment facing this target population. Moreover, the results of the study confirm the tenets of CRT: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Hiraldo, 2010). This theory provides information that would be useful in the development of educational policy, programs targeting at-risk populations, as well as training materials for teachers and administrators. Additionally, this study would provide specific information on how to design culturally responsive pedagogy that incorporates all perspectives in the learning environment, which can influence college aspirations. Incorporating African/African American history, culture, and culturally responsive pedagogy within the curriculum will address the feeling of alienation with the education system that many of the
participants described in this study. School and college would no longer be perceived as places
designed only for White people, but inclusive environments for all learners.

**Empirical Implications**

The empirical implications of this study are significant due to the lack of data examining
low-income African American male high school graduates’ decision not to attend higher
education. The study’s findings were consistent with the results from the literature review in
Chapter Two. Barriers to college access facing low-income African American males tend to be
clustered around three distinct areas: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers.
Additionally, the study analyzed how the intersectionality of being low-income, African
American, and male may influence the pathway to higher education. Research has shown that
the gap in performance and outcomes between African Americans and Whites is a result of a
variety of factors, and it widens as children progress through school (Orr, 2003). However, more
research is needed to determine how the intersectionality of multiple disadvantages (low-income,
African American, and male) influences these outcomes, including college enrollment.

Moreover, this study highlighted the importance of cultural capital within the college access
literature.

Yosso (2005) argued for a critical examination of the systemic factors that perpetuate
deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant,
sociocultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Leveraging CRT in this study enabled the researcher
to feature how cultural deficits influence the pathway to college for this target population.
Cultural deficits included parental education, low expectations from schools and the community,
attending high-minority schools, and the absence of cultural capital with regards to family,
friends, and peers who actually attended college. Welton and Martinez (2014) claimed teachers
and academic counselors often make the executive decision to relegate low-income African American students to lower academic tracks by adamantly coercing them to pursue the minimum graduation plan. The majority of the cases did not know anyone who went to college who looked like them, which is a significant cultural deficit that can influence the college enrollment process. Research has demonstrated that individuals will aspire to achieve what they observe people who look like them actually accomplish. The effects of this ideology are evident with career choices, college majors, and even sports. Many of the participants in this study did not know anyone who could assist them in accessing post-secondary education including their schools, which led to many of them not even applying to college. Lastly, Patton (2016) argued that the curriculum excludes the diverse perspectives of all students and allows for a Eurocentric perspective that aligns more with the experiences of White students. The cases in this study expressed how African American history and culture are excluded from the curriculum, which can influence college aspirations. An exclusive curriculum may communicate to young low-income African American males that they are unwelcome in school or college, and because of it, they may experience a reduced sense of belonging within the education system (O’Hara et al., 2012). As a result, majority of the cases saw college as a White process not accessible to them, and they did not apply. College access literature must consider all of the obstacles facing this population that may influence the pathway to college. This study demonstrated how structural, cultural, and racialized barriers are significant; this study also highlighted how they can discourage and, in some cases, decide for the students whether they can attend college. More research is needed to incorporate these barriers into the literature to understand how these obstacles in low-income communities combined with racism can exacerbate the college access gap between low-income African American males and their White affluent counterparts.
Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study address the application for researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders. The literature on college readiness and access have been monolithically focused on students’ standardized test scores, prompting this study to highlight other significant constructs such as racialized barriers, specifically, exclusive curriculums (Liou & Rojas, 2018). This study focused on barriers that may not be visible on reports or statistics; however, these barriers influence the pathway to college. Accordingly, Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) called for the creation of culturally relevant, college-going cultures to increase the college readiness and college accessibility of African American students attending urban schools. This study is calling for culturally responsive pedagogy that includes all individuals in the classroom. Schools can no longer only engage in a one-size-fits-all Eurocentric curriculum and expect it to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. Research results suggest that sense of belonging may influence student’s self-efficacy and college aspirations (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). By engaging in culturally empowering pedagogies, educators can supersede many of these irrational and dehumanizing hegemonic forces that discourages low-income African American males from continuing their studies after high school graduation (Cati et al., 2015). This study is also challenging teachers and administrators to reevaluate their teaching styles and how they present pedagogy to low-income minority students, specifically African American males. Faculty and administration are not typically challenged to rethink their curriculum, address their biases, and engage with minority students in the classroom (Patton, 2016). Teachers and students need to reconstruct the meaning of a racialized school structure, and they must do so through curriculum and instructional strategies (Liou & Rojas, 2018). As a result, to influence more low-income African American males to attend post-secondary
education, they must be exposed to more African American teachers, curricula that reflect their values, communities with positive perceptions of college, more college-educated African American community stakeholders, and peers who attend post-secondary institutions.

For parents, the results of the study reinforce the idea that children are influenced by not only what you say but what you do as well. Parental education levels were a cultural barrier to higher education in this study. Not one case in this study came from a cultural background with college-educated parents, 50% of the parents were high school dropouts. More parents in these communities must attend college to inspire their children to want to do so as well. A significant body of research clearly identifies parents as one of the strongest influences in the student college choice process (Chapman et al., 2018). Students whose parents have cultivated a K-16 approach, in which higher education is a mandate and not an option, are more likely to believe in their ability to successfully apply to college (Chapman et al., 2018). Having affluent and educated parents can provide unique benefits to students trying to access higher education (Mwangi, 2015). Furthermore, the expectation to just graduate high school must be reconsidered. All of the cases in this study came from backgrounds where the only academic expectation was to graduate high school. Although the nuances of each parent/child relationship were different, the research demonstrates the parents’ expectations and education levels played a role in the participants’ decision not to attend college.

