

CITY SONS:
HOW FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE-GOING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES
ATTENDING COLLEGE IN AND AROUND THEIR CITY OF ORIGIN
TRANSITION TO AND PERSIST WITHIN
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

College retention, persistence, and success levels continue to be lower for students of color, first-generation students, and low-income students compared to the White majority. This study, focusing on African American males from Philadelphia, set out to investigate the challenges that young, urban, low-income, and first-generation students face in their transition to and enrollment in institutions of post-secondary education. To accomplish this goal, the study at hand focused on two primary questions:

RQ 1: What tools do young Black first-generation college students who go to school in and around their city of origin utilize in order to gain entry to institutions of post-secondary education and successfully transition to these institutions?

RQ 2: How are young Black first-generation college students who go to school in and around their city of origin able to successfully navigate academic obligations and social responsibilities in their first year of college?

To answer these questions, a qualitative research study was designed, and six young men fitting the criteria above were interviewed over the course of their first year of college. In total, each student participated in four interviews. Additionally, participants submitted their college entrance essays and personal statements, which were reviewed to confirm their narratives and coded for themes. Finally, college counselors for the non-profit that assisted each young man in his college planning were interviewed. These interviews focused on the counselor's perception of success at the post-secondary level, and the ways that their non-profit could assist students. Student engagement theory, paired with a Critical Race paradigm, served as the primary theoretical lens through

which data were analyzed. Additionally, literature on student resilience and self-efficacy was used to inform the interpretation of the data.

Key findings include: the significance of family support during a student's transition to college, the myriad ways that a student's intersecting identities play a role in the collegiate experience, and the importance of engaging in campus life to form strong support networks and succeed academically. The young men of this study faced myriad challenges in the journey towards a college degree. From complex family relationships, to navigating stigma surrounding their identities, the obstacles facing these men are great. However, through forming a network of campus connections and using their past challenges to inform future decisions, the young men of this study are resisting stereotypes and pursuing their goals. Developing resilience and self-efficacy through self-reflection, vicarious experiences of trusted mentors and family members and supportive peer networks has and will continue to allow the young men of this study to achieve their goals.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is for my family:
those whom I was lucky enough to be born to,
and those whom I chose for myself.
I could not have asked for a more supportive,
loving group of people.
This work is as much yours as it is mine.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The problem of educational persistence among low-income, urban students of color is a perennial one in the field of education. Educational researchers have been discussing why this group of students is less academically successful for decades (Ogbu, 1987; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). Students of color who are a product of urban public schools enter institutions of higher education at a lower rate than their White counterparts, and with a unique collection of disadvantages (Baber, 2012). They are the targets of racist words and deeds ranging from microaggressions, or frequent, subversive, sometimes unintended messages targeted towards members of marginalized groups, to outright racism (Sue, Capodilup, Toino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). They are stigmatized as Affirmative Action admits, or presumed to be athletes by their peers, and, because there are few faculty and staff members of color at predominantly White colleges and universities, they receive minimal identity-relevant mentorship through their transition. These obstacles come after a long line of challenges that these students have previously faced throughout K-12 education. Obstacles range from low teacher expectations to the over-classification of African American males into special education, and as such, urban students of color are tasked with navigating a system, which was not created with them in mind (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; Wise, 2010). Students must overcome numerous risk factors in their daily lives if they are to succeed within the education system.

Throughout American history, people of color have been subjugated simply because they are not White, and critical research on resilience opens up a dialogue about how to change this dynamic. This paper will outline a brief history of resilience research, as well as key theoretical concepts in researching resilience. Student engagement theory, situated within a Critical Race paradigm, is used to frame and examine the phenomenon of resilience in African American youth during the transition to post-secondary education, with particular attention paid to how students operate within oppressive structures to achieve academic success. The theoretical lens of student engagement theory, based off the work of Vincent Tinto and Alexander Astin, paired with a critical world view, as well as the implications of these frameworks, will be examined herein. I firmly situate resilience research within the Critical Race paradigm by examining how students are able to form resilient identities through their interactions with oppressive structures. The aim of critical theorists is to work to give voice to the oppressed. As such, it is a particularly valuable framework when investigating traditionally oppressed groups.

As I write, student consciousness is at a sixty year high. We are currently engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement, Third Wave feminism, and protests aimed at protecting Gay Rights, Women's Rights, and Marriage Equality while also combating a spike in hate crimes nationwide. The collaborative and critical consciousness that has led to these progressive movements and subsequent protests has promoted college students to make profound demands of, and subsequent profound changes to, their campuses across the nation. In the case of the University of Missouri, students and faculty alike protested the use of racist slurs and images around campus, calling the president complicit in the

attacks, and demanding for him to step down (Ballentine & Scher Zagier, 2015). In the case of Yale, protests against racial discrimination have flared, situating Dr. Holloway, the first Black dean and a scholar of African-American history, between students fighting for their rights and the administration of one of the oldest, most elite, and most resistant to change universities in America (Swarns, 2015). Here in Philadelphia, the case of Chestnut Hill College is being investigated by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission for discrimination in the judicial process. The Commission sites that 100% of Black students who faced a conduct charge were expelled or suspended. The Chestnut Hill Student of Color Collective has written an open letter to the College's president demanding diversity training, additional faculty of color, and the addition of a Dean of Diversity and Inclusion position among other demands (Snyder, 2015). Moreover, Justice Scalia of the United State Supreme Court stated, before his passing, that he believed African American students belong in less elite colleges than their White peers, commenting that it does not benefit these students to enter elite institutions and then fail to do well. Rather, he stated, we should have a lower-tier of institutions for these students (Kopan, 2015). This sentiment is echoed in many political maneuvers aimed at divesting in low-income, urban neighborhoods and their residents.

Uncertain that their identities will be respected on college campuses, students of color may abandon their post-secondary goals prior to ever entering an institution of higher education. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the ways in which a wide range of constituents can better serve and support one at-risk group during this time of insecurity around the future of education, particularly for traditionally oppressed groups,

rather than continuing to further alienate these students. As this dissertation will show, appropriate mentorship, support, and opportunities to engage are not only critical to Black student success, but the minimum of what a university should be offering to its students.

Research around student resilience or “grit” has become popular in the last two decades, as researchers begin to frame achievement gaps with a more critical lens. Examining student underachievement through a macro-level lens opens up room for discussion around how to anticipate and overcome obstacles, which, in turn, leads to a conversation about the process by which students develop resilient identities. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which first-generation college-going African American males who are planning to attend college in and around their city of origin are, or are not, able to succeed in this setting. The study focuses on indicators of resilience and persistence in this group of young men in order to explicate their social-emotional processes throughout their transition. Special attention was paid to resources that the participants utilized to ensure a successful transition to, and integration into the post-secondary setting.

To date, much of the research around Black male students in post-secondary education focuses on the campus factors that inhibit their academic achievement. This study aimed to look past these structural constraints, towards the ways in which this population is able to succeed academically, form supportive peer groups, and utilize campus resources to persist through their first year of college and beyond. This study sought to research academic and social resilience of Black first-generation college-going

men, who attended post-secondary institutions in the same metropolitan area in which they grew up. The obstacles facing this group are myriad. As this literature review will show, each identity-based category into which these young men fall affects the likelihood of their success. First-generation college students, for instance, have less knowledge about access to post-secondary education and the academic expectations of them once they enter higher education (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Being a male, specifically a male of color, likely means that these students have faced low teacher expectations throughout their academic career, and this may have impacted educational aspirations (Harper, 2013). Moreover, masculinity is a complex concept, and may also impact how these men interact with the school environment. The literature review will outline the numerous obstacles the group faces in their transition to post-secondary education in order to frame the concept of academic and social resilience necessary to succeed under these pressures. This conversation sets the stage for two research questions seeking to investigate how students in this group are able to not only transition to post-secondary education, but also persist through the first year of school. Taken together, this study aims to answer two research questions:

RQ 1: What tools do young Black first-generation college students who go to school in and around their city of origin utilize in order to gain entry to institutions of post-secondary education and successfully transition to these institutions?

RQ 2: How are young Black first-generation college students who go to school in and around their city of origin able to successfully navigate academic obligations and social responsibilities in their first year of college?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

This research is guided by a critical paradigm and utilizes student engagement theory to investigate the experiences of first-generation college going African American males. There are many factors which may inhibit the participants in this study from achieving academic success. Being a low-income male of color in an education system that values White middle-class values, and rewards the docility in the classroom often displayed by females; first-generation student status; and feeling pull from one's home community even while at school are all factors which may prevent these students from the same level of achievement as their classroom peers. The theoretical frameworks presented herein, when placed in conversation with one another, provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the post-secondary experiences of this unique population. By using student engagement theory, this study will examine the ways in which African American males interact with their post-secondary settings and navigate the higher education system. This experience will be colored by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. As such, a critical paradigm is essential to fully understand how these identities impact the campus life of the participants in this study. Using these theories in tandem will allow each to be expanded by the other.

Critical Paradigm and Critical Race Theory

Research utilizing a critical worldview takes many forms, all of which have the ability to influence policy and practice in relation to institutions of education. The critical paradigm has one central goal—to uncover the non-obvious ways that groups are oppressed by the elite and the structures built by the elite (Allan, 2013). Initiated by Marx, this primary tenet of critical research has been embraced by many theorists throughout its long history. Critical theorists believe that the purpose of research is to awaken a deeper understanding of inequality. Fairclough (1989) describes this as a researcher’s “critical consciousness” (p. 4). With the understanding that knowledge is a product of power, not truth, critical theory is meant to bring about a change in social practices as they relate to this power construct (Creswell, 2014; Mack, 2010). Theorists, through their critical consciousness, work to bring about an agenda of change; one that will shift the power structure to give more agency to those oppressed by systems and policies (Creswell, 2014). That is what this research aims to do as well. In investigating the educational experiences of African American males, it seems clear that issues of structural inequality and social discrimination are present in a way that they would not be if this study focuses on White women or men. As such, examining the ways in which race and gender impact the experiences of the study participants is central to understanding their engagement with post-secondary institutions.

Critical Race Theory, one off-shoot of critical theory, is focused on how racial identities influence everyday interactions between individuals, and examines power dynamics between racialized groups and was originally intended to investigate the

intersection of race and law. CRT grew out of the post-Civil Right Movement era, when activists began pressuring elitist institutions to transform themselves from “color-blind” and “race neutral” to something more progressive, and Critical Race theorists are deeply committed to the struggle against racism, especially as it is legitimated by law (Bell, 1995). These activists wanted to disrupt the status quo, and work to combat institutional racism (Crenshaw, 2011). Law became the fertile ground from which Critical Race Theory emerged, as law has the ability to grant or take away privileges. As such, utilizing the law to dismantle unjust race-based practices also give agency and voice to the oppressed—two key facets in Critical Race Theory as we experience it today.

The pillars of Critical Race Theory include: the beliefs that racism is commonplace and serves an important psychological, and thereby material, purpose in the American mind; race and racism are socially constructed, created and supported by law; racial groups’ symbolism, definition, and meaning change over time and space; race is not an essential identity, but rather all identities are composed of intersecting factors; and that people of color have unique voices (Freeman, 2012). These pillars serve as a thread to help examine the processes by which urban students of color are asked to succeed within a structure that was not built with them in mind, in this case institutions of post-secondary education. It was not until 1995, when Ladson-Billings and Tate co-authored “Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education,” however, that CRT was applied to the education system. Their article argues that three of these pillars are more important in understanding how education and CRT are in conversation with one another: (1) race continues to be an important identity in the United States, (2) society is more concerned

with property rights than human rights, and (3) race and property intersect in important ways based on our history as a nation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). If race is associated with property, then Whiteness is the most desirable property to own. Whiteness allows for privileges within society, something as simple as being able to find a Band-Aid that resembles your skin tone, to more pernicious privileges such as feeling safe when around police officers. With White privilege comes the ability to exclude others who are not White. As you will read below, this has taken many forms in education, such as denying access to students of color, or demanding students be educated separately based on race. With these assumptions in mind, it becomes clear that school inequality, and unequal access to resources can and should be examined through a Critical Race lens.

Moreover, Critical Race Theory focuses on the presentation of counter-narratives, something this dissertation aims to do. Critical Race theorists examine the everyday school inequalities of urban students of color, who often have fewer resources in their schools but are expected to achieve at the same level as their suburban peers despite forecasts that say this outcome is unlikely (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). In other words, critical theorists work to elucidate a narrative counter to the one legitimized by society (Allan, 2013; Harper & Davis, 2013). With the goals of critical theory in mind, it is easy to see how this paradigm applies to researching resilience. Reframing resilience through a critical lens allows researchers to approach the problem not only from a standpoint of agency, but from one of structure and necessity. Urban schools shape student attitudes, as well as the conversation on Black student

academic achievement and engagement. This conversation has focused on deficit-oriented concepts of “culture,” rather than school structures and societal inequality (Tyson, 2011).

To better understand the need for a critical paradigm it is important to first be aware of the rampant inequality that the participants have faced up until the point of this study. The current picture of urban education leaves much to be desired. Urban schools are left wanting for resources to help their unique population of learners. For instance, schools in urban settings often spend less than \$3,000 per student for the academic year, while suburban schools spend upwards of \$10,000 per student (Kozol, 2005). Moreover, guidance counselor programs in urban schools are being cut across the nation, despite their potential to serve as the primary solution to the underrepresentation and underachievement of students of color in post-secondary settings. Outside of school, urban students of color, who do not have access to surplus resources and after-school enrichment programs as many of their privileged peers might, need to tap into communal resources, such as family members or other mentor figures, to help them succeed academically, learn about post-secondary education, explore majors and financial aid, and discuss the impact of the academic decisions they are making before they ever enter high school in order to fully develop the problem-focused approach and ability to plan necessary for developing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013; Yosso, 2005). The earlier these conversations occur, the better equipped the students will be for academic achievement. Student support is paramount, as when a student believes that the barriers against him outweigh the support that he will receive his motivation is

inhibited (Kenny et al., 2003). As such, it is particularly important that school officials nurture urban students of color. Sadly, this occurs too infrequently in the current achievement gap based discussion despite this intervention's potential to significantly increase resilience among students.

Shifting the power structure is not an easy undertaking, and many individuals believe that they have earned their power and privilege rather than were handed it (Delpit, 1995; Turner, 2011). Researchers with a critical worldview work to show that an unequal social reality exists and that it is reproduced through a set of illegitimate and hegemonic assumptions and repressive factors. Bringing a critical lens to the discussion of student engagement and achievement will redefine how we, as a society, view academic achievement at the post-secondary level among at-risk students. Human capital is cultivated through inclusive social institutions, resources, and opportunities. As such, these assets are required for the development of resilience, which is seldom about an individual being remarkable, as many scholars would have us believe, but rather about receiving the supports necessary to succeed in spite of a vapid school climate.

Urban, low-income, first-generation men of color exist within a structure built to limit their success. As such, their agency within the structure is limited. This is not to say, however, that the men do not assert any agency over their collegiate experiences. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, Critical Race Theory will be used as the overarching lens through which student engagement at the collegiate level is viewed. By utilizing CRT, we can discuss the ways in which social structures inform how the

students in this study are able to interact with the collegiate experience, find academic achievement, and get involved in their campus communities.

At its core, the education system in America is unequal. For students with fewer resources, developing a resilient identity is critical in navigating post-secondary education if they hope to be successful. There are many ways to view resilience research in education. The concept of resilience has a complex history in the United States, and while investigating resilience seems to be a noble goal, there are those who argue that research on resilience alone will not solve the issue of the achievement gap or American inequality. Various theorists have attempted to shape the modes of thinking around academic resilience to better understand and explain the phenomenon. Student engagement theory highlights the physical and psychological process through which students can develop resilience via interactions with supportive networks, and undergirds understandings of resilience as a positive adaptive behavior. Furthermore, student engagement theory helps to operationalize resilience through self-efficacy in non-theoretical ways such as mentoring and stress reduction. While there is not yet a clear-cut way to ensure that resilience and self-efficacy is developed in young adults, student engagement theory attempts the task of setting forth guidelines for doing so.

Student Engagement Theory

Student engagement and its impact on academic persistence has been an area of concern for the last 45 years (Astin, 1985). Vincent Tinto and Alexander Astin have written extensively on student academic persistence in higher education, and how schools can augment retention among their students. Freshmen seminars, mentoring programs,

and other community-building techniques have been implemented at colleges and universities across the nation in an attempt to increase student retention, largely as a result of Tinto and Astin's work around student engagement (Tinto, 1998). Student involvement theory, as coined by Astin (1984/1999), refers to the energy that a student invests in their educational and social experience. This energy falls both into the physical and psychological realms, and can include activities such as studying, participating in extracurricular activities, or simply interactions with peers, as well as faculty and administration. The more a student engages in these practices, or the more a student is involved with campus life, the greater the student learning. When this theory was first introduced, it was considered novel, as it was the first student theory to look at the motivation behind student learning as the impetus for success, rather than traditional models examining pedagogy and content specific factors of success (Astin, 1984/1999). Much of this work has been focused in the realm of student affairs, however. As such, the academic experience for students has remained relatively unchanged despite the growing body of research on student persistence. This is troublesome, as the population of learners on college campuses is increasingly diverse. Along with this diverse cohort comes the need for diverse academic experiences.

Research shows us that student engagement on campus is important to academic persistence within institutions of higher education. Moreover, a student must view their engagement as positive, and feel as though they are integrated and valued within the community (Tinto, 1998). When a student meets these criteria, he or she is far more likely to be retained by an institution of post-secondary education than a student who is

either not engaged socially or academically, or who does not feel that their interactions are positive or that they are valued members of the community. Indeed, current literature suggests that forging strong peer connections serves as a protective factor for students facing racial discrimination, beyond the ability of even families to provide such insulation (Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016). Finding a home within a peer group is often the first step towards student engagement on campus, and the social relationships a student develops over the course of their academic career at an institution are paramount to establishing a feeling of oneness with the institution. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case for students of color (Harper, 2013). Moreover, student engagement theory has been described as “raceless,” which indicates that it was created with only the White majority in mind (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, Howard-Hamilton, 2007). This study aims to examine how student engagement theory can be applied to the experiences of students of color.

Student engagement is particularly crucial during the first eight weeks of the first year of college. During this time, students are still mentally transitioning to college, and they have not yet determined their social groups and personal affiliations. This is why many colleges and universities plan events during the early weeks of the semester, to entice students to get involved and meet new people. Moreover, the first year of college as a whole is critical in determining student retention and persistence (Tinto, 1998). As a result, many institutions require students to live in campus residence halls during their first year, to better acclimate them to college life. Students who commute to campus even during their first-year often report feeling like an outsider on campus, and find it hard to

connect with their peers who live in campus housing (Astin, 1984/1999). Moreover, students who are inhibited from fully connecting with campus life because they are still active in their home communities may face challenges similar to commuters, even if these students live in campus residence halls.

When a student is engaged either academically or socially on campus, the likelihood that a student will then also be engaged in the other realms is increased. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two forms of student engagement. However, research holds that academic engagement is the more important of the two, as a sense of familiarity with the instructor ultimately leads students to interact more in and out of the classroom (Panos & Astin, 1968). Moreover, in previous studies, it has been surmised that student perceptions of the level of faculty encouragement have a greater impact on student persistence than the racial makeup of the institution that the student attends (Reid, 2013). While the diversity of an institution remains important to students of color insofar as they are able to find role models, Reid's study reveals the distinct and critical role of faculty support at the post-secondary level. Moreover, students who are highly engaged with learning are often involved in the learning process with other students, thus forming supportive peer groups around coursework. These individuals display greater intellectual growth as a result of their increased participation (Tinto, 1999).

For the students who do not have a social or academic outlet, however, persistence is markedly low (Tinto, 1998). Unfortunately, many of these students are students of color (Reid, 2013). Students of color are often left outside of retention efforts

implemented by colleges and universities, either through feelings of otherness or because these students simply are not targeted or considered when designing and recruiting for such community-oriented programs. As such, these students are responsible for finding their own community (Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) discusses the importance of creating one's own supportive network. Ideally, students are approached by upperclassmen early in the semester, and an informal mentoring relationship is established. Many students who have experienced this type of connection claim that they would not have survived the college experience without this relationship, as feelings of otherness and alienation would likely have caused these students to leave their institutions.

Moreover, Black students are often called upon to be the representative of the Black voice in many classroom conversations, as well as for other students or administration should the student decide to take on the added challenge of a leadership role on campus. These leadership roles increase the pressure put on students of color, as they are often left without relatable mentors, and fear that anything short of perfection will preclude other students of color from one day assuming additional leadership roles (Harper, 2013). The energies that students spend countering stereotypes, educating peers, and striving towards perfection could have otherwise been used on academics, leaving students of color at a unique disadvantage in the classroom.

Missing from much of the student engagement theory, however, is the discussion of how engagement looks different depending on your race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The generalized student that Tinto and Astin describe appears to be one with the agency and habitus to make social connections, interact with faculty in a way that is more

than mere deference, and finance participation in various clubs and activities. Indeed, many low-income students have been socialized not to question the instructor, but rather to view their lecture as truth (Engle & Tinto, 2008). How then, are the students described in this literature review meant to engage meaningfully in the classroom? Additionally, first-generation students are less familiar with the opportunities available to them on campus. Thus, these students may have a harder time engaging in social activities. Students of color are also less likely to find social circles into which they easily fit. These students often have to rely on one another to find campus resources and social outlets, which will ultimately allow them to be successful (Harper, 2013). For these reasons and more, it is important to examine student engagement theory with a critical lens.

Student Efficacy

Resilience research, a key source of literature for this review, has its roots in biology. Biological resilience describes a species' ability to adapt to its environment in order to survive (Rutter, 1985). Educational resilience mirrors this emphasis in many ways, focusing on student ability to positively adapt to adverse life circumstances. The key components of resilience, as outlined by Michael Rutter are: "(A) the reduction of negative outcomes altering either the risk or the child's exposure to the risk, (b) the reduction of a negative chain reaction following risk exposure, (c) the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) the opening up of opportunities" (Winfield, 1991). Among these factors, developing student self-efficacy can occur organically within the typical school environment, and, as outlined by Rutter, is paramount to the development of resilience as a positive adaptive behavior. Self-efficacy

is a student's belief that he is able to be successful. When self-efficacy is high, students are more optimistic about their academics, feel a sense of self-responsibility, are more confident, and understand the tasks they must undertake in order to accomplish their goals. Albert Bandura first described the general concept of self-efficacy in 1977, referring to a person's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks in specific situations.

According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy beliefs consist of two factors: personal self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. A person's self-efficacy impacts their effort, perseverance, level of stress when faced with difficulties, and long-term interests and goals (Bandura, 1982; Lopez & Lent as cited in Newton, Leonard, Evans & Eastburn, 2012) Self-efficacy also links to outcome expectancies, which are defined as a judgment of the likely consequences a performance, such as succeeding academically, will produce (Newton et al., 2012). Self-efficacy can be further understood as self-fulfilling human agency, and is responsible for future-oriented ambitions (Reid, 2013).

Bandura (1982) states that self-efficacy is developed through four key elements: a combination of recognition of previous accomplishments, and an appreciation of the progress made (academic or otherwise) in order to raise expectations of mastery; vicarious experiences, or modeling, as could be found in the success of an older family member or another role model, to enhance expectations of personal trajectory; social persuasion, such as coaching or positive feedback to increase an individual's ability to cope with certain tasks; and development of positive physiological and emotional states, where judgment is unhindered by stress or doubt (Bandura, 1982; Reid, 2013). Bandura's

theory holds that when students encounter all four of these criteria in their daily experiences, self-efficacy will be developed and maintained. Historically, studies have shown lower self-efficacy among students of color, including Black males. Additionally, self-efficacy may help to mediate the relationship between faculty expectations and academic achievement described above. That is, if perceived levels of faculty support are low, students with high self-efficacy will mitigate this deficit (Reid, 2013).

Mastery experiences or an individual's previous encounters with skills or content are considered the strongest input into a person's self-efficacy. For instance, for a student of color entering post-secondary education, studying in a fashion similar to that used in high school, studying familiar content, or finding social outlets like those found prior to college will prove helpful in maintaining self-esteem (Newton et al., 2012). Second, and not quite as strong an influence as mastery experiences, self-efficacy develops out of a person's vicarious experiences; such as watching a person similar to you succeed at some task. Encountering someone with whom you identify who is finding success, in academics for instance, is particularly important here, as role modeling is key in vicarious experiences. Unfortunately, for many students of color, this is challenging, as students often face low teacher expectations and exclusionary tracking practices (Gamoran, 2011; Harper & Davis, 2013; Tyson, 2011). Self-efficacy can help mitigate the effects of stereotype threat, but only if students are able to develop this trait. Third, verbal persuasion develops self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion occurs when someone more expert, such as a teacher or administrator, encourages the novice and suggests they can succeed, thus, increasing their self-efficacy and self-esteem. This has implications for the support

of students of color through direct encouragement from faculty and administration, something that these students may have been lacking in their educational career up until this point. Tyson (2011) outlines this phenomenon in her book, *Integration Interrupted*, in which high-achieving Black students rely on teachers and administrators for support of their academic goals, as their peers often mock their success in the classroom. Finally, self-efficacy develops out of affective states. If a student feels stress in an academic environment, they will perceive their affective state as indicating a low ability. Therefore, stress is a major contributor to lower efficacy (Newton et al, 2012). This is particularly relevant in discussing resilience among urban students, as high-stress factors may be part of everyday life (Oketch, Howard, Mauldin, Mimura, & Kim, 2012).

This theory continues on to state that the development of a scholar identity will help students of color move away from internal deficit thinking. In other words, a scholar identity will allow students of color to stop questioning their academic potential, and no longer see achievement as a White trait (Whiting, 2009). Bandura (1982) believed that self-regulation was an important skill to master on the road to self-efficacy. This is particularly important in the creation of the scholar identity because academic success becomes paramount, and social ties may become secondary.

It is clear that student engagement is critical to the retention of students of color at predominantly White serving institutions. However, little research has directly connected student engagement, retention, and academic performance measures such as cumulative GPA. In Reid's (2013) study, he highlights that students of color with the highest GPAs often report higher faculty and social interaction than their lower performing peers,

establishing a relationship between student engagement and self-efficacy. As described above, student perceptions of faculty support are paramount to the development of student self-efficacy. Particularly important in developing this high level of self-efficacy was a strong sense of identity, specifically one's racial identity. Moreover, when students are able to interact with faculty members in a favorable way, they report higher level of confidence in their academic ability (Reid, 2013). Students of color who are able to interact with their instructors, then, may perceive higher levels of faculty support and therefore more manageable faculty expectations as a result. Social persuasion, one of the four components of self-efficacy theory, provides the most tangible ways to increase student self-efficacy: through role modeling and mentoring.

Resilient students from urban communities often display a commitment to their community, and a high degree of determination (Bottrell, 2009). These factors correlate strongly with the vicarious experience component of Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory, although the home community may not be able to offer directly applicable vicarious experiences to the students. Resilience scholars and capital scholars alike discuss the importance of a strong community in the academic success of low-income students. Finding supportive role models or mentors, as well as seeking camaraderie in the face of obstacles is particularly important for students who possess less traditional capital than their middle-class peers (Bottrell, 2009; Yosso, 2005). This work will need to continue once the student has accessed the post-secondary setting as well. Unfortunately, much literature outlines the lack of mentors for young Black men, particularly ones who

share a racial identity. Yet, connecting with faculty and administration on college campuses is paramount to a successful transition into a post-secondary setting.

Students who display self-efficacy, as described above, are the topic of much research in education. They are examined as beacons of hope in an otherwise drab landscape of urban education (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd, & Varner, 2013; Whiting, 2009). These students elevated as exemplars for their peers, ostensibly demonstrating that anyone is capable of academic success if these students are able to achieve.

There are many ways to view resilience research in education. The concept of resilience has a complex history in the United States, and while investigating resilience seems to be a noble goal, there are those who argue that research on resilience alone will not solve the issue of the achievement gap or American inequality. Various theorists have attempted to shape the modes of thinking around academic resilience to better understand and explain the phenomenon. Self-efficacy theory highlights the psychological process through which students can develop resilience via interactions with supportive networks, and undergirds understandings of resilience as a positive adaptive behavior. Furthermore, Bandura's theory helps to operationalize resilience through self-efficacy in non-theoretical ways such as mentoring and stress reduction as discussed above. Student engagement and resilience theory, interrogated through a critical lens, will undergird the remainder dissertation.