Recommendations for researchers is to discontinue using the traditional college choice model that only considers the pathway of the dominant group. Future researchers must engage in models similar to the cultural ecological model used in this study that can account for many of the structural, cultural, and racialized barriers that hinder low-income African American males from pursuing higher education. For practitioners, this study is calling for culturally responsive
pedagogy that includes every student in the classroom. Schools can no longer engage in a one-size-fits-all Eurocentric curriculum and expect it to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. By engaging in culturally empowering pedagogies, educators can overcome many of the barriers described in this study. This study also challenges practitioners to reevaluate their teaching strategies, curricula, and discipline procedures as they relate to minority students, specifically African American males. Lastly, recommendations for community stakeholders and parents is to cultivate a K-16 approach. The expectation at home and in the community must push further than high school graduation. Research is clear that students with college-educated parents can provide unique benefits to their children trying to access higher education (Mwangi, 2015).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was a backyard study; many of the issues and barriers explored in this study were experienced firsthand by the researcher. The sites selected to conduct my research I was very familiar with. One location was the school district I attended over two decades ago; whereas, I have worked in the other setting for over 10 years. A couple of limitations occurred while conducting the study within these two settings. I discovered the school system I attended over 20 years ago changed in demography. It is no longer a predominantly African American community; it is now a predominantly Hispanic community. The other limitation occurred with the second location. During the study, I changed jobs and no longer worked in the state of Pennsylvania, which made finding participants a challenge in that state. Additionally, in both communities there is this distrust of the education system. As a result, the participants perceived me as an extension of the school system. Several individuals refused to sit down with me to discuss this study, especially when they read the consent form that I would be examining their
grades and SAT scores. After conducting several interviews, I also realized the target population may have been a limitation. The participants were able to articulate overt racism but had difficulty speaking to covert and institutional racism. Some of these systemic barriers may take more of an advanced critical understanding of the education system to identify the underlying issues one is experiencing. Lastly, future research should consider changing the research design and methodology of this study. A phenomenological approach to studying this phenomenon can also be useful with future research. By emphasizing the lived experiences of low-income African American males, future research may discover other barriers not highlighted in this study. Furthermore, employing a quantitative methodology, future researchers may be able to quantify the barriers emphasized in this study and measure how they are influencing college enrollment for this population.

My axiological assumptions influenced some of the delimitations of this study. This study was limited to low-income individuals who identified as African American male, who graduated high school but did not attend college. Through my research, I realized there was a gap with this specific population (low-income African American male high school graduates) in the literature. The focus typically resides with students who dropped out of K-12 education or students who are enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges (Welton & Martinez, 2014). My decision to target low-income African American males was to establish how the intersectionality of race, sex, and class influences the pathway to college. Moreover, I identified with this group and the barriers they presented in this study. Through my axiological assumption, I was able to position myself within the study by identifying my positionality in relation to the context and setting of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I limited the geographical location to two inner-
city communities in New Jersey and Pennsylvania due to my familiarity and accessibility to these two states.

This study did not include students from suburban or rural areas because they were not the focus of the research questions. The study also did not consider family background when vetting participants. The findings of this study could have potentially changed if the researcher had considered individuals who were only reared in either single-parent households, two-parent households, or without parents. Furthermore, the education levels of the parents were another limitation of the study; low-income African American families can sometimes possess college-educated parents, which could influence the findings of this study. The study did not explore low-income African American female high school graduates and their experiences or other minorities whereby generalities could be made. These delimitations were also made due to the research questions that guided this study. I delimited the study to 10 participants because I reached saturation. The accounts of the participants began to yield similar results by the eighth interview. I delimited the ages of the participants to 18 to 24; that particular age group was the focus for this study because it is the average age range of traditional college students (Mayhew et al., 2016). Additionally, the study was delimited to students who were over the age of 18; therefore, parental consent was not needed. Due to the small sample size, generalizability could not be assumed. Lastly, with the interviewer identifying as African American, there seemed to be a level of comfort with the participants responding to these sensitive interview and focus group questions. Therefore, changing the race of the interviewer, can potentially skew the responses to the interview and focus group questions.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study produced recommendations for future research. This study established several barriers facing low-income African American males that can assist low-income communities and school districts. The data from this case study validated previous college access studies and produced new knowledge around barriers to college access for this specific target population. Recommendations for future research includes replicating the study at different inner-city locations to determine whether these barriers are generalizable or specific to this geographic location. In addition, future research should consider the parental level and family arrangements of the participants and determine how it would influence the barriers identified in this study. Future research should also consider changing the sex of the participants to ascertain whether these barriers are exclusive to African American males. Moreover, future research should consider including rural and suburban settings to determine whether the barriers identified in this study are restricted to urban settings only. Even when socioeconomic status is comparable, the nuances of rural, suburban, and urban poverty may create new barriers not considered in this study. Additionally, new research should consider whether there are any barriers that fall outside of structural, cultural, and racialized barriers that influence the pathway to college. Lastly, future research may want to consider studying a different population that can articulate all of the obstacles this population faces accessing higher education. Some of these systemic barriers may take more of an advanced critical understanding of the education system to identify the underlying issues that the participant is experiencing. The researcher should consider expanding the participant group to include students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators to gain a comprehensive perspective of the barriers.
Summary

Gaining access to higher education should be a right for all students; however, our current system denies a disproportionate amount of low-income African American males of that opportunity (Cati et al., 2015). As college education becomes increasingly important, it is estimated that many of the new jobs in the future will require some form of college credentials (George-Jackson & Gast, 2015). The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American males in the northeastern region of the United States. This study employed a qualitative methodology approach involving 10 low-income African American high school graduates from New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The theoretical framework that guided this study was critical race theory. The central research question was: What are the barriers to college enrollment for low-income African American male high school graduates? The data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. The data analysis process involved open coding, axial coding, cross-case synthesis, and categorical aggregation. Research was needed to understand why low-income African American males graduate high school yet fail to enroll in post-secondary education. Constructivist theories developed out of the work of Piaget and Vygotsky influenced this study (Slavin, 2012). One of the concerns that was raised in this study was how low-income African American males are not active participants in their own learning, which can influence their college aspirations. Through a review of the literature, three overarching obstacles facing low-income African American males’ pathway to college were identified: structural barriers, cultural barriers, and racialized barriers. Previous research focused on many of the structural and cultural issues, however, more research was needed to understand
how these issues compounded with racism influenced low-income African American males’ post-secondary enrollment decisions (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