Four bodies of literature have been investigated to provide a background to the research questions at hand. Literature on (1) urban education, (2) African American

masculinities, (3) first-generation college student status, as well as (4) resilience and self-efficacy all impact the academic and social achievement of first-generation African American males as they transition to post-secondary education, and each of these literatures will be interrogated through a Critical Race lens. The obstacles facing young, Black, first-generation, low-income, and urban males are myriad, and as such, building a resilient identity is critical to their academic persistence and success. Much of the literature to date examines student risk and resilience through *either* a psychological or a sociological lens. Many sociological studies discuss the importance of the family or community in the building of resilience in young people (Harper & Davis, 2013). Conversely, many psychological articles discuss individual indicators of a resilience that urban students need to “build up” to be successful (Winfield, 1994). This study attempts to simultaneously investigate the numerous obstacles young men of color must face in their transition to post-secondary education, while merging the realms of sociology and psychology, the structural and the personal, to get at the roots of building resilience in urban first-generation college men of color within oppressive structures.

Definitions

One major issue that arises from discussing “resilience” is the way in which it is defined. When we consider behaviors that are resilient, we are assuming that there is a “good” way to progress through life, and a “bad” way to do so. The “good” way is to follow the typical middle-class, White path: go to high school, get involved, make friends, go to college, get involved, make friends, get a job and succeed. However, developing protective factors, or habits and characteristics that insulate a student from

negative stimuli, may mean having few relationships with peers at school, or not getting involved in clubs or activities (Bottrell, 2009). Indeed, some of the students who participated in this study took this route through their high school experience and into their first year of college. The water is murky when discussing what it means to be resilient. In order to be clear, for the sake of this project “educational resilience” will refer to a student’s ability to successfully move through various levels of education without regard for *how* protective factors are enacted in a student’s life. “Persistence” will signify a student’s ability to continue on their path towards a college degree. Additionally, in order to avoid the “symbolic violence” of determinism that Foster and Spencer (2011) discuss, this study assumes that attending college is the path that these students have decided upon for themselves. As these participants come from homes where post-secondary education is not the norm, there is an assumption that these students face less pressure to attend college. This, however, will be further addressed in the participant interviews.

Additionally, “first-generation” student status refers to a student for whom neither parent completed a four-year degree. Included in this population are students with parents who: attended a four-year institution but did not graduate, completed a two year or vocational degree, did not attend any form of post-secondary education, or did not complete high school (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, & Gray, 2013). While there is a good deal of variety in using this definition, all students will have a decreased level of knowledge regarding

opportunities on college campuses, as well as how to access these opportunities and other campus resources.

Resilience will be a key theme throughout this study. As such, harnessing a definition for how resilience is operationalized is paramount. For this review, resilience is defined as an individual's positive response to risk factors. Risk factors may include such things as poverty or a volatile home life (Bottrell, 2009). Further, the concept of student efficacy will be explored in this review. Self-efficacy, which is a key component in Rutter's explanation of resilience, is defined as "the self-belief that one can cope with challenging situations" (Rutter, 1985, para. 12). Self-efficacy is connected with academic persistence, as self-confidence and self-esteem are important factors for underrepresented youth in their path towards completing a college degree. A key component to self-efficacy is the ability to plan and prepare for obstacles. For this review, planning is defined as "a style of coping that involves doing something about one's situation rather than just passively accepting life's difficulties" (Rutter, 1985, para. 12). Indeed, future planning served to be a critical component in overcoming immediate obstacles for many of the young men of this study.

Addressing Race

Race is a matter of significance in education and much work has been done to examine the impacts of race on a student's educational career (Carter, 2005; MacLeod, 2009; Ogbu, 1987). To be clear, "race," refers to racialized groups, as race as a biological measure does not exist (Goodman, 2008; Hu-Dehart, 1994; Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000; Painter, 2010; Pollock, 2008; Thompson, 1999). Rather, examining race through a

sociohistorical lens is a more accurate approach. Race has long been a socially constructed category, or a category contingent upon human creation, placed upon different groups of people (Blum, 2002). Race is a flexible category because of its manmade nature, and can change based on a person's location and context (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Freeman, 2012). This categorization has strong links to politics, history, education, civics, and economics, particularly in America (Blum, 2002; Gillborn, 2008). However, it is also important to keep in mind that while race is a socially constructed category, the lived experiences of racialized groups makes race real, as is the case for the student participants in this study (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

African Americans are challenged by systematic discrimination throughout their entire lives simply because they are Black. Much research on African American youth, especially males, focuses on the consequences of underperformance in schools. This narrative has only furthered the deficit-centered model used to discuss this population. Culture and setting, as well as socioeconomic status, are directly linked to social factors and outcomes, as described in the theoretical framework section of this literature review. When the prevalent social belief is that African Americans are inferior to Whites, educators, knowingly or unknowingly, act upon this paradigm. By doing so, these students are denied access to resources that may improve their academic standing or future ability, thus reifying the belief that these students are somehow lesser (Ford & Moore, 2013). It is a vicious cycle that serves to maintain the status quo in urban neighborhoods. Access to resources is key in building resilience in youth, and preventing

these students from gaining access to these resources will continue the cycle of inter-generational poverty and risk.

While race is not tied to biology, one concept that was beneficial in the examination of the data was “colorism,” or the creation of a hierarchy within the Black community based on skin tone (Hunter, 2007). Within her framework, Hunter postulates that individuals with lighter complexions are privileged with greater access to high paying jobs, education, housing, and potential partners. However, the same men are also considered less authentic within the Black community due to their skin tone. The complexions of the men in this study became important in their understanding of their own masculinity, as well as in further investigating the race-based stigma that each faced on the college campus.

While race is indeed a critical identity for the student participants, race itself will not be independently reviewed at length in this literature review. Rather, race will be examined in partnership with other student identities below. For the purposes of this review, race is the lens through which other identities and experiences are filtered. As such, examining race in the absence of other student identities would not do justice to the interrelated nature of racial identity formation. Race will be threaded throughout the remainder of the literature review rather than described separately at length. This lens is also described above in the theoretical framework portion of this review.

Education and the History of Exclusion

People of color have long been excluded from American society. Institutions of education have been complicit in the systematic exclusion of people of color for

centuries. The education system has the greatest potential to improve the lives of urban people of color in America today. However, low expectations and outdated stigma surrounding urban youth of color continue to hold back a population with tremendous potential (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Moreover, the lack of resources available to schools serving low-income and urban of students color perpetuates the cycle of exclusion that this group has suffered for generations.

American history has not been kind to the racialized other, particularly African Americans. That many Black Americans were brought to the United States through the slave trade has impacted how others perceive this group, particularly in the realm of academic achievement. This, in turn, has affected how African American students view their own academic abilities today. Black individuals were excluded from formal education in the United States for decades, and once these students were finally given access to the education system, their resources were limited, as were their opportunities.

The history of education in the United States of America has progressed from that of an elitist institution where only the children wealthy land-owning men were eligible to receive an education to an egalitarian one where a child, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or race, is able to receive an education (Rury, 2005). However, the quality of education is not guaranteed, and often students of color are left with under-funded and under-performing institutions.

Despite the unrestricted system of education that we have today, we cannot overlook the long history of denying education to the “other.” Long after education assumed the more democratic appearance that we are familiar with today, education was

still being denied to people of color (Lazerson, 2005). First, it was denied to Blacks through enslavement, and in later years, through limited rights extended to persons of color (Franklin, 1979). Currently, education is denied to students of color through poorly funded and under-resourced public institutions.

This history of educational segregation in America is a lengthy one, ranging from the inception of the colonies, until the 1970s when *Brown v. The Board of Education* was finally enacted in schools across America. Primary and secondary education was the focus of many protests and much debate, with discrimination in schooling beginning even before persons of color were bought and sold as property in America. Kaestle (2005) writes, “new urban missionaries began to connect foreign birth with poverty and crime.” The distinction of “other” and therefore “dangerous” has simply migrated from foreign-born light-skinned individuals, to any darker skinned individual in America.

Higher education is not free of this long and unjust history. Despite the availability of institutions of higher education since 1636 in America, it was not until the 1820s, nearly 200 years later, that African Americans had access to higher education. Alexander Lucius Twilight completed his baccalaureate studies in 1823 at Middlebury College in Vermont. He is the first recorded African American to receive such a credential (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Additionally, the doors of non-HBCUs were open only to those who were deemed adequately prepared, and those who were resilient enough to face the complete social isolation that was married to the opportunity to attend a predominantly White institution, and by 1860 only 28 African Americans had received college degrees. For those students of color who were accepted into post-

secondary institutions, segregation was commonplace. These students were often forced to listen to lectures from the hallway, and were not permitted to live or socialize with White students. In response, young Black students formed fraternities such as Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi at predominantly White campuses to serve as internal support systems (Harper, 2013). These sorts of internal supports remain relevant and necessary today.

Educational research on resilience, while a relatively recent trend, has its roots in the Civil Rights movement. The concern over the psyche of students of color first emerged during *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* court case of 1954. During this trial, for the first time, the psychological damage done to African American boys and girls through school segregation was investigated and shared through the now famous “doll experiment” conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). From this landmark case came concern about inhibiting a child’s ability to learn through prejudicial practices, and the stunting of the Black mind through school segregation. Conversely, this case, and the subsequent concerns about the mental status of students of color, also paved the way for dialogue around the mental fortitude, what is now more commonly known as resilience or “grit,” of students from traditionally oppressed groups.

Urban Schools and Inequality

Public education was once held up as a great equalizer for American citizens. Its original mission was to create good citizens and productive members of society (Labaree, 1997). Unfortunately, public education is no longer able to serve this mission for public

good without interference, if it ever was. Rather, the goals of urban public education currently seem to teeter between providing social services and simply providing a physical space to hold students for eight hours a day. Inequality in public education causes a large portion of its attendees to be left behind academically. Urban students of color largely make up this population, while their privileged counterparts continue to receive support in and out of the classroom. The current educational climate has led to an every-man-for-himself mentality, leaving those without the knowledge of available resources struggling to keep up.

Low teacher expectations are yet another obstacle facing urban students of color (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Winfield, 1994). Teachers often believe that the poor homes that urban students are coming from impact their ability to be successful in school (Evans, Banjeree, Meyer, Aldana, Foust, & Rowley, 2012; Winfield, 1994). As a result, many teachers lower their expectations for these students, which, unfortunately, can result in students performing down to these expectations. In metropolitan areas, this occurs at a structural level. While a student may receive good grades in high school, they arrive on college campuses underprepared for the level of work expected of them. Moreover, hearing only negative statistics, and being constantly reminded of their subordinate place in American history creates an impression in one's mind that the stereotypes are correct, that the general population is correct, about this group's ability. This process is what Harper (2013) terms "Niggering" or the process by which stereotypes of Black men and women shape people's low expectations for their success. This process closely mirrors Steele's (1997) theory of stereotype threat. Indeed,

African American males are arguably the most stereotyped and stigmatized group in America (Corprew & Cunningham, 2012). Steele's theory of stereotype threat, or the anxiety over confirming a negative stereotype about one's identity and Harper's theory of "Niggering," in conversation with one another, can be utilized to explain this phenomenon (Spagnoli, 2010). The cycle of low expectations and performing down to these expectations continues to lead to both group stigmatization and self-stigmatization. Moreover, if these students are able to enter institutions of higher education, the challenges are compounded through perceptions that privileged (often White) young adults carry about urban youth of color. Conversely, self-efficacy can help to mitigate stereotype threat (Winfield, 1994). This idea is explored further in the Resilience portion of this literature review.

Institutions of Higher Education

Like much of American society, American higher education was created with a mono-racial population in mind, and has traditionally served the interest of hegemonic White European-American men (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; Wise, 2010). The critical paradigm, discussed in detail above, provides some insight into how an institution built without consideration for a diverse student body can contribute to alienation of students of color. It was not until the latter part of the twentieth century that institutions of higher education opened their doors to women and people of color and began to dismantle higher education as solely a privilege for the White male population. (Hartley, 2010). However, large-scale reform needs to occur within the primary and secondary school systems if we, as a nation, are going to better serve our urban students of color. Finding

ways to listen to their unique voices, as a critical paradigm instructs us to do, and provide them with opportunities to learn and grow from role models in their community will increase their ability to navigate challenging life circumstances.

Unfortunately, institutions of higher education continue to perpetuate the inequality found in urban public schools. The financial need of colleges and universities causes these institutions to support capitalism and a free market (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Hughes, 2013), which can be harmful to urban students in a pay-to-play system of education. The uncertainty about how higher education will be funded moving forward has led to increasing tuition costs, a shortage of financial aid available puts additional strain on low-income students. Capitalism is a structure built with the assumption that some must fail if others are to succeed, and often times low-income urban students are the ones left to fail.

All of these factors contribute to the development of a negative self-identity and negative impression in regards to education, which only contributes to the gap between suburban students and their urban peers. As a result, many of these young men give up on their education long before they begin to think about post-secondary options. If an urban student of color decides to pursue a post-secondary education, it is important to understand the experiences that he brings to campus, because the climate he is entering is anything but value neutral (Baber, 2012). Moreover, literature in the field of education states that students who are unable to integrate fully into campus life because they are still closely tied to their home communities have more trouble succeeding academically (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). With this in mind, the same factor that allowed

students to persist through high school (strong communities ties, racial pride) may cause them to fail in a post-secondary setting (van Wormer, Sudduth, & Jackson, 2011). The confluence of these factors can negatively impact these students despite their ability to gain entry to post-secondary education, especially for students who go to school in their metropolitan area of origin. It is not easy to leave behind one's community, nor is it easy to leave behind the notions of being lesser that were forwarded for much of a student's educational career prior to pursuing a college degree. These factors will be further explored throughout this literature review. In spite of the ways that educational institutions and policies disadvantage a Black male identity, urban men of color are developing resilience and succeeding academically. A narrative of success will allow students to steer their protective factors towards academic achievement, rather than protecting their ego or defending their identities. Education has the potential to liberate, yet culturally unresponsive curricula, low teacher expectations, and a lack of resources keeps traditionally oppressed groups subjugated. Countering this paradigm will be paramount in creating space for a dialogue around Black male achievement, which may in turn lead to increased success.