Further research was needed to understand why low-income African American males are graduating high school but ultimately not enrolling to college. The research questions were answered and correlated with the theoretical framework and literature review from Chapter Two. Nine themes emerged from the 10 bounded systems exhibiting common characteristics based in the literature. This study, through CRT, permitted the participants’ voices to contribute to the research questions surrounding this educational phenomenon. The significance of this study was practical, theoretical, and empirical. This study provided all stakeholders with a better understanding of the barriers that low-income African American male high school graduates must navigate to access college. Furthermore, the study emphasized how the pathway to post-secondary education for this demographic is plagued with more barriers than their White advantaged peers (Cox, 2016). The implications drawn from this study challenges low-income communities to develop a K-16 approach, and for schools to engage in culturally empowering pedagogies to increase college aspirations. Moreover, this study propelled the college access research forward by targeting a specific population whom the literature seemingly overlooked (Cox, 2016). The findings of this study were significant and will inform future research, policy, and practice. This study suggests changes be made in pedagogy and the curriculum to reduce hegemony and discrimination in educational practice, which can inspire college aspirations in these communities. Recommendations for future research include expanding the participant group to allow for students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators to gain a comprehensive perspective of the barriers facing the target population.
REFERENCES


https://www.jbhe.com/2017/05/many-qualified-low-income-students-are-not-attending-our-best-colleges/


Dear Emmanuel Cherilien,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*
Appendix B: Consent Form

A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO COLLEGE ACCESS FACING LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES
Emmanuel Cherilien
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates within two communities. You were selected as a potential participant because you met the following criteria: African American male between the ages of 18 to 24, graduated high school, did not attend college, lived in either New Jersey or Pennsylvania during your high school years, received free/reduced lunch during your high school years, and currently eligible for government assistance. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Emmanuel Cherilien, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates within two communities.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following:
1. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded and consist of 21 questions. The interview is estimated to last one hour.
2. Submit archival documents from respective high school to the researcher (transcripts, test scores, college preparatory classes, etc.). Participant will be asked to submit documents that can provide a rich source of information regarding some of the barriers to college access. This procedure is estimated to take one hour to complete.
3. Select participants will be invited to attend a focus group. The focus group will consist of eight questions and will provide an opportunity to bring both locations together to determine any similarities or differences among the cases. The focus group will be audio recorded and is estimated to last one hour.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study, however increased knowledge of the college matriculation process may be gained. This study will benefit society by identifying structural, cultural, and racialized barriers influencing the pathway to college for low-income African American males. The implications from this study can influence policy and practice.
Compensation: Individuals will be compensated for participating in this study. There will be refreshments at the interviews and lunch after the focus group. Each participant will receive a $25.00 Visa gift card one week after the focus group is conducted. To be eligible for compensation, the participant will have to complete all of the procedural steps of the study. Failure to complete all eligible procedures will forfeit monetary benefits. Email addresses will be requested from participants to arrange for compensation benefits.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In the circumstances that I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and faculty chair will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews and focus group in a private location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and physical documents from participants shredded and discarded.
- The interviews and focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher and faculty chair will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group. However, all efforts will be made to keep all information confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Emmanuel Cherilien. You may ask any questions you may have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty chair.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email the IRB.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

Date

______________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

Date
Appendix C: Recruitment Email

Hello ________,

As you are aware, I am a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University. I am conducting research to better understand a phenomenon occurring in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The purpose of my research is to understand the barriers to college access facing low-income African American male high school graduates within two communities. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in my study.

Do you meet the following criteria: identify as an African American male between the ages of 18 and 24, lived in either XXXXXX, NJ or XXXXXX, PA during your high school years, received free/reduced lunch during your high school years, currently eligible for government assistance, graduated high school, and did not attend college? Additionally, are you willing to participate in this study, which will consist of an interview, the submission of high school documents, and for a select few, a focus group. The whole process should take approximately 3 hours. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, text, email, or call me. I will forward a survey link to confirm your eligibility for the study. Once your eligibility is established, I will reach out to you to schedule an interview and finalize correspondence.

If you are eligible to participate in the study and choose to do so, a consent document will be provided to you. Please sign and date the consent document and return it to me at the time of your scheduled interview or by email. The interviews will take place in November 2019 and select participants will be asked to also attend a focus group the following month (December 2019). If you choose to participate in this study, you will be compensated with a $25.00 Visa gift card. Thank you for your time and assistance with my research study. If you know of someone else who might be a candidate for my study, please provide them with my study information.

Sincerely,

Emmanuel Cherilien
Doctoral Candidate
Appendix D: Survey Questions

1. Are you male?

2. Do you identify as African American?

3. Did you receive free/reduced lunch during your high school years?

4. Have you received government assistance for either food or rent since graduating high school?

5. Did you graduate high school?

6. Did you ever attend college?

7. Do you have access to your high school records?

8. Select your availability and willingness to participate in this study from: Very Available/Extremely Willing, Moderately Available/Willing, Not Available/Willing, Available/ Not Willing.
Appendix E: Interview Questions

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.

2. Please describe your life experiences after graduating high school.

3. How did your high school experience influence your decision to attend college?

4. What is the process of applying to college?

5. What resources were available to you to ensure you were able to attend college?

6. Describe your decision not to attend college?

7. What makes the pathway to college difficult for African American males like yourself?

8. Describe any structural barriers to college access you encountered in pursuing higher education?

9. How did college affordability impact your decision to attend higher education?

10. How did your high school prepare you for college?

11. How were you made aware of the steps to apply to college?

12. Describe any cultural barriers to college access that may have influenced your decision to attend?

13. How was your culture included and/or dismissed during your high school education?

14. What expectations, if any, were set by your family or school that influenced your perception of college?

15. Why are low-income African American males at a disadvantage when they attempt to enroll to college?

16. Describe any racialized barriers to college access that may have influenced your decision to attend college?
17. What racist practices in high school do you believe shape the low college enrollment rate for low-income African American males?