Black Masculinity

This study focuses on the experiences of males because there are many factors coalescing in the lives of young urban African American men that inhibit their educational attainment. For instance, males in general, but specifically men of color are seen as "troublemakers" in urban secondary schools, while young women of color are seen as young ladies because of their tendency towards the traditionally feminine traits of

silence and passivity (Lopez, 2011, p. 386). Men of color, in general, are also less likely to graduate high school than their female counterparts. This is due, in large part, to the way that they are perceived by teachers and administrators, according to Lopez (2011). Indeed, African American males also report lower GPAs as a result of racial discrimination, or the negative, unfair treatment of students on the basis of race from peers or professional staff members, while in school. Racial discrimination can have an overall negative impact on student engagement and motivation spanning within and between years in school (Butler-Barnes, Chavour, Hurd, & Varner, 2013). Moreover, teacher perceptions of Black males are often more negative than the perceptions of their White male counterparts, even when displaying the same character traits. For instance, White men are seen as “aggressive” and “go-getters”, while Black men are perceived as “dangerous” and “needing external controls” (Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991, p. 88). Educators believe students are successful when they are able to overcome adversity and take responsibility for their actions. However, for students of color this frequently means taking ownership of a system that is intentionally exclusionary and often operates outside of their control. Additionally, the schools from which the study participants hail are urban, low-income communities, and are under-resourced; all factors that further impede on academic success (Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991).

Men of color perform masculinity in many ways, but the most common in the social imagination is that of the dangerous other. As with race, masculinity is not lived in a single way. Rather, there are myriad ways in which a man of color can enact his masculinity, some of which contradict one another, adding to the complexity of

navigating masculinity. In the scholarship, Black masculinity is primarily discussed in two key ways: traditional masculinity and high-achieving, alternative masculinity. Traditional Black masculinity is defined by competitiveness, pursuing sexual relationships with women, displaying wealth with material possessions, and lack of concern for academic endeavors (Harper, 2004). This form of masculinity is also tied to perceptions about work ethic and poor academic achievement (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Moreover, collegiate Black masculinity, particularly among fraternities and sports teams, has traditionally required men to be “in control” and unemotional (Dancy II, 2011, p. 481). Nonprofessional men, who likely have had less access to higher educational opportunities, most frequently embrace this form of masculinity, which are generally viewed as a “dysfunction” and a compensation for a lack of life opportunities (Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Hunter & Davis, 1992). Examining this form of masculinity through a critical lens, one could argue that although normalized in contemporary society, this vision of masculinity is rooted in the vision of Black men during the slave trade: as beasts of labor. The socialization of Black men over the course of generations has reified the need to be strong, in control, desirable to women, and competitive. Moreover, these notions are reinforced by institutions of education, which makes them complicit in the reproduction of patriarchal, hypermasculine citizens (Dancy II, 2012).

High-achieving masculinity, on the other hand, is defined by the acceptance of leadership positions, concern with academic achievement and career success, and a desire to provide for one’s family (Harper, 2004). Additionally, Dancy II (2011) found that collegiate Black men defined their own masculinity in terms of their resilience and ability

to overcome obstacles, their honesty or “realness,” and their desire to build solidarity with their Black peers (p.486). A resilient masculinity for Black men in college was further described as taking on leadership positions, taking pride in one’s efforts and accomplishments, and trying one’s best. These themes are strikingly similar to the high-achieving masculinity Harper elucidated in his 2004 article. In the current discourse, young Black men are most often thought to ascribe to traditional Black masculinity. However, in the study at hand the majority of the men represent the high-achieving Black masculinity described by Harper and Dancy II.

In his later works, however, Dancy II moves away from the masculinity binary described above. Rather, he outlines how masculinity and manhood are complex identities, and are performed in myriad ways with four distinct typologies: sexualizers who are hyper-heterosexual, transgressors who are primarily focused on being accepted by their racial communities rather than feeling free to be themselves, misogynists who feel entitled to women and oppress them as they are oppressed by White men, and self-actualizers, who most closely resemble the “high achieving” masculinity Harper describes (Dancy II, 2012). Moreover, masculinity, to Dancy II, is something you “do,” while manhood is a state of being. This is an important distinction, as this section refers to the way that masculinity is performed. Despite his movement away from Harper’s binary, Dancy II does highlight that a masculinity based around providing for one’s family and scholastic achievement is common in Black college students, particularly those who come from single-parent households (Dancy II, 2012; Dancy II, 2015).

Important to the discussion of high-achieving masculinity is the presence of Black male role models. The literature states that, often times, young men who ascribe to this model of masculinity will mirror older Black men from their community and their work giving back to and supporting their neighborhood. While much of the literature agrees that role models and mentors are important, the unfortunate reality is that these men are in short supply in many of the areas from which the study participants hail. Rather, these young men look to their collegiate peers and, often, non-male role models as sources for inspiration.

Literature also suggests that masculinity, especially Black masculinity is negotiated within peer groups (Harper, 2004). If a young Black man is engaged in activities far outside of what is expected of him, his masculinity is called into question. Hunter and Davis (1992) state that one of the central challenges for the men in their study was defining masculinity in terms of what they expect of and want for themselves, rather than framing their definition through a social lens. Once these men were able to discern their own definitions of masculinity, however, the primary domains in which their masculinity sat were similar to those described by Harper (2004) and Dancy II (2011).

Black Masculinity and Academic Success

Obtaining a college degree is now paramount for the economic success of young adults in America. Since the 1970s, 100% of the job growth in America has required that employees have *at least* a bachelor's degree (Suskie, 2015, emphasis original). Given the economic and social impact a college degree has on a person's life course, examining the academic and social experiences of young Black men on college campuses is critical for

investigating and increasing their success. Academic and social support of young Black men on college campuses has been linked to differential outcomes for this group of students. Students with more support are more likely to be academically successful. This relates to student self-efficacy as students who have mentors and role models and are able to view their own opportunities through the experiences of others are more able to develop resilient selves (Bandura, 1982). African American male students not only perceive a lack of support from the campus environment as a whole, they also perceive discrimination from faculty and administration on their campuses (Davis, 1994). Many Black students at predominantly White institutions report that relationships with faculty and their peers are negative, and that they avoid interpersonal interactions outside of the classroom. A lack of social activity on campus is tied to decreased student retention, and could have serious implications for student persistence (Tinto, 1998).

Research has shown that differences in academic achievement are also linked to home factors, which are in place long before a student enters school. Factors such as a family's race, socioeconomic status, living arrangements, health care, and parental educational attainment all influence student school readiness, and, as such, academic achievement once a student enters an academic setting. The role of parents on adolescent African American boys is particularly large, especially early in development. When parents emphasize the importance of school to their sons, these students tend to perform better in reading and math at an early age. Moreover, parents reading to their children, as well as discussing racial heritage are also linked with increased student achievement (Joe & Davis, 2009). Discussion of racial heritage has particular implications for student

academic success, as this is likely tied to the development of a positive racial identity, which is believed to increase resilience in youth. Identity development for young Black men is important, as stereotypes about low academic achievement and involvement in criminal behavior too often plagues this group of students (Muhammad, 2010).

Parental involvement in a student's academic career has myriad benefits: higher academic achievement, reduced absenteeism, and a more positive attitude towards education are among these factors (Joe & Davis, 2009). Moreover, at-home enrichment is thought to be particularly critical for academic achievement. Activities such as a parent helping her student with homework, setting school-related policies in the home, and visiting centers of culture such as the theater or a museum are seen as important contributors to a student's education. Cultural capital theorist would indicate that participating in these activities helps ready a student not only for school, but to be successful as a middle-class adult as well, as these activities are highly regarded (Allen, 2013). Unfortunately, however, research shows that parents of color are less often able to engage in these enrichment activities with their students than are their White peers. This difference is often tied to socioeconomic status, as race and class are inextricably linked in America (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Siegel-Hawley, 2010).

As these students move into adolescence, school staff input becomes particularly important to positive development. Students spend the majority of their day operating within the school environment, either through physical presence in the school, or through extracurricular activities and homework. As such, the influence that the school personnel have on students is high. Because school officials make the up bulk of adults that students

come into contact with, interactions with these individuals have great potential to shape the student's identity development. If young Black men encounter supportive instructors and administrators, particularly other Black male role models, research shows that a positive academic identity is fostered (Whiting, 2009). However, if a student perceives a lack of support from school officials, the student parlays these experiences into a negative associate with academics (Corprew III & Cunningham, 2012).

Parents and teachers both often report lower academic expectations for African American boys than for African American girls (Joe & Davis, 2009). As such, examining Black masculinity in schools is important, as being gendered male may have long-lasting impacts on a student's academic trajectory. When examining masculinity, the concept of dissociation through bravado or machismo is of note. Students who face numerous risk factors are often left feeling vulnerable. Adopting the mask of bravado allows a student to act out his "cool pose," while subsequently disengaging from situations that cause the students excess stress (Majors & Billson, 1992). For faculty and administration, this bravado is often viewed as a disengagement with school exemplified in traditional Black masculinity, which, in turn, leads to lowered teacher expectations. This façade, however, is utilized most when students are in need to support from staff and administration and are not receiving adequate interventions (Corprew III & Cunningham, 2012).

Despite the low expectations and stigmas that these students face, access to institutions of post-secondary education for African American males has improved somewhat over the past few decades (Engle & Tinto, 2008). However, along with increased enrollment of Black students, the overall student population at colleges and

universities has also increased. As such, the cohorts of Black male students, though larger in number, continue to represent approximately the same percent of the student population as they did previously. As a result, these students continue to enter college campuses where they face exclusion, racism, and tokenism in much the same way this population did 30 years ago (Harper, 2013). The psychosocial impact this sort of isolation has on this student group will be discussed in detail below.

First-Generation College Goers

First-generation college students, or students for whom neither parent graduated college, face many challenges in transitioning to post-secondary education (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, & Gray, 2013). First-generation students traditionally have lower GPAs, earn fewer academic credits and, as such, are more likely to leave college before they complete their degree requirements (Craft Defreitas & Rinn, 2013). These students are also often less academically prepared to enter college based on their high school preparation and academic placement tests. Craft Defreitas and Rinn (2012) propose one reason for these academic differences is lower self-concept among first-generation students. Students who are confident in their ability to succeed are more likely to do so (Bandura, 1982). However, other studies have shown that aspirations are not necessarily a predictor of success. For instance, 63% first-generation college students who begin their degree program at two-year institutions hope to complete at least a bachelor's degree. Yet, only 5% of these students complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years (Engle & Tinto, 2008). There are a number of risk factors that contribute to this low completion rate for first-

generation students: first-generation students are more likely to live and work off campus, take classes part time, and select schools that are closer to their homes than non-first-generation students. All of these factors impact a student's ability to engage academically and socially on campus. Student engagement theory, discussed in greater depth above, holds that the more engaged a student is in campus life (through clubs, study groups, meeting with professors during office hours, etc.), the more likely a student is to persist academically (Tinto, 1998).

First-generation college students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, are more likely to attend college closer to home than their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). While this may be a practical financial choice, as it allows students to live and work off campus, it also often limits a student's ability to interact with other students and faculty on campus. Moreover, going to school close to home leaves first-generation students without a space to call their own. Regardless of which space these students are occupying, they hold outsider status. In their home communities, students are interacting with family and friends who likely did not attend post-secondary education and report having strained relationships as a result of different life paths. Finding common ground becomes a challenge for these students when they return to their neighborhoods on school breaks or even on a daily basis if the student lives at home while attending school. While on campus, first-generation students report feeling isolated from their peers because they feel under-prepared, under-represented, or as though they constantly exist in two vastly different spheres (Engle & Tinto, 2008). This may be particularly troublesome for students who remain in their hometown while attending institutions of higher education,

as home obligations are unlikely to wane when the student is geographically available. Moreover, the participants of this study often described feelings of indebtedness to their families, which causes them to put their family's needs above their own at various times during the academic year.

First-generation college students are also more likely to be students from traditionally oppressed groups than their non-first-generation peers and feelings of isolation are further increased for first-generation students of color (Harper, 2013). Previous studies have shown that students of color, specifically African American and Latino students, have lower academic achievement than their White peers regardless of first-generation student status. However, when the first-generation identity is added to the equation, students of color perform at a much lower level than their peers, regardless of first-generation student status (Craft Defreitas & Rinn, 2013).

Influence of Families on First-Generation Students

Currently, there is a dearth of literature examining the importance and influence of the family unit in the academic pursuits of low-income first-generation college students of color. The literature currently available addresses the influence of families on: Black men and women at HBCUs (Brooks, 2015); Black men and women at predominantly White institutions (Guiffrida, 2005; Love, 2008); and various ethnic minorities at predominantly White institutions (Juan, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016). Currently, none of the literature examines the impact of families on the population of this study: first-generation college-going African American males from public urban high schools in who have gained access to institutions of higher education in their

metropolitan area of origin. These students are low-income, and the majority of them were raised in single-parent homes. This collection of identities will shape how they interact with their families during their time in college. These interactions may be markedly different from what is available in the extant literature.

The current literature on the influence of families on young Black college students outlines how many families expect their student to attend college after high school (Brooks, 2015). This could be, in part, because the literature is not dealing specifically with first-generation college students, however. Additionally, the literature focuses on how students will often have a better relationship with their families once they have left for school. The distance between student and family member may help to alleviate some of the strain on the relationship and allow the student to remove himself from familial responsibilities or tensions. Indeed, research states that African American students tend to report stronger bonds and closer relationships with their families (Love, 2008). Unfortunately, the men of this study are still geographically close to their families, and thus the tension in their familial relationships was not alleviated.

The literature also indicates that students feel as though they are putting a financial burden on their families by attending college. Much of the data in the literature points to this psychological burden of asking family members for monetary support as among the most challenging part of a student's transition to college (Brooks, 2015). However, the financial contributions of family members have practical benefits for the students: it allows them to focus on their academics while at school. Moreover, students' perception of the financial sacrifices made by their families are tantamount to praise and

support (Guiffrida, 2005). While the connection to one's family is important in feeling well supported, research is inconclusive on whether strong familial connections will help insulate students from the negative effects of racial discrimination (Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016).

Although much of the literature around family influence, particularly on first-generation students, suggests that families serve more to distract than support, this is not always the case. This study adds to the small amount of literature investigating the benefits of family involvement on a college student's career, with a particular focus of first-generation male students of color.

As outlined above, first-generation college-going African American males who elect to attend an institution of post-secondary education in their metropolitan area of origin face many, if not all, of the challenges described in the transition to post-secondary education herein. There is much literature that details why this population should be unsuccessful in their academic pursuits—lack of knowledge about processes, access issues, cultural and social capital, deficit thinking surrounding those who come through the urban education system, and strong community ties pulling students away from coursework (Harper & Davis, 2013). This, in turn, may impact how African American students view their own academic abilities. Yet, despite the literature describing why these students should not be academically successful, many are. This ability to overcome great adversity is what this review labels as “resilience.”

Resilience and Self-Efficacy

As stated above, resilience research has its roots in the field of biology. Biological resilience describes a species' ability to adapt to its environment in order to survive (Rutter, 1985). Educational resilience, however, focuses around the ability for an individual or a group of students to navigate through adverse life situations to ultimately meet some educational goal (Winfield, 1994). Michael Rutter, the father of resilience research, identifies four key aspects to resilience in youth. They are, "(A) the reduction of negative outcomes altering either the risk or the child's exposure to the risk, (b) the reduction of a negative chain reaction following risk exposure, (c) the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) the opening up of opportunities" (Winfield, 1991). Self-efficacy, which is a key component in Rutter's explanation of resilience, is defined as "the self-belief that one can cope with challenging situations" (Rutter, 1985, para. 12). In addition, Rutter discusses the importance of planning to the resilience process. Planning is defined as "a style of coping that involves doing something about one's situation rather than just passively accepting life's difficulties" (Rutter, 1985, para. 12). The ability to plan and problem-solve is paramount to student efficacy, as a student's exposure to risk is hard to mitigate prior to entering a post-secondary institution.

Scholars from a number of theoretical backgrounds have employed their lenses to this burgeoning topic in education research. These theories raise interesting questions about what is and should be valued in resilience research, and theorists argue amongst themselves about what the best approach is when working to develop resilience in

learners. Many identity theorists have written on the topic of resilience, working to explore how traditionally oppressed identities and marginalized voices transform into stories of resilience. Additionally, much has been written about poverty and violence in relation to resilience. Largely, these studies state that while a student may be lacking physical resources, emotional and community resources help the student develop a resilient identity (Yosso, 2005).

Obstacles to Developing Resilience

Race and racism are the effects of hegemony, or the process whereby the interests of the group in power become the status quo (Hughes, 2013). The dominant group (middle class, White, male, able bodied, etc.) continues to fixate on “otherness” (most frequently on Blackness, however this changes based on the context of a given situation, as, like race, otherness is socially constructed) as dangerous (Muhammad, 2010). Structural privilege removes the responsibility to recognize oppression from the individual (hooks, 1995). This removal of responsibility allows for the continued “othering” of groups of color to persist. Institutions of higher education are no exception to this process. In fact, and unfortunately, institutions of higher education can breed racist behavior among students if conversations about the sociohistorical nature of race are not discussed either in the classroom or in the extracurricular activities of students (Cottom, 2013; Hughes, 2013).

When urban students of color enter institutions of higher education they are often assumed to be there for one of two reasons. Either these students have gained entry into this institution because of Affirmative Action, or because they are athletes (Bonilla-Silva,

2010). This perception can devalue the hard work that these students have done to progress to the collegiate level. Unfortunately, their privileged counterparts may never realize that these stereotypes are damaging because they are not overt, liberal racist thoughts. Rather, they are a more innocuous but equally damaging form of racism.

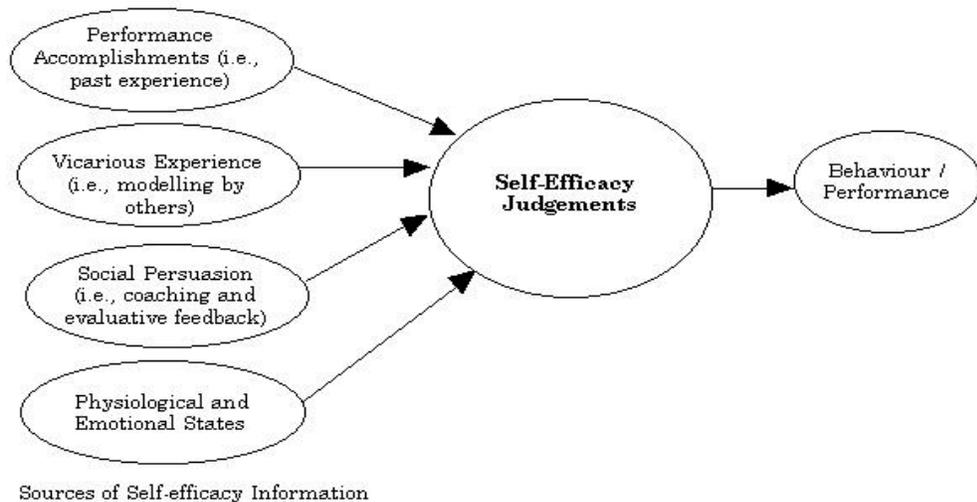
Resilience in Urban Youth

In psychology, resilience is defined as an individual's positive response to risk factors such as poverty or a volatile home life (Bottrell, 2009; Schoon & Bynner, 2003; Winfield, 1994). It is believed that individuals build up processes within themselves that help protect them from and find ways to respond to challenging situations in their daily lives. According to Winfield (1994), individuals who may be identified as resilient display high aptitude in social settings by forming positive relationships with their peers, exhibit sensitivity, intelligence (as measured by IQ), empathy, humor, and thrive in situations that require critical problem-solving. These students demonstrate a positive sense of self, and feel able to control some of the forces occurring in their lives. The formation of these relationships and their subsequent implications in the lives of youth, as well as connecting with mentors, community members, and educators allows resilience research to bridge the realms of psychology and sociology. Figure 2.1 further illustrates Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which explicates the importance of relationship-based resilience (Bandura, 1982).

Educators and administrators in urban public schools should work to facilitate resilience in their student population to ensure their success not only at the secondary level, but at the post-secondary level as well. Staff and faculty at these schools will likely

not be able to plant the seeds resilience in their students, as this is an internally driven process, complemented by strong social connections. Providing space to develop the skills necessary to fight against risk factors is one way that educators can assist students in this area. If students feel successful in their educational careers, either through academic success or through social success, they are more apt to continue in their educational pursuits (Noguera, 2003; Winfield, 1994). Faculty and administration can contribute to this success by connecting with their students on an individual level, and introducing students to the variety of resources available to them on their respective campuses. Combatting low teacher expectations is another way to encourage students in their academic trajectory.

Figure 2.1: Bandura's Sources of Self-Efficacy Information



Resilient students from urban communities often display a commitment to their community, and a high degree of determination. These factors correlate strongly with familial influence (parents or guardians holding education as a priority), strong connections to teachers, and a peer group that is also concerned with academic success (Winfield, 1994). Moreover, a strong community can lead to the development of protective factors in urban youth. Bolstering a sense of community pride may in turn help these students display racial pride, high self-esteem, and self-efficacy as well (interestingly, these same facets also increase difficulty for first-generation students as described above). Framing resilience in a sociological lens, rather than a purely psychological one, allows us to simultaneously investigate the internal processes of resilient youth as well as the community impacts on these students. These connections are important, as the individuals providing support to the student are often from the same community and understand the struggles that the student is facing. Utilizing the unique voice of these individuals can strengthen a student's resolve to succeed. Unfortunately, if a student does not have these support systems in place early, the likelihood of succeeding decreases.

The transition from high school to college is a challenging one even for the most prepared students. Urban students of color are often underprepared for this transition because of the lack of resources (or knowledge of resources available) during their time in secondary education (Laureau, 2002; Lipman, 2010; Winfield, 1994). Even academically gifted Black and Latino students do not reach the same level of success as their White peers in the post-secondary setting. If the highest achieving students of these

identity groups cannot match the success of the dominant group, much must be done to assist those students who do not fall into the gifted tier. Unfortunately, urban schools are left wanting for resources to help their unique population of learners. Guidance counselor programs are being cut across the nation, but could serve as the primary solution to the underrepresentation and underachievement of students of color in post-secondary settings. Urban students of color, who do not have access to surplus resources outside of the classroom as many of their privileged peers might, need special attention from administrators to help them discover different colleges and universities, explore majors and financial aid, and discuss the impact of the academic decisions they are making before they ever enter high school. The earlier these conversations happen the more equipped the students will be for the transition to higher education. When a student believes that the barriers against him or her outweigh the support that he will receive a student's motivation is inhibited (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, and Gallagher, 2003). This is why it is particularly important that urban students of color are supported and nurtured by school officials and family members alike.

Developing a positive sense of self is particularly important in this process. Giving students the opportunity to exercise control over their environment is one small way to do this, and something of which educators at all levels are capable. As a student matures and encounters racial stereotypes and microaggressions, a strong sense of one's accomplishments and abilities help to mitigate the damage done (Sue, et. al, 2007; Winfield, 1994). This work needs to be rigorous and ongoing if we want urban students of color to emerge as leaders in their schools and in their communities.

Attending an institution of higher education is, in itself, a mechanism for resilience (Oketch, Howard, Mauldin, Mimura, & Kim, 2012). Attaining a higher level of education is a way to insulate oneself from issues of poverty and violence—ideally curtailing the likelihood that a student’s children will encounter the same “risk factors” as his or her parent did growing up. Discovering new opportunities within institutions of higher education and pursuing them with support of school professionals can help strengthen a student’s sense of self-efficacy, further preparing them for the challenges they may face when they reach the collegiate level.

Self-Efficacy

Researchers have found that students of color achieve greater academic success when faculty and administrators affirm their efforts and intellectual competence. Students who receive this sort of affirmation have higher degree attainment, and perform better academically than many of their counterparts would without similar support (Harper, 2013). Students who do not receive this type of encouragement, however, are more likely to feel isolated on campus, and shift their efforts away from academic success.

Harper (2013) introduces the concept of peer pedagogies, in which students of color assist new students of color transition and acclimate to campus life. These roles are not formalized with titles, but often mirror traditional mentor-mentee relationships. Mentor students reach out to new same-race students to welcome them, encourage them to join social organizations targeted toward supporting students of color, or connect with new students over course work. This simple support network is often the difference

between social isolation accompanied by the decision to leave higher education, and the ability to persist and find one's niche within a post-secondary setting (Harper, 2013).

Perceived school support is operationalized using student narratives about their relationships with or impressions of faculty and administrators in their schools. When students share stories of positive interactions with these adults, perceived school support is high. When students share stories of negative interactions with these adults, or do not reference their relationship with faculty and administration at all, perceived school support is low (Corprew III & Cunningham, 2012). Low perceived support, too, is linked with decreased retention and lack of academic persistence. Student engagement theory, which serves as the primary theoretical frame for this work, further outlines the consequences of low student engagement on college campuses (Tinto, 1998).

As described above, Critical Race Theory provides an in-depth analysis of the various structures that restrain student success just described. Understanding structural obstacles makes the discussion of resilience more complex, as the development of a resilient identity is both prevented and made necessary by these obstacles. Enabling resilience in traditionally oppressed groups is about setting them up for success within a system that was constructed to inhibit them, and Critical Race Theory gives voice to those who often do not have the chance to be heard in academia. As such, a critical paradigm is particularly fitting when researching the ways in which traditionally subjugated groups find academic success within structures that oppress as it offers an alternative to the current conversation on resilience.

Scholars continue to work to construct a counter-narrative to the traditional deficit-orientated thinking around students of color. Harnessing the power of a supportive community and racial pride as the basis for a new narrative, a critical counter-narrative, about student achievement and engagement may, in turn, increase protective factors in youth needed to develop self-efficacy and therefore resilience within post-secondary institutions. Creating a counter-truth to that of the deficit discourse around students of color is crucial in deconstructing the historical subjugation of this population of students (Delpit, 1995). Education has the potential to liberate, yet culturally unresponsive curricula, low teacher expectations, exclusion from social organization, feelings of isolation, and a lack of resources keeps traditionally oppressed groups subjugated. Investigating and countering this paradigm with a critical perspective will allow space for a more realistic dialogue around student achievement and engagement as well as the structures that shape student success. This, in turn, may lead to increased student success.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In this study on student resilience, personal narratives were key in understanding the different resources students access in order to persist through their first year of college, as well as understanding the community assets utilized to gain entry into Philadelphia post-secondary institutions. As such, qualitative methods were employed. A series of four (4) participant interviews, interviews with City Scholars (CS) staff, and document analysis were used to gather data on student experiences at the post-secondary level.

Participants

This study focused on first-generation college-going African American males from public urban high schools in who have gained access to institutions of higher education in their metropolitan area of origin. The participants grew up in the city of Philadelphia, and are currently attending institutions of higher education in and around the city as well. These students are reflective of the majority demographics (race, income, SES, family educational attainment) of their neighborhoods of origin. Despite attending college close to home, the student participants are attending institutions where the primary demographics are strikingly different from those of the surrounding neighborhoods. The institutions of higher education are more affluent, of a different religious makeup, and represent a different racial makeup, just to highlight a few key differences. Historically Black Colleges and Universities were excluded from this study,

as their missions are targeted specifically towards the success of the study's participants. This study investigated resilience processes utilized by young African American men attending predominantly White serving institutions, and whether these processes allowed them to persist academically. Moreover, Tinto (1998) states that the type of school a student attends impacts his social and academic integration, with small, residential schools providing more opportunities for students to become engaged in campus life when compared to larger, more commuter-based institutions. For this reason, students attending one large public institution, and three small liberal arts institutions were targeted for this study. Tinto (1998) and Astin (1985) write that experiences such as living on campus, attending school full-time, participating in extracurricular activities, and studying hard, all signifiers of high involvement, also result in increased persistence to degree. Based on this theory, residential students have more opportunities to interact with their peers, and, as a result, their persistence is increased. By interviewing residential students, I hoped to discern whether Tinto and Astin's suppositions are correct: whether students feel as though their residential status is important to their collegiate experiences, and which resources and interventions are important for these students in terms of feeling engaged on their campus.