18. How are sports scholarships being promoted to African American males compared to academic scholarships?

19. How was race reflected in the curriculum at your school?

20. How did that (race reflected in the curriculum) influence your college aspiration?

21. How did some African American males you graduated high school with overcome many of the barriers you highlighted in this interview and attend post-secondary education?

22. Looking back across your educational journey, what other challenges not discussed in this interview you believe influenced your educational trajectory?
Appendix F: Sample Transcript

Interviewer:
All right. How are you doing? My name's Emmanuel, and I will be basically questioning you on 22 questions and you just give me the answers as honest as you feel, all right? Introduce yourself for me please.

Participant:
My name is XXXXX. I'm from XXXXXX, PA. [inaudible 00:00:26] section.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
18 years old.

Interviewer:
All right.

Participant:
That's it.

Interviewer:
Okay, that's fine. Question number two. Please describe your life experiences after high school. Tell me how your life's been since you've graduated.

Participant:
Life's been cool. I haven't really been complaining, I've been out of trouble. My school built a lot of structure, I mean, me being there it helped me a lot, being how I have anger problems.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Being at XXXX, XXXXX helped me with building character and calming down and XXXXX also helped me with a lot of job opportunities. That's what really got me into working, being there. I've been working and I have a life...

Interviewer:
Okay, after high school your focus has been to make money?

Participant:
Make money and go to school.

Interviewer:
And go to school, okay. Question three, how did your high school experience influence your
decision to not go to college?

Participant:
High school had me on a bumpy road. Being in school, I want to say from my ninth to tenth grade years, I was stuck on myself, not going to school, it is what it is.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
I'm going to work and I'm just going to get my money. Coming back from after the summer break, I want to say my 11th grade year, I started losing friends and that's what it was, that's what took me to, yo, I have to get out of the hood.

Interviewer:
Alright.

Participant:
It was my 11th grade year, I want to say, it was just the bumpy road to here. If I want to go on then this is where they start looking, it's crunch time right here...

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
And I was undecided. I want to say, about the time I graduated, I was just undecided...

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
And about a month ago I just said, "Listen, I'm going to just going to take it for a try, probably do a trade or something."

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Okay.

Interviewer:
Question number four. What is the process of applying to college? If you did decide to go to college, would you know how to do it?

Participant:
Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay, tell me about the process.

Participant: First is, I had to file my FAFSA first.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: I had to do my FAFSA. Find out which schools would accept me, from where I came and be behind me grades wise and all that and I had to get my transcripts printed out and I had to send them out and tests scores, that's the main thing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: SAT's I had to take, because the schools I wanted to, they were going based off the test scores.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you know all this?

Participant: My school, I had Counselors and things like that.

Interviewer: Your Counselor told you about the whole process?

Participant: Yeah about the whole process. My school helped me and we had a class, our class was called Senior Capstone, so they built us from the beginning to us graduating with the whole college process, resumes and all that.

Interviewer: Perfect. All right, question number five. What resources, what tools were available to you to ensure you were able to attend college?

Participant:
Like I said FAFSA is a government aid.

Interviewer:
Yeah

Participant:
And I did a lot of college tours and they helped us apply for scholarships and things like that.

Interviewer:
Oh really? Okay, so that was from your school counselor? I mean...

Participant:
That class.

Interviewer:
XXXXXXXX?

Participant:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
So given that you understand the process, you have the teachers and tools that helped you, what made you decide not to do it?

Participant:
Money. I had no money; I had no money. I didn't want to go to school broke.

Interviewer:
Yeah

Participant:
I didn't want to have student loans, I know I'm going to need them, I don't want them though.

Interviewer:
Yeah, that's smart. A lot of people don't think about that.

Participant:
Yeah, I don't want student loans. I feel as if I can work and grind and save my money, I'll be able to, in my first couple months I'll be able to pay for all my books that I need and everything, all the food, my housing all that. That's where I want to be. I don't want to be where I have to call mom if I need a care package or I've got to contact a counselor, can I get a loan for this, because I need these books and I've got to go study in this place. That's my whole thing.

Interviewer:
Okay, question number seven. Why do you think the pathway to college for guys that look like us is, so much difficult compared to guys that don't look like us?
Participant:
It's just society today, the way society is built. I feel as though society is built for us to fail.

Interviewer:
Why do you feel that?

Participant:
The way life is with the police brutality, how African Americans are treated now, there ain't no way around it. We've got to fight to make the world better and make it better for us. Us going to school, that's a major platform. The man is scared of a black man in a suit. That's my whole thing.

Interviewer:
So you feel like because of, what would you call that, racism?

Participant:
Yeah, because of things like racism. There are a lot of places that are still segregated. So I've been to campuses that are mainly Caucasian, European and I'm like, man, where are all the black people?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
When I look back at the history, there are no black people at all.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
You get the few and like, damn, and they probably still run off [inaudible 00:06:10] and that's really how I feel about it.

Interviewer:
Wow. Your school, XXXXXX, was it predominately white or was it predominately black?

Participant:
Black and Latino.

Interviewer:
Black and Latino. Okay, question eight says, describe any structural barriers to college, you encountered pursuing higher education. So, to break that down, basically what things do you feel stops you from college that was outside of your control?
Participant:
I feel as though can't nothing stop you from doing what you want to do. So, therefore, if you really want to do it, you can cancel everything out and put your mind to doing that.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
So, there ain't nothing really, it's just you, you're the structural barrier that's going to stop you from doing what you want to do. Ain't nobody else, that's why I'm saying. If I want to go out and my mind made on that, that's what I'm going to do. What is going to stop me from doing that? Nobody. You have to be a made man, you can't let anyone else stop you from doing what you want to do. That's really what it is.

Interviewer:
Okay. How did college affordability impact your decision to attend higher education? You alluded to that earlier.

Participant:
Yeah. I actually got accepted to Cheyney, that's a HBCU. When I got accepted there I was ready to go, but then I got an email for me, all the deposits and how everything was going to go, I'm like, damn how do I get this money now?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
That just stopped me right there.