Six students who fit the description above were followed from August 2016, before the start of the college fall term, but after they have applied to and been accepted to institutions of higher education, through the spring of their first year of college. Interviews were utilized as the primary means of gathering information about how these young men coped with the transition to college, their engagement levels, and their

response to perceived obstacles. The group of students were recruited in partnership with the City Scholars (CS). CS places college advisors in high-need high schools around Philadelphia. Additionally, the organization offers a gap-filling scholarship for students with financial need. The students recruited for this study were all affiliated with CS through one of these post-secondary initiatives.

Data Collection and Processes

Data collection began in the summer of 2016 as the students prepared to enter their first year of college. Four interviews were conducted between August 2016 and April 2017. The following sections describe the techniques that were used to gather the primary data, those from the student participants, as well as secondary data from the program coordinators and college counselors at CS.

Background Interviews

The aim of this interview was to gather demographic information and find out about the students and their history in the education system in Philadelphia, as well as their choice to attend a post-secondary institution in or around their city of origin. The “focused” portion of the interview touched upon the students’ experiences in the School District of Philadelphia high schools, a discussion of mentors in or out of the school setting prior to entering post-secondary education, family and peer group history, and interest in post-secondary education. Open-ended questions were utilized to prompt participants to reconstruct their experiences and contextualize their decision to pursue a college degree. Background interview were face-to-face and were audio-recorded and

transcribed. These interviews occurred early in the fall 2016 semester, as students transitioned to their college campuses.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews described in this section focused on, respectively, the transition from high school to during the fall 2016 semester, a mid-semester check in to investigate the establishment of peer groups and campus relationships, an early spring interview to touch base about academic persistence and goals, and a mid-spring interview to discuss the first-year college experience holistically. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed. All person-to-person interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participants. Open-ended questions were once again utilized to allow participants to reflect on, and make meaning of, their experiences at various points during the first-year experience. Second semester interviews focused on student adjustment, decision of and success in their field of study, utilization of campus resources, feelings of acceptance, involvement in campus activities, and the ability to find mentoring relationships on campus. Tinto's (1987, cited in Indiana Campus Compact, 2002) theory of student engagement argues that the more integrated into campus life a student is the more likely he is to develop a sense of loyalty to that institution. He suggests that students make the decision to stay or leave an institution based on three things: individual characteristics (i.e. parenting, personality, culture), institutional characteristics (i.e. size, location, religious affiliation), and integration. This theory was utilized in examining student adjustment to a post-secondary setting below.

In all interviews, masculinity undergirded questions, as this is likely a key factor in the development of self-efficacy in participants, regardless of trajectory. All interviews also touched upon the key components in Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy, as it is possible that self-efficacy.

Document Analysis

In addition to interview with the students, document analysis was part of the data collection for this project. College application essays and personal statements were collected from each of the study participants. These were analyzed for themes related to self-efficacy and resilience as outlined by Bandura (1982).

Secondary Data Sources

To further supplement the student interviews, the researcher conducted interviews with the program coordinators and college counselors at CS. This provided an interesting framework, as the coordinators possess longitudinal knowledge of the college-access programming and its potential success, as well as pitfalls and recommendations for the students. These narratives will help to frame the discussion of the student data below.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher worked with gatekeepers at CS to gain access to a population of students which fit the study criteria. The role of the researcher in this study was, primarily, to make connections with the group of young men who agreed to participate. All interviews were conducted by the researcher, as well as all necessary document

analysis. Field notes were collected throughout the interview process. These, too, were written up and analyzed as a potential source for data.

Certain ethical concerns arose during the course of the study, not the least of which was the personal investment in the young men in the study, and the desire for them to succeed. This desire, however, was partially mitigated through memoing and bracketing personal thoughts and experiences so that personal opinions and motives had limited influence in the interviews or the feedback that I gave each participant. However, it would be unfair to say that personal desire for these young men to succeed was completely absent from the data collection process. In my experience as a Student Life professional, I often counseled students, and built trusting relationships. In a similar vein, the personal relationships I formed with each young man allowed me to conduct stronger interviews as the process went on, and encouraged the young men to share their experiences with me, as they knew I was rooting for them. I shared with the students that my hope was for our partnership to be mutually beneficial: that I would learn from them, and they could turn to me for counsel, letters of recommendation, or advocacy. Since the conclusion of this study, several of the young men have reached out to ask for letters of recommendation for scholarships, and I hope they will continue to do so, to allow me to give back to them for sharing their experiences with me. One student went so far as to say that being a part of the project was already beneficial for him:

I really enjoyed it, like we just like just talked about everything on my future, it was fun. Like, people don't realize it, but little talks like this, it's like, it's important, honestly- Because sometimes like when you're in school, you really don't have time to sit there and think. (W. Kingett, March 12, 2017)

Additionally, I am a White woman seeking to conduct research on the Black male experience. This was more challenging to navigate than I had initially thought it might be. The initial interview felt awkward. Moreover, in conversations where I asked questions about race, I often felt uncomfortable asking the young men about this portion of their identity. I was very aware of my Whiteness in these moments, and let the young men know, in advance of asking the questions, that if the topic was too sensitive they did not have to answer my question. The opportunity to skip questions that made them uncomfortable was presented to them in each interview. Luckily, all of them were very forthcoming about how their race affected their college experience thus far. For this, I cannot take all of the credit. I believe that the young men were looking for the opportunity to share their story, especially those on small, homogeneous campuses as they had limited opportunities to do so. To mitigate any discomfort felt by the young men prior to the interviews, I explained my interest in the research topic, and allowed the young men to ask questions of me before they agreed to participate in the study, and during each interview. This allowed, at least partially, for a level playing field and open lines of communication throughout the course of the proposed study. Moreover, the young men of this study were able to contact me outside of the interview process with questions and concerns.

My racial identity and its associated privilege were my primary reasons for wanting to investigate the Black male experience. During my master's program at The University of Pennsylvania I wrote a thesis on White racial identity, with a focus on how civic engagement and interaction with diverse others could help break down stereotypes

the dominant group has about people of color, and allow them to begin using their privilege to support those who are subjugated. For me, this dissertation project feels like a continuation of that work, as I hope to give young men of color a space within academia to have their narratives shared. It is my hope that this work, along with much work on race and education, will help to create a narrative counter to the deficit models of thinking about urban students of color that many individuals still hold.

Throughout the data analysis process, described below, I memoed not only about the content of the interviews, but also how the interviews made me feel. I had many conversations with people in my life, specifically my colleague who serves as the Director of the Student Center for Inclusion in Culture, about how to best proceed through the interview and data analysis process, the sorts of language to use, and whether I was staying true to my theoretical frame. As the primary research instrument, after each interview, I would reflect on the life experiences that were shared with me, and attempt to think through how my etic role was affecting the research. Through the process, I formed relationships with my participants, and through the course of the study, conversations around race and gender were easier to have. One participant, in our first interview, postured and talked about all of the fights he got into in high school when people disrespected him. I took this as a warning (as a White woman, asking him personal questions) that I was to walk the line with him. By the end of the study, however, we talked casually about his romantic relationships, family drama, and experiences as a Black man at school. Through constant interrogation of my work and my style, and

through their own generosity, I believe I was able to successfully navigate the disparate identities of my participants and myself.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data was an ongoing process and began with the transcription of interviews and the digitalization of observation field notes. The constant comparative model was used when coding and analyzing interview transcriptions. The constant comparative model required examining the data in three stages. The first stage consisted of open coding, or the process of breaking down and examining or comparing the data. The second stage was axial coding, or grouping the data together to identify new relationships and subcategories. The final stage was selective coding, or linking codes and categories to the research question (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Throughout the research process, I wrote memos. These analytical memos provided a space for continuous reflection on the data and the research process, and allowed me to develop possible themes, and develop future interview questions in order to further probe themes and fully develop a picture of resilience in this context. These memos also informed the final write up of the data. After analysis, the data were re-examined to confirm or disconfirm the existing thematic analysis.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the sample size of student-participants interviewed. Due to the exploratory nature of interviews, a sample much larger than the

group selected would have made for a much longer research project. However, one benefit of this project over other similar projects that have been conducted before is the reduced risk of melt as the limited number participants allowed for personal connections to be formed between the researcher and each student.

The study was also limited because it focused on individual interviews rather than focus group. This limited the participants' ability to hear another's story and relate directly to it. The purpose of using only interviews was to allow students to discuss their experience without the influence of another, but this also did not allow them to make direct connections with others who may be experiencing a similar phenomenon.

Delimitations

The current study had much delimitation. For instance, this study was bounded its geographical location, both in general and specifically. In general, this study was bounded by its urban focus. Specifically, this study was bounded by its investigation of Philadelphia. The study was further bounded by the criteria that participants not only grow up in Philadelphia, but also attended an institution of post-secondary education in or around the city. Participants for this study were also all of one gender and of one race: African American males. Furthermore, all of the participants were college-bound students at the outset of the study.

Validity and Reliability

While the indicators of resilience are defined above, how participants obtained these indicators varied. Moreover, how the students embody these traits also varied. If another cohort of students fitting the same criteria as those in this study were collected,

their personal narratives of resilience would not be identical; that is what makes this research rich and interesting. Reliability and validity were improved, however, through the utilization of multiple data sources.

Despite the small sample of participants, however, validity is paramount. Participants had the opportunity to review the interviews to ensure that they have represented themselves accurately. The same opportunity was presented as the data was coded. As trends and themes emerged from the diverse narratives of the participants, implications for policy were formed and are discussed in Chapter 5 below. These serve not only to lace together the disparate experiences of the individuals, but also to demonstrate that, despite having different experiences, overarching policy implications can be developed to benefit many urban students of color.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The image of Black men in America has been linked with violence, crime, and academic disinvestment (Harper & Davis, 2013). This representation has been reified through dominant discourse, in which men of color are seen as dangerous evil-doers. These socially imagined traits are especially present when envisioning young, urban men. The stereotypes contained by this image can be damaging to young students, as they try to navigate their way through an education system that is neither value-neutral, nor was created with them in mind. Trying to negotiate teacher, community, and societal expectations may leave a student with bifurcated views on academic achievement and his ability to reach educational goals. Risk and resilience scholars state that this tension may increase a student's exposure to risk, which in turn will decrease his self-efficacy (Evans, Banerjee, Meyer, Aldana, Foust, & Rowley, 2012; Ford & Moore, 2013; Harper & Davis, 2013).

After analyzing the data from the six young men who participated in this study, four themes emerged. They are: (1) the influence of family in the college process, (2) the implications of identity on the college campus, (3) the obstacles to and motivations for academic persistence, and (4) the importance of connecting to campus life. In this chapter risk and resilience, obstacles and motivation, will all be discussed in detail. The young men who participated in this study may have struggled with aspects of their college experience, yet they have all persisted through their first year, with plans to continue forward towards their educational goals.

The influence of family on the college process appears to be particularly complex for the participants of this study. Familial relationships range from a source of pride and motivation, to a persistent roadblock on the student's academic journey. Indeed, families are often viewed as both simultaneously. The family unit has great impact on how the young men think about themselves as scholars, as men, and as community members, as well as how they plan for their futures, and this theme emerged as one of the most salient during the course of participant interviews. Additionally, the various identities that the participants hold significantly impacted not only their familial relationships, but their relationships on campus as well. The young men described feeling ostracized due to their race, gender, or socioeconomic background, all of which were vastly different from the student majority on their campuses. Yet, these young men also highlighted the myriad ways in which they are using their identities, and their unique voices, to impact change on their campuses.

This dissertation set out to explore the resources that students use to achieve entry to, and persist within institutions of higher education. During the course of participant interviews, however, much time was devoted to a discussion of the myriad obstacles faced by the young men as well. The challenges include feeling academically underprepared, the financial burden of higher education, and feeling othered on college campuses. However, the young men also spoke at length about how they were overcoming the challenges in front of them and where they found the motivation to do so. From the future-oriented desire of finding a high paying job, to the simple love of learning, the young men found ways to engage in their academic and social experiences.

All but one of the young men was actively engaged in campus life, and described the importance of their various communities and the more engaged the student was, the higher levels of self-efficacy he displayed. Each of these themes will be explored at length below.

Profiles of the Participants

The young men who participated in this study each shared their most personal experiences from childhood and through their experiences on the college campus. The narrative of each young man is explored at length in this chapter. Table 4.1 displays some general characteristics of the young men, which may assist the reader throughout the remainder of this paper.

Manny grew up in the Huntington Park region of Philadelphia, where he attended his neighborhood public school. When describing his life before college, he spoke often of the fights he used to get in to, as well as the drugs that were prevalent in his neighborhood. Manny is small in stature, something that he reflects on as a main reason why he would often get into fights in high school. He felt the need to stand up for himself, and to show others that he would not be bullied just because of his size. When not in school, Manny lives with his mother and his two younger siblings. He is walking distance from extended family as well.

Zayion grew up in West Philadelphia, but attended high school in North Philadelphia. The neighborhood around Zayion's school was often plagued with violence and crime, and Zayion shared that the worst parts of his days were the travel to and from his high school. Zayion played football during his high school tenure, which he highlights

as one of the key reasons why he stayed away from street life and was able to gain entry to college.

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Participants

Name	Age	Major	Family Structure	Type of Institution
Manny	19	Criminal Justice	Single-Parent, Two Younger Siblings (brother and sister)	Large, Public, Comprehensive
Zayion	20	Software Engineering	Two Parent, Three Younger Siblings (all brothers), and One Older Sibling (sister)	Large, Public, Comprehensive
Will	18	Biology	Single-Parent, One Older Sibling (brother)	Small, Liberal Art, Religiously Affiliated
Frank	19	Marketing	Single-Parent, One Younger Sibling (brother)	Small, Liberal Art, Religiously Affiliated
Jethro	19	Marketing	Two-Parent	Small, Liberal Art, Religiously Affiliated
Schoolboy Q	19	Statistics and Economics	Single-Parent, One Younger Sibling (brother)	Small, Liberal Art, Religiously Affiliated

See Appendix A for a full description of each institution

Will grew up in the Strawberry Mansion area of Philadelphia, a region well known for its violence and lack of resources. Throughout his interviews, Will described how his parents kept him in the house whenever he was not at school to insulate him from the negative aspects of the neighborhood. Will also shared that, because of this parenting tactic, he and his brother were known as the good kids on the block, and many of the community members continue to inquire about college when Will is home on weekends and holidays.