Interviewer:
It stopped you right there. Do you remember how much money they were asking for?

Participant:
I had to put a $250 security deposit down then I had to pay another $500 for housing.

Interviewer:
Wow

Participant:
I didn't have it. It came up too short and everything was coming back to back to back, so I went to my prom, May 16th, my birthday was May 30th, so I had that and that, and I graduated the day after my birthday. So, it was like prom the 16th, my birthday the 30th, graduation the 31st. I had everything planned out for that already, two days before my birthday, I got the acceptance letter.
Interviewer:
Wow. Did you have anyone that could vouch for you with that?

Participant:
There were people who were willing to help me, but it wasn't going to be enough and my parents couldn't make due with much. My mom she told me to fall back for a little bit, try finding something else you can do besides school. I know how to cook, so I was using my cooking plan to go to trade school and take up that trade, culinary arts, carpentry also.

Interviewer:
All right. Question number 11. We're halfway through alright XXXX. How were you made aware of the steps to apply to college? You spoke a little bit about that but just tell us again. Who told you the steps on how to go to college?

Participant:
I want to give a big shout out to my senior Capstone teacher, Mrs. Riley.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Yeah, she helped me. I was in senior class since I was in the 11th grade. I got kicked out of school in my 11th grade year and me not knowing, see, when I was at XXXXXX, I wasn't really focusing on how many credits I had, so when I got kicked out, I was like, Oh, I was actually doing good in here. Me not knowing, I didn't really have nobody on my back at XXXXXXX that was telling me, like, what you doing? You don't see what you're really doing to yourself. I got to XXXXXXX and I met the staff...

Interviewer:
So XXXXXXX is another high school?

Participant:
Yeah, XXXXXXX is a high school that's in XXXXXXXX.

Interviewer:
You got kicked out of that one?

Participant:
Uh-huh

Interviewer:
And then you went to XXXXXXX which sounds like a better school than XXXXXXXX?

Participant:
That's a disciplinary school, it's not really a regular school, but structure wise.
Interviewer:
Gotcha.

Participant:
I don't want to say XXXXXXX was bad education wise [inaudible 00:10:34] less people, the less you get you learn. [inaudible 00:10:40] in and out the classroom and all that. Most time I wasn't even in my classroom...

Interviewer:
Okay, so now we're moving off of structural barriers to something called cultural barriers. Describe any cultural barriers to college access that influence your decision here. So what we're talking about here, is your neighborhood, your family, your friends, do you feel like they also played as your decision not to go?

Participant:
A lot of my friends downplayed me going to college, I called Cheyney and said, listen...

Interviewer:
Say that one more time again?

Participant:
A lot of my friends downplayed me going to college.

Interviewer:
They didn't believe you?

Participant:
Yeah, so actually made me call Cheyney and say, listen I'm switching my semester, I'm switching from fall 2019 to 2020, I want to come. And a lot of my friends said, "You're not going to school. What you going to do to school for?", "Why are you going to school?"

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
And whoa. "Why do y'all want me out here? There's really nothing for me, out here." Everybody keep telling me, you're not going to go to school. That's what helped me focus on going to school.

Interviewer:
So you're saying, by them telling you not to go.

Participant:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
It made you want to go more?

Participant:
Uh-huh.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
I don't like people telling me what I can't do. I actually got homies telling me, "School ain't for you. I already know. From what I seen you do in regular, in high school, it ain't going to be for you." This is my time to break apart to experience more stuff. The only reason I felt like school [inaudible 00:12:09] was because I was stuck in my ways with my [inaudible 00:12:13]. I'm going to expand my horizons to more people, newer things and we going to see how it goes.

Interviewer:
How about your family? Anyone in your family ever been to college?

Participant:
No. I got cousins, but I'm not really close to them, so that wasn't really my excitement to show that I could really do it. On my dad’s side of the family I got two cousins that graduated from Temple. So they helped me, they kind of showed me the way but they weren't really around to show me the way. I was always on my own. My mom dropped out of high school, my dad dropped out of high school, my brothers all...

Interviewer:
All right. How are you doing? My name's Emmanuel, and I will be basically questioning you on 22 questions and you just give me the answers as honest as you feel, all right? Introduce yourself for me please.

Participant:
My name is XXXXX. I'm from XXXXXX, PA. [inaudible 00:00:26] section.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
18 years old.

Interviewer:
All right.

Participant:
That's it.
Interviewer:
Okay, that's fine. Question number two. Please describe your life experiences after high school. Tell me how your life's been since you've graduated.

Participant:
Life's been cool. I haven't really been complaining, I've been out of trouble. My school built a lot of structure, I mean, me being there it helped me a lot, being how I have anger problems.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Being at XXXX, XXXXX helped me with building character and calming down and XXXXX also helped me with a lot of job opportunities. That's what really got me into working, being there. I've been working and I have a life...

Interviewer:
Okay, after high school your focus has been to make money?

Participant:
Make money and go to school.

Interviewer:
And go to school, okay. Question three, how did your high school experience influence your decision to not go to college?

Participant:
High school had me on a bumpy road. Being in school, I want to say from my ninth to tenth grade years, I was stuck on myself, not going to school, it is what it is.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
I'm going to work and I'm just going to get my money. Coming back from after the summer break, I want to say my 11th grade year, I started losing friends and that's what it was, that's what took me to, yo, I have to get out of the hood.

Interviewer:
Alright.

Participant:
It was my 11th grade year, I want to say, it was just the bumpy road to here. If I want to go on then this is where they start looking, it's crunch time right here...
Interviewer:  
Yeah.

Participant:  
And I was undecided. I want to say, about the time I graduated, I was just undecided...

Interviewer:  
Okay.

Participant:  
And about a month ago I just said, "Listen, I'm going to just going to take it for a try, probably do a trade or something."

Interviewer:  
Okay.

Participant:  
Okay.

Interviewer:  
Question number four. What is the process of applying to college? If you did decide to go to college, would you know how to do it?

Participant:  
Yeah.