Jethro grew up in South Philadelphia in public housing. During his childhood, he would often start trouble in school, and has a self-described problem with authority. Jethro would often sleep through class when he was young, until teachers decided that his main issue was that he was not being challenged enough. From there, Jethro was put into more challenging classes, and began to enjoy going to school. At the time of the interview, Jethro and his mother owned their own home in the Olney area of the city.

Schoolboy Q moved around frequently as a child, but spent the largest chunk of time in Northeast Philadelphia. The majority of his family lives out of state, so he spends much of his time with his mother and brother when he is not at school. Schoolboy Q attended his local public school until 10th grade, at which time he petitioned to transfer to a local magnet school. Schoolboy Q received his name from his peers in high school because he is a voracious reader and loves school. While the name may have originally been intended to mock him, Schoolboy Q now uses the title with pride.

Uneasy Resilience: The Case of Frank

I would like to take a moment to address a specific story of one of the young men who participated in this study, Frank. Above the rest, Frank's story captivated me during the interviews. His journey to college, as well as his first year experience, were tumultuous at best. Throughout the duration of this project, Frank has seemed on the precipice of leaving school. It appears, to me, that a large reason for this desire to depart is the perception that he lacks agency in his college process. For instance, he is not at the school he truly wants to be attending; he does not like his program but was convinced to stay in it by faculty members who have not invested in him since; his younger brother is

going to the school he most wants to attend but little effort was taken by Frank's mother to ensure Frank went to his dream school; he has not made many friends due to living in a single room within his residence hall and lack of diversity of clubs; and he worries he will lose his support system if he leaves. Prior to college, Frank was not able to attend the high school he most wanted to attend, a performing arts school in Philadelphia, because of poor Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores, so he felt stuck with his neighborhood school. It appears that, although many of the young men's families assumed they would go to school, the agency of deciding where to go, and what to study once they were there, could make a large difference in overall satisfaction. Frank said many times that the reason he was still in school is that he thought that if he left he would lose his systems of support. He stated that his mentor and support systems from high school were very focused on college, and he worried that by leaving, they would dismiss him. He repeated over and over that he felt like he does not have a choice.

Frank has decided to try to transfer to a large, public institution to study art. This decision is interesting, as it walks the line of tension between smaller schools, where students receive individualized attention (when he wanted to switch majors, Frank's advisor and a faculty member talked him into staying with Marketing) and the desire for a booming social life (Frank has stated repeatedly that he is shy and is having trouble making friends). Moreover, many of the young men at smaller institutions feel as though they are the targets of micro-aggressions and assumptions about their abilities based on their identities. It would be interesting to follow up to see which type of institution he prefers, but is likely outside of the scope of this project. Additionally, he has discussed

attending a community college next year to boost his GPA enough to attend his institution of choice. While leaving his small, liberal arts institution may be the best thing for Frank, this decision is somewhat alarming, as the literature states that community colleges can be a place that is hard to escape for students; they put off transferring, change majors, do not achieve the academic success they had hoped for, and then do not move on to a four year institution (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Engle and Tinto (2008) find that while community colleges offer a point of access to many low-income and first-generation students, the odds that students successfully earn a bachelor's degree after enrolling in such institutions is low. They found that 63% of low-income first-generation students entering community colleges planned to earn at least a bachelor's degree, yet only 5% had achieved this goal six years later (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Another interesting follow up would be to see if Frank moves past his community college experience into a 4-year program, but is also outside of the scope of this project.

When asked if he thought his race affected his college experience at all, Frank answered that it did. He described how his small, liberal arts institution advertised itself as a very diverse campus, but he felt that they lowered admissions standards in order to recruit a diverse freshman class. Moreover, diversifying the student population appears to be a fiscally motivated one, as a larger class means more revenue for the institution, and in the current educational climate, increased revenue is paramount. Yet, this sort of diversifying does not serve the student well. Frank lamented that when one or two Black students on campus acted out, how the entire group was perceived was impacted, as the

community is so small. We discussed how this was unfair to the student population, and he replied by stating he wanted to attend a more diverse (and truly diverse) institution.

Something else Frank talked about was the connection to his family. For instance, his brother is planning to study at a prestigious (and expensive) art school. Frank wanted to attend an HBCU in the South, but was \$6,000 short of being able to afford it per year. Now, he has decided to stick around Philly, for better or worse. His mother is having health problems, and he does not want her to be alone, with his brother going away for school. He has also discussed that he anticipates he will need to help finance his brother's education, so he had better start looking for a part-time job. These are enormous stresses for a young man, especially one who is working hard to find what will make him happy. When asked about it, his only response was "Yeah, it sucks" (F. Baylor, March 6, 2017). In Frank's case, it seems clear that his strong connection to his family is causing him undo stress during a transitory time that is already inherently stressful.

When thinking about whether Frank possesses the self-efficacy necessary to be successful in school, the answer is "I don't know." He is navigating a stressful time at a school he does not want to attend, with only limited (and, in his opinion, contingent) support from mentors and family members. He is managing to continue going to class, do his work, and consider transferring. He states that his motivation is low, that he does not want to be at his small, liberal arts institution, and that he is not sure that college is for him, yet he remains enrolled. Literature states that students who do not have social or academic outlets have markedly low levels of persistence (Tinto, 1998). Yet, despite the theory, Frank is continuing to pursue his goal of obtaining a degree so that he can then

focus on his passions. He does not outwardly doubt his ability to do well, but he does struggle when challenges arise. However, at least so far, he is managing to struggle through the issues that pop up. Does he possess self-efficacy? Is he resilient? At least to the latter, my answer is yes.

So, what is resilience exactly? The ability of students to come out on the other side of struggles. In Frank's case, the struggles are both macro-level and micro-level. On the macro-scale—his family could not afford to send him the school he most wanted to attend, he attended a neighborhood high school that does not have a great reputation among colleges, and he comes from an abusive home, which has recently transitioned to a single parent home. This transition is likely for the best, as the abuser is now out of the home, but a challenge nonetheless. Much of this is likely related to the systematic divestment in Black neighborhoods and families. On the micro-level, Frank is struggling to find what he wants to study, to find people he connects with or whom are like him, even to connect with resources away from the mentors he met in high school. Frank is navigating all of these pieces, but he is certainly feeling the effects of these challenges as he does so. Frank is not Teflon; these issues do not slide off him. They leave him tired, unmotivated, and frustrated. Yet, despite the variety of challenges, he is battling through. He aims to find opportunities for himself through the college process, and is willing to change directions (in this case both major and school) to try to find a better fit. Moreover, Frank's masculinity may be limiting his ability to fully feel his feelings. He wants to provide for his family, despite his depression and lack of motivation. Literature suggests that overprotective parents are linked to extreme psychological stress and depression in

Black college students (Love, 2008). Frank appears to be experiencing extreme psychological stress, but it is largely due to the lack of support he receives from his family. As such, more research on the impact of family dynamics on college students of color may be warranted. While it would be impossible for him to answer, I also wonder if some of these pressure might be removed if he were female. Would he still be expected to provide financially in the absence of a father? Would he feel the need to bottle up his feelings, and not discuss them unless directly prompted? I do not know, and I assume he does not know either, but I will assume that his masculinity, at the very least, complicates issues.

Perhaps resilience, then, does not always take on the Superman (or, perhaps more aptly, the Luke Cage) model, where problems bounce off the students as bullets would. For some, resilience may look like teetering on the edge of quitting but deciding to stay and fight. The young men of this study have faced myriad challenges in the journey towards a college degree. From complex family relationships, to navigating stigma surrounding their identities, the obstacles facing these men are great. However, through forming a network of campus connections and using their past challenges to inform future decisions, the young men of this study are resisting stereotypes and pursuing their goals. Developing resilience and self-efficacy through self-reflection, vicarious experiences of trusted mentors and family members and supportive peer networks has and will continue to allow the young men of this study to achieve their goals.

Background, Risk Factors, and “Evidence” of Resilience

The young men selected for this study were first-generation college-going African American males from public urban high schools who have gained access to institutions of higher education in their metropolitan area of origin. The intersectionality of their identities, according to the literature, gives them a disadvantage in many arenas, but particularly higher education. These students were the targets of microaggressions, lowered expectations, and societal vitriol resulting in a lack of resources, as well as a variety of other challenges (Sue, Capodilup, Toino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). This disadvantage stems from the systematic divestment in communities of color across America. The young men of this study perceive our current social system as broken, and are invested in creating change through their future plans. In itself, future planning is a sign of resilience and self-efficacy in a student; and the students’ desire to change their life course and the course of others demonstrates a sense of agency over their current situations. Moreover, believing in one’s ability to overcome obstacles also illustrates the resilience within the students who participated in this study.

Education

Many of the young men shared similar narratives about their upbringing. They described coming from economically depressed regions of Philadelphia, often from single parent households. Many of the participants criticized their experience in Philadelphia schools, and felt, generally, that the education system is broken. As described in the literature review, public education has long since been able to uphold its goal of educating good citizens. The confluence of systematic divestment in

neighborhoods of color and the school choice movement have stunted the ability of public educational institutions to fulfill their egalitarian goals. Students described how under-resourced their schools were, and how this negatively influenced the college application processes for them as well as students like them. Jethro commented, “My cousin, he went to Martin Luther King High School and they didn't even have a college advisor. He didn't even know there's fees to pay for college. SAT's? They didn't schedule that for them” (J. Lester, October 15, 2016). Schoolboy Q echoed this observation, stating,

I know how troublesome the district has been in the past few years recently. My school now, we don't even have a functional library. Most of our classes have over 30 students, probably 40. My economics class had about 50. It's tough on the teachers. I know that. The teachers are now the focal point of the school now. They have to be perfect in order for the school to function. (Q. Wright, October 14, 2016)

The focus of public education has moved from the student to the teacher. With such a shift, it is not surprising that the young men felt academically underprepared for their transition to college. Schoolboy Q went on to describe how the current system of funding schools leads to further inequality, as the wealthy neighborhoods continue to have well-resourced schools, whereas neighborhoods like the one he came from do not have the tax base to make the sweeping improvements that would be needed to reinvigorate the neighborhood public schools. Critical Race Theory informs us that racism is tied to the material deficits experienced by minoritized groups, and as such, that structures have been designed to impede the material and thereby psychological success of students of color (Freeman, 2012). Indeed, Schoolboy Q, who is attending an elite private institution,

stated that he believes that his socioeconomic status, and as a result, the schools from which he came, put him at a significant disadvantage now that he is in college.

Being from a poor socioeconomic neighborhood... I feel like I'm behind a lot, and in order to catch up I have to put in extra work. Just like what I did over winter break, was what I felt was necessary for me to be at the same level as everyone else. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Schoolboy Q described spending much of his winter break doing work to prepare himself for his spring math course. He ordered the math textbook, and worked through problem sets during his month away from campus. Unfortunately, the feeling of being “behind” was not uncommon among the young men. Several of them described a similar feeling, and attributed this sensation to their academic background and the under-resourced schools that they attended. These students, each of whom successfully transitioned into a post-secondary institution, are now expected to perform at a level similar to their collegiate peers, many of whom came from a well-resourced educational background. This expectation is problematic, as it anticipates that low-income students will be able to effectively overcome their historical lack of resources and socially under-valued cultural capital upon entering institutions of higher education. However, feeling underprepared for higher education was not the only challenge that students brought with them to campus. Many of them spoke at length about the influence their neighborhoods and families had on their sense of self, which the literature describes as important for developing protective factors, and therefore resilience (Bandura, 1982).

Families and Neighborhoods

Throughout the interviews, the young men spoke cavalierly about challenging life events and circumstances they experienced while growing up in Philadelphia. Several shared on how growing up in a single-parent household affected their experience in schools:

I had a problem with authority. I didn't like teachers telling me what to do and I kind of had a chip on my shoulder. I don't know if it's because my dad wasn't present, you know that would be the generic answer. (J. Lester, October 15, 2016)

Out of the six young men interviewed, four came from a single parent home. Of the students who came from a two-parent household, one noted that his father was constantly working rotating shift work, so he rarely saw him. "He's home, but he's always on-call...he's working, working, working, working. 'Where's dad at?' 'Oh, he's at work; he just got called in.'" (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016). Will shared in many of his interviews how close he feels to his family, despite his father rarely being home. He stated that his mother is on Social Security disability benefits, so his father works as often as possible in order to help support the family. He also shared how tight money is, and how his mother is often distraught over their financial situation. Will is inspired by his father, and hopes he has his father's work ethic, but also hopes that he does not fall into the same set of circumstances as his parents when he is older.

Conversely, Frank spoke candidly about his abusive father, and how their relationship has significantly affected his mental well-being and his academic achievement. He shared this not only in his initial interview, but also in his college personal statements.

My dad was an alcoholic, and he was very verbally abusive. We went through a situation where he would argue with my mom and he said I wasn't his son and he wanted a DNA test and all of that stuff. I had to call the police on my dad and we had to get a restraining order and stuff like that. Just harassing us... Throughout my middle school years, a situation happened. It was a lot of domestic violence. I started going through stuff. Depression and stuff like that. I wasn't doing good in school. I just really had a hard time all the way up, for most of middle school and into high school. (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016)

The events Frank describes here had an impact on his academics as well as his social life. Frank struggled to make friends and come out of his shell, which he attributed to the domestic violence he experienced while growing up. Yet, the implications of the abuse were not all negative. Although Frank continues to suffer with depression and grapple with family relationships, he was able to use these events as inspiration for a short film, which he entered in a film contest while he was in high school. He described the process of turning the domestic abuse he and his mother suffered at the hands of his father into art as therapeutic. The short film was nominated for various awards, and Frank found that he was able to express himself through his art.

Many of the young men who participated in this study described feeling responsible for their siblings, largely because of the absence of a father figure. Frank, despite speaking candidly about the abuse he faced from his father while growing up never spoke about the abuse his brother faced at the hands of their father. This omission, when compared to Frank's story, speaks volumes. Frank is now working to ensure his brother has a meaningful college experience, even if it comes at the expense of his own. Frank's desire to protect and serve his family undergirds much of his decision making process.