Interviewer:  
Okay, tell me about the process.

Participant:  
First is, I had to file my FAFSA first.

Interviewer:  
Okay.

Participant:  
I had to do my FAFSA. Find out which schools would accept me, from where I came and be behind me grades wise and all that and I had to get my transcripts printed out and I had to send them out and tests scores, that's the main thing.

Interviewer:  
Okay.

Participant:  
SAT's I had to take, because the schools I wanted to, they were going based off the test scores.
Interviewer:
Oh, okay.

Participant:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
How did you know all this?

Participant:
My school, I had Counselors and things like that.

Interviewer:
Your Counselor told you about the whole process?

Participant:
Yeah about the whole process. My school helped me and we had a class, our class was called Senior Capstone, so they built us from the beginning to us graduating with the whole college process, resumes and all that.

Interviewer:
Perfect. All right, question number five. What resources, what tools were available to you to ensure you were able to attend college?

Participant:
Like I said FAFSA is a government aid.

Interviewer:
Yeah

Participant:
And I did a lot of college tours and they helped us apply for scholarships and things like that.

Interviewer:
Oh really? Okay, so that was from your school counselor? I mean...

Participant:
That class.

Interviewer:
XXXXXXX?

Participant:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
So given that you understand the process, you have the teachers and tools that helped you, what made you decide not to do it?

Participant:
Money. I had no money; I had no money. I didn't want to go to school broke.

Interviewer:
Yeah

Participant:
I didn't want to have student loans, I know I'm going to need them, I don't want them though.

Interviewer:
Yeah, that's smart. A lot of people don't think about that.

Participant:
Yeah, I don't want student loans. I feel as if I can work and grind and save my money, I'll be able to, in my first couple months I'll be able to pay for all my books that I need and everything, all the food, my housing all that. That's where I want to be. I don't want to be where I have to call mom if I need a care package or I've got to contact a counselor, can I get a loan for this, because I need these books and I've got to go study in this place. That's my whole thing.

Interviewer:
Okay, question number seven. Why do you think the pathway to college for guys that look like us is, so much difficult compared to guys that don't look like us?

Participant:
It's just society today, the way society is built. I feel as though society is built for us to fail.

Interviewer:
Why do you feel that?

Participant:
The way life is with the police brutality, how African Americans are treated now, there ain't no way around it. We've got to fight to make the world better and make it better for us. Us going to school, that's a major platform. The man is scared of a black man in a suit. That's my whole thing.

Interviewer:
So you feel like because of, what would you call that, racism?
Participant:
Yeah, because of things like racism. There are a lot of places that are still segregated. So I've been to campuses that are mainly Caucasian, European and I'm like, man, where are all the black people?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
When I look back at the history, there are no black people at all.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
You get the few and like, damn, and they probably still run off [inaudible 00:06:10] and that's really how I feel about it.

Interviewer:
Wow. Your school, XXXXXX, was it predominately white or was it predominately black?

Participant:
Black and Latino.

Interviewer:
Black and Latino. Okay, question eight says, describe any structural barriers to college, you encountered pursuing higher education. So, to break that down, basically what things do you feel stops you from college that was outside of your control?

Participant:
I feel as though can't nothing stop you from doing what you want to do. So, therefore, if you really want to do it, you can cancel everything out and put your mind to doing that.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
So, there ain't nothing really, it's just you, you're the structural barrier that's going to stop you from doing what you want to do. Ain't nobody else, that's why I'm saying. If I want to go out and my mind made on that, that's what I'm going to do. What is going to stop me from doing that? Nobody. You have to be a made man, you can't let anyone else stop you from doing what you want to do. That's really what it is.
Interviewer:
Okay. How did college affordability impact your decision to attend higher education? You alluded to that earlier.

Participant:
Yeah. I actually got accepted to Cheyney, that's a HBCU. When I got accepted there I was ready to go, but then I got an email for me, all the deposits and how everything was going to go, I'm like, damn how do I get this money now?

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
That just stopped me right there.

Interviewer:
It stopped you right there. Do you remember how much money they were asking for?

Participant:
I had to put a $250 security deposit down then I had to pay another $500 for housing.

Interviewer:
Wow

Participant:
I didn't have it. It came up too short and everything was coming back to back to back, so I went to my prom, May 16th, my birthday was May 30th, so I had that and that, and I graduated the day after my birthday. So, it was like prom the 16th, my birthday the 30th, graduation the 31st. I had everything planned out for that already, two days before my birthday, I got the acceptance letter.

Interviewer:
Wow. Did you have anyone that could vouch for you with that?

Participant:
There were people who were willing to help me, but it wasn't going to be enough and my parents couldn't make due with much. My mom she told me to fall back for a little bit, try finding something else you can do besides school. I know how to cook, so I was using my cooking plan to go to trade school and take up that trade, culinary arts, carpentry also.

Interviewer:
All right. Question number 11. We're halfway through alright XXXX. How were you made aware of the steps to apply to college? You spoke a little bit about that but just tell us again. Who told you the steps on how to go to college?
Participant:
I want to give a big shout out to my senior Capstone teacher, Mrs. Riley.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Yeah, she helped me. I was in senior class since I was in the 11th grade. I got kicked out of school in my 11th grade year and me not knowing, see, when I was at XXXXXX, I wasn't really focusing on how many credits I had, so when I got kicked out, I was like, Oh, I was actually doing good in here. Me not knowing, I didn't really have nobody on my back at XXXXXX that was telling me, like, what you doing? You don't see what you're really doing to yourself. I got to XXXXXX and I met the staff...

Interviewer:
So XXXXX is another high school?

Participant:
Yeah, XXXXXXX is a high school that's in XXXXXXX.

Interviewer:
You got kicked out of that one?

Participant:
Uh-huh

Interviewer:
And then you went to XXXXXX which sounds like a better school than XXXXXXX?

Participant:
That's a disciplinary school, it's not really a regular school, but structure wise.

Interviewer:
Gotcha.

Participant:
I don't want to say XXXXXXX was bad education wise [inaudible 00:10:34] less people, the less you get you learn. [inaudible 00:10:40] in and out the classroom and all that. Most time I wasn't even in my classroom...

Interviewer:
Okay, so now we're moving off of structural barriers to something called cultural barriers. Describe any cultural barriers to college access that influence your decision here. So what we're talking about here, is your neighborhood, your family, your friends, do you feel like they also
played as your decision not to go?

Participant:
A lot of my friends downplayed me going to college, I called Cheyney and said, listen...

Interviewer:
Say that one more time again?

Participant:
A lot of my friends downplayed me going to college.

Interviewer:
They didn't believe you?

Participant:
Yeah, so actually made me call Cheyney and say, listen I'm switching my semester, I'm switching from fall 2019 to 2020, I want to come. And a lot of my friends said, "You're not going to school. What you going to do to school for?", "Why are you going to school?"

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Participant:
And whoa, "Why do y'all want me out here? There's really nothing for me, out here." Everybody keep telling me, you're not going to go to school. That's what helped me focus on going to school.

Interviewer:
So you're saying, by them telling you not to go.

Participant:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
It made you want to go more?

Participant:
Uh-huh.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
I don't like people telling me what I can't do. I actually got homies telling me, "School ain't for
you, I already know. From what I seen you do in regular, in high school, it ain't going to be for you." This is my time to break apart to experience more stuff. The only reason I felt like school [inaudible 00:12:09] was because I was stuck in my ways with my [inaudible 00:12:13]. I'm going to expand my horizons to more people, newer things and we going to see how it goes.

Interviewer:
How about your family? Anyone in your family ever been to college?

Participant:
No. I got cousins, but I'm not really close to them, so that wasn't really my excitement to show that I could really do it. On my dad’s side of the family I got two cousins that graduated from Temple. So they helped me, they kind of showed me the way but they weren't really around to show me the way. I was always on my own. My mom dropped out of high school, my dad dropped out of high school, my brothers all...they all dropped out of high school. So like, it was what it was. I’m just trying to break the chain. I’m trying to show my little sister and my little brother that there’s more to like just being out here. Especially my little brother because he’s six man….and he mocks everything. My little brother, he watches everything I do, even like ... all my moves. Like he be in the house, he see me in there playing a game he be in there Grand Theft Auto and Fortnite things like that. He hear me listen to the rap music, he rap the songs word for word, I wouldn't even know that ... think that he knows. So now I see that I got somebody, I gotta show a better way to. Our brothers ain't show me that better way, I was always around, and we used to be drunk. So now I know that's what I'm about to go school for. I got younger siblings that need me and people ain't show me ... my family didn't show me what school was, so I got to show them. That's what it really is.

Interviewer:
Interesting, how was your culture ... this is more about your school? How did you feel your culture was included or dismissed during high school education? So, what we mean by that is, do you feel like when you went to school, they actually showed you successful black men or black women going to college? Or you learned about African American culture? Or was it not touched or talked about at all?

Participant:
See when I was at XXXXXXX, we had something called Male Leadership Day. So, like a bunch of African American males, they would come in and talk to us about successful males. They would talk to us about the [inaudible 00:01:30] and it wouldn't always be successful. Some people might be, I don't know, fresh out of prison, like they're just trying to get away from it, from prison system. So I’ve been to schools that different black leaders and African Americans who ... as you're doing something, they like, so yeah.

Interviewer:
What expectations, if any, were set by your family or school when it came to college?
Participant:
Like I said, my two cousins on my dad's side, even though we wasn't close I ... me seeing them, my only two cousins, the only two out of both sides of the family that graduated school. Besides them two, and me, we the only ones that did high school like all four years.

Interviewer:
Wow.

Participant:
Yeah, so we the only ones that did all four years. Yeah, that's just like, as I was saying.

Interviewer:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). What made you finish high school? What was it?

Participant:
Me being my mom's only child that graduated high school.

Interviewer:
Wow. Wow.

Participant:
I had two older brothers ... one of them got locked up, so he never finished. Other brother he got all the way to the 12th grade here and had a baby. He just-

Interviewer:
No way.

Participant:
He just said, "Forget it, too much before graduation." So he just said forget it. Let [inaudible 00:02:58]. That's what I'm trying to stay away from. That's what I be going through, and I see myself going ... I'm staying away from it.

Interviewer:
Okay. Why are low income African American males at a disadvantage when they attempt to go to college?

Participant:
It's hard to firstly get loans. I can say that because I've seen it. I've seen it. One of my teachers from XXXXXX she's an accountant and she explained to me how the banks she worked for ... she had black people come in getting loans for school and then you got the African American families, they come in and it's all welfare and things like that and all the government assistance programs where they just look down on us. Like we're not meant for school ... they really ... that's how it is, like they just look through we're like ... because we're poor and in the hood or living in projects and Section 8 homes ... they think we not built for college, they think our
mindsets [inaudible 00:04:10] college then.

Interviewer:
Okay, now we're moving to more racism. Describe any racialized barriers to college that may have influenced your decision to attend. So, did you see racism play any part when it comes to your decision to go?

Participant:
I did. I actually did.

Interviewer:
All right.

Participant:
I did see something where like ... I went to XXXXXXXXX that's like a trade school. I went there and I don't see no females. So, I'm like why are there no females? Because it's a manly beast school. It's only things in here that make a dude. I'm like, you're wrong. And then in here's barely any African Americans in there. Like Mexicans, things that's like-

Interviewer:
Why do you think that's happening?

Participant:
It goes back to society and the way that certain people were raised.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Racism ... you can't ... let's not just silence the truth. Racism [inaudible 00:05:13] that you got to be born into it. You got to be taught that. You got to be taught that hate. You can't ... let's be not ... you can't just be like, I got to put, you're not going to be born that just [inaudible 00:05:28] this color ... born to hate this specific group of people. That's saying that you're caught up in [inaudible 00:05:36] household for life.

Interviewer:
Did you see any racist practices in your high school that you think shaped the low college enrollment rate for African American males?

Participant:
Um, no.

Interviewer:
So there was nothing in your high school that you think shaped why so many African American
males decide after school, not to go? If you don't think so we can move on-

Participant:
Nah, I'm about to say it, nah.

Interviewer:
Okay. All right. Question 18 how are sports scholarships being promoted to African American males compared to academic scholarships?

Participant:
We're entertainment, that's how they look at us.

Interviewer:
Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Participant:
That's how they look at us, entertainment. So they feel as though they could get us ... they can feed us these sports scholarships and feed us a million dollar contracts once we leave school to where like ... that's what I'm saying, a lot of people ... if you're paying any attention to the NFL now, a lot of people are leaving the league to go back to school, just so they can get their education that they needed ... that's what they not feeding them, they not giving people the right education, they .... you go to school; your mind says football. Football, football, football. I got four friends that's all in D1 colleges, all for sports. It ain't nothing academic they are building for them, problem is. Bro, I ain't doing nothing, bro. I'm in the gym, I'll call them, "Bro, why you not [inaudible 00:07:03], bro?" "I'm in the gym, bro. I'm getting this playbook ready." What you gon' do after school, bro? Say you get injured, you not gon' know, bro. Not going to know nothing. And you're just wasting your time in school, just so you can play a sport. That's was what my mom said at the same point in time ... do you want ... that's what I want to do ... do you want football, bam, football is what I want to do. I still want to play football, but it's like, I know how hard it is-

Interviewer:
Absolutely.

Participant:
What comes with it and how the NCAA work. You got them ... it took so long for them to start ... it took so long for people to start paying college players that ... before coaches had to do it. Yeah, and now they could freely do it, just because they know how we get used for entertainment, that's the way it is for ... we not making no money off this. But the coaches in the school bringing in multimillion dollars ... how is that possible?

Interviewer:
Absolutely right, man. This is very similar to the first question I asked you. How was race
reflected in the curriculum at your school? So let's say... did you see it, not with people coming in, but in your textbooks, in the way they were teaching you guys, did you see black culture infused in the lessons and stuff like that?

Participant:
We made black culture infused in the lessons.

Interviewer:
Yeah, what do you mean by that?

Participant:
Especially at XXXXXX, we used all the old books and I don't agree with a lot of them, I really didn't agree with it because I did ... I do deeper research in advance. So I was correcting certain stuff that was in the book ... the wrong to make it seem like our ... as African Americans did this, but it was the white man that sat on top and ruined [inaudible 00:08:52] It's a lot of books in schools that tell you the white man invented a lot of stuff, but when you really go and research, it's really a black man that's sitting next to it and ... yeah.

Interviewer:
So when you did the research are you doing it on your own, or did the school teach you that?

Participant:
I'm doing it on my own. I did some of my own research that's deeper than school for [inaudible 00:09:14]

Interviewer:
Question 20, the fact that you just told me things like that, do you think that had any play in your decision not to go to college?

Participant:
Oh, no. I know college, like I said, college can give you ... it could expand your horizons so I know college could give you more ways to research and look stuff up ... a lot of stuff I didn't get in school that I missed on, I picked that back up in college and now I got more [inaudible 00:09:45], way different viewpoints that teach me how to look at it, and what went down and things like that.

Interviewer:
All right. Given what you told me about your story. How did some African American males that you graduated high school with, how did they overcome all the things that you just told me about, and still able to go to college, when most of them did not? You understand my question? Like a few guys that did go to college, say XXXXXX or from XXXXXXX. How were they able to overcome all of these things that we've talked about and still be able to go when the majority of people cannot overcome it?
Participant:
Some people, they could just get past certain things.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Or like I said, financially wise, some people family got it, some people family don't. I know a lot of people that's in school now that's just going off a week to week thing. They'll be at school for one week, be home the next week. Damn, why would I be in school, I don't got no food up there. It's really ... I get ... I know people that family got it, and they get whatever they want, that's why they in school. And then there's people who don't, and they ain't about ... want to go to school, but I ain't got the funds, and scholarships and, you know? That's what it be.

Interviewer:
Okay. This is the last question for you. Looking back across your whole education journey, from kindergarten all the way to graduating high school, were there any other challenges that you think you faced that helped you make the decision you made to not go, that we didn't get to discuss?

Participant:
I got into a lot of fights.

Interviewer:
Okay, so tell me about that.

Participant:
I'm not a people person at all.

Interviewer:
Okay.

Participant:
Like me sitting here talking to you, it's amazing! It's amazing, I'm not a people person at all so it could be the littlest thing somebody will say to me, and it'll take me out. Yeah, trigger me like that. That's what I had to learn, because I ... my man told me, he's like ... my man told me he's in school now, he's like you can't be nonchalant and trying to be in school, trying to go out to college. He said it won't work. You will have the most miserable time of your life and I don't want that, so I start talking to more people ... It start broadening my horizons to ... opening up more to people.

Interviewer:
That's got to be hard, because it's not natural for you.
Participant:
Not at all. So when I do start talking to people, it's just like ... people like, "Yo, you're real intelligent."

Interviewer:
You're really intelligent!

Participant:
People are like, "Yo, you real ..." I know you can ... A lot of people I talk to, people just think I'm some stuck-up in my ways, hood kid ... I carry myself to bed. The way I dress and all that, they just, nah. But when you get to talk to me, I'm real intelligent. That's anything thing, people they be judging books by their covers. What it be, everybody got their own story.

Interviewer:
Well listen man, we're going to end this interview now.

Participant:
Appreciate you.
## Appendix G: Code Frequency Chart

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<th>Structural Barriers</th>
<th>Cultural Barriers</th>
<th>Racialized Barriers</th>
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<tr>
<td>College Affordability 14</td>
<td>Cultural Deficits 15</td>
<td>Black Educators 6</td>
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<td>Disengaged Schools 10</td>
<td>Low-Income Environment 13</td>
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<td>Substance Abuse 1</td>
<td>Advanced Placement Classes 1</td>
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Number represents the frequency of the code in data collection.