I know my mom and the bills and stuff like that, having to send money out [to school] for [my brother] and make sure he's okay. If I were to go away or something like that, it would just be stressful on her money-wise. I would probably be working and sending him money too. It would probably help if I was closer that way, so that way I'm not stretching myself too much. (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016)

Frank has spoken, at length, about how dissatisfied he is with his college experience at his small, liberal arts institution. From his difficulty connecting to other students, to disliking his major, he struggled to find motivation to continue through his college journey. However, he feels as though he needs to help support his brother through his college journey, which, by proxy, also assists his mother. To do this he is willing to sacrifice the college experience he had hoped to have. There is likely less disposable income in a home with only one salary, and urban families are often tasked with working several jobs in order to make ends meet. This is particularly true for single-parent homes where the breadwinner does not possess a college degree. Many of the men expressed feeling financially obligated to their family, as demonstrated above by Frank, and all of them were looking for employment while they were in school. This theme will be explored further in the Family as a Burden section of this paper below.

Violence

In addition to family-based concerns, the men described challenges that they faced in their neighborhoods and around their schools. The creation of impoverished, isolated communities by unjust social structures has led to scarce resources and a lack of social capital to escape such situations. This is often how low-income urban neighborhoods are viewed and this description of urban life, for many urban youth of color, speaks to familiar challenges. Literature indicates that a scarcity of resources and

opportunities leads to higher psychological and social stress, which in turn leads to lower self-efficacy, and that violence can be an outgrowth of these factors, as well as a response to prior life experiences (Fleisher, 2009; Wilkinson, McBryde, Williams, Bloom, & Bell, 2009). For urban youth, violence can manifest in many forms throughout their formative years, through domestic violence, community violence, gang presence or affiliation, or proximity to weapons. As a result, urban youth are more likely to also enact violence as a response to stressors. While violence is a normative experience, when accompanied with other risk factors it can impede the development of resilience in vulnerable populations. The young men in this study were exposed to various types of violence while growing up. Frank, for instance, experienced domestic violence, while other young men were exposed to community violence in the form of gang activity, drug use, and fighting.

A lot of violence occurs around that area, the Huntington Parking area. A lot of people were always fighting and [selling] drugs a lot around the school. Kids, they see that and they do that. Their brothers and sisters are out there selling drugs and fighting and everything. That's the neighborhood they grew up in. (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016)

Zayion describes here the primary challenge to his academic success in the Philadelphia School District. During his time in high school, he worried about his physical safety, which significantly impacted his education experience. While some of the young men were witness to neighborhood violence, others described their role in it. In one interview, Manny described, at length, his propensity for fighting. Manny is small in stature, around 5'4, and light-skinned. He would often get into fights to prove that, despite his appearance, he was the man his father taught him to be.

My friends, they cool, it's just that some of them are bad. Some smoke weed, whatever. They also in a gang...I got into fights because I got disrespected a lot. I

think, mostly because, how I look and how small I am. Some fights was people trying to bully me. I stood up before. Other times, people threaten or actually hit my family. Yeah, when it come to family, I go crazy. I black out. Not black out, but I see red... My mom was scared. My dad was mad, because he the one who made me grow up to who I am now. He taught me to be tough. He always say, "Somebody hit you, hit them back." (M. Frost, October 14, 2016)

In other interviews, Manny stated that he is not close with his father: that his father is not around much, and that his father “disrespects” his mother as well. Manny, therefore, took lessons how to treat others from a man he does not necessarily respect. This decision was compounded by his traditional masculine identity, which drives him to see other men as competition and act upon this assumption (Harper, 2004). Another reason Manny took up fighting was to combat assumptions about his status based on his skin tone. “Colorism” or the creation of a hierarchy within the Black community based on skin tone, often assumes that lighter-skinned individuals have an elevated social standing. Moreover, men of lighter skin tone are considered less authentic within the Black community (Hunter, 2007). Manny, who is quite grounded in his community, did not care for the assumption that he was privileged over his peers in some way, and took action against it. This could be why Manny faced bullying while he was in high school, and took to fighting to prove his “realness.” Moreover, Manny also referenced that he had friends who were involved in gangs during his younger years. This affiliation may also have led Manny to be more violent than some of the other study participants.

Violence and resilience scholars argue amongst themselves about the root causes of violence. Psychologists argue that violence is inherent within individuals, while sociologists argue that violence occurs because of and within unjust social structures. In the case of urban youth utilizing violent acts, critical theorists would argue that they are

reacting to structural violence, a macro-level social structure (Aisenberg & Herrenkohl, 2013; Creswell, 2009; Mack, 2010). Structural violence takes form in the seclusion of groups from resources and opportunities. Resilience scholars would argue that existing in an area where there are a lack of resources keeps traditionally oppressed groups subjugated. As such, individuals experiencing structural violence are isolated both physically, and from opportunities. This isolation is borne out when individuals or groups decided to engage in violent acts in response to stressors, such as fear, experienced within their community. Based on the descriptions that these young men shared during their interviews, this could be why violence broke out in their neighborhoods. Literature indicates that attending college is, in itself, a way to insulate oneself from negative stimuli, such as the violence just described (Oketch, Howard, Mauldin, Mimura, & Kim, 2012). As such, transitioning into a post-secondary setting is particularly beneficial for the men on this study.

Community Resources and the Transition to College

Literature indicates that students who lack the resources necessary to gain entry into post-secondary institutions will often rely on community resources to achieve entry, as well as begin developing their resilient identities (Yosso, 2005). The students selected for this study were all recipients of services from the City Scholars (CS), a non-profit that places college advisors in low-performing Philadelphia high schools with the goal of increasing the number of college-bound students. This non-profit also offers students a gap-filling scholarship, which serves to cover any outstanding bills once all other financial aid has been applied. As shown in Table 4.2 below, the professional counselors

at CS, a staff comprised entirely of women, who work to increase college access for several hundred students a year. The counselors meet with students one on one, and in small groups, to help prepare them for the college application process. Counselors work with students to explore majors and institutions, as well as discuss financial aid options. Moreover, these counselors occasionally work with parents and families of the students to help explicate the college experience.

Table 4.2: Demographic Information of CS Counselors

Name	Gender	Years with CS
Missy Hernandez	Female	14
Maria Franklin	Female	7
Melissa Marciano	Female	5
Kai Peoples	Female	2

As Jethro shared above, he grew up opposed to authority figures, and believed that this opposition stemmed from the absence of his father. For the young men growing up without male role models, it seems like the college application process is a time of transition, rich with opportunity if the men could have connected to male mentors to help steer them through their process. It is interesting, then, that all of the college advisors placed in schools around Philadelphia by CS were women. The literature describes how important it is for young men of color to find role models during their transition (Reid, 2013). Bandura describes how vicarious experiences through role models are key in enhancing a student’s personal trajectory (1982). In other words, working with men of

color who have successfully navigated the post-secondary setting may have increased the students' perceptions about their ability to succeed academically. Yet, working with the all-female staff of college advisors did not inhibit the young men from obtaining entry to post-secondary institutions. We can therefore assume that the college advisors were able to provide vicarious experiences and guidance to their audience, despite being differently gendered.

In interviews with the college advisors, many of them discussed how they often discourage students from attending institutions of higher education within and around Philadelphia. One stated,

I probably will usually steer kids away from Philadelphia... You [the student] need to be on campus and be away from them [their parents] where they can't really touch that much, except for maybe the weekends, or on your breaks. That's really hard, I think, when they're here in Philadelphia because their parents or family's or neighborhood friends, they can pull them at any time and it's so easy. (M. Hernandez, July 29, 2016)

The primary concerns of the advisors are that the students will not spread their wings if they remain so close to home, and that their home community will continue to distract them from their primary goal: academics. The college advisors believed that parents often have little understanding of the new demands placed upon their students once they enter college, and often viewed families as a hurdle to collegiate success. These concerns are echoed in much of the literature, as well. Specifically, strong community and familial ties have the potential to pull students away from campus life, and back into the neighborhood, which may disrupt their academic achievement and social integration (Harper & Davis, 2013). Without firm roots in the campus community, a student is less likely to persist (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). The advisor went on to say that, should

a student decide to stay close to home, he would need to be particularly motivated, “I think that that transition sometimes is really hard unless you have a student who's really dedicated and can time manage well” (M. Hernandez, July 29, 2016). Further, the parents echoed the desire for their students to leave the area, as well. In an interview, Will shared, “My mom didn't really want me to stay because she wanted me to leave Philly... I just wanted to stay close” (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016). Despite the beliefs of the counselors, many of the young men made the conscious decision to stay close to home for myriad reasons. Top among these were the desire to save money, and the desire to be close to home in case their families needed them. These themes will be explored in greater detail below.

Interestingly, while the students shared at length about the challenging life experiences they faced prior to entering college, they spoke minimally about the challenges facing them in the transition from high school to college. Zayion described his mindset on transitioning to a college near home:

I think it's all about you. I feel like if you're going to college then you have to have that mindset of you leave everything else in Philly and you start over, like a fresh start in college. You don't bring any nonsense to college, which I feel like this is a personal ... You have to be mentally ready ... Basically, mentally ready to move on and just basically move on. (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016)

This sense of agency and ownership over their outcomes permeated many of the discussions around transition. Overall, the young men struggled most with time management, with all of them describing themselves as procrastinators. In terms of finding social groups, connecting to faculty, or otherwise rooting themselves to campus, however, most of the young men experienced little turbulence in doing so. This could be,

in part, because the young men were involved in many activities outside of the home during their youth. Indeed, they tapped into many community resources, which likely helped them successfully make the transition from high school to college. These extracurricular activities, beyond their association with the City Scholars, included various sports teams, chess club, film club, and working with other nonprofits aimed at increasing college access such as Talent Search and Philadelphia Futures. Schoolboy Q reflected on his experience with one of these nonprofits in his college personal statement: “As I entered high school, I was mentored and nurtured by the Sponsor A Scholar program at Philadelphia Futures, a non-profit organization that provides low-income, first-generation-to-college students with the tools, resources and opportunities necessary for college success” (Q. Wright, 2016). Schoolboy Q attributed his ability to gain entry to an elite, private institution to his association with non-profits that afforded him additional opportunities for growth and development. Additionally, many of the young men highlighted staff or faculty from their high schools that inspired them to keep pushing toward their educational goals. Frank, who feels consistently unsupported in his collegiate academic journey, spoke about the value of his high school mentor.

Tenth grade, I had one friend and I was still pretty quiet. I didn't know anybody still. I just wasn't willing to talk to people. I was just so cut off. I think I was still going through something at the time. I would just close myself off from everybody. I wouldn't let anybody be my friend or anything like that. That's the year that I started the film program. My film teacher, he's more like a mentor now. I could call him up right now and he'll do whatever. He's almost like an uncle to me at this point. (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016)

Support from high school faculty helped lure Frank out of his shell, and help him to use his art to express himself. Manny, another young man who struggled through his high

school experience, spoke about the importance of one faculty member who helped him move forward into postsecondary education.

There was one teacher that I love so much. Her name is Ms. Woods. She was my IEP [Individualized Education Program] teacher...She used to always be there, when I told you I had issues at school with my teachers or whatever, I usually go to her, and she used to help me out. She said I could stay in her room. She helped me with my work. She helped me try to be better. I think she was one of the most best IEP teachers I ever had. She actually was trying to make me improve, whereas the other IEP teachers, they don't really try. I just felt like they just gave me a lot of tests to see if I was getting better. I don't see it as actually improving me at all. I think she was actually doing great. I actually liked her a lot. (M. Frost, October 14, 2016)

Academic and social connections are paramount in preparing these young men for life after high school. The literature states that low-income and urban students often struggle to transition from secondary education to post-secondary education because of the lack of resources, or knowledge of resources, that were available to them in their secondary setting, which may have made the transition easier (Laureau, 2002; Lipman, 2010; Winfield, 1994). Luckily, for the young men who participated in this study, each seemed highly involved in their schools and communities prior to entering college. This likely had a positive impact on their ability to transition to college with little challenge.

The Influence of Family: A Blessing and a Curse

As with much of the collegiate experience, the men of this study experienced tension with regard to the roles their families assumed when they left for college. For some, families were triggers for anxiety, or a distraction from their work. For others, families were a source of motivation and security. Moreover, family plays an integral role in selecting an institution of higher education for many of today's college-going

population, and the men of this study were no different. Jethro described his college selection experience as “micromanaged,” while another described how his mother encouraged him to think about “plan B,” rather than encourage him to travel far away to attend the HBCU he most wanted to attend. The continued proximity to their families further complicates the influence that these individuals have over the students. However, despite the tension there was only one man who did not feel well supported by his family. Additionally, he appeared to be the student who struggled most with the greater college experience.

Counter to assumptions in the literature that parents who have not attended college will put less pressure on their sons to participate in post-secondary education, each of the young men expressed that their parents had always assumed that their child would continue his education after high school. As one young man put it, “it wasn’t a conversation” (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016). Literature indicates that the more emphasis parents put on education and its importance, especially early in their son’s lives, the better their students perform in both reading and math (Joe & Davis, 2009). The parents of the young men in this study imparted focus on education as a priority to their sons, which may have contributed to their successful transition to college.

In researching first-generation college students, the assumption is that families have little understanding of the higher education experience and its importance in the lives of their sons. For instance, Joe and Davis (2009) write that while parental involvement can have beneficial effects on a student’s academic career, parents of color are often less able to engage in their student’s academic pursuits throughout elementary

and high school due to their socioeconomic status, and the requirement to work odd hours or several jobs to support their families. The challenges herein are exacerbated by the limited education possessed by parents of first-generation students. Yet, in my conversations with the young men who participated in this study, all of them conveyed that their families, particularly their mothers, let them know from an early age that attending college was the expectation. This level of expectation and support helped the young men set their expectations for themselves, as well.

For the young men who participated in this study, family interactions fell into four categories: (1) Family as a burden, (2) family as a distraction, (3) family as a safety net, and (4) family as motivation. Often, the young men described their families as falling into several of these categories over the course of a single interview. The complexity and significance of these familial relationships emerged as a key facet in both the young men's desire to attend and motivation to persist through postsecondary education.

Family as a Burden

When discussing the role of family in the lives of first-generation college students, one perennial concern is that, due to their own educational limitations, parents are not able to understand what their sons are experiencing. This has implications in how parents share in their son's experiences, as well as assist their sons in navigating the systems within their institutions. As one of the City Scholars (CS) staff stated, "It's not that their parents don't want them to do anything further after high school, they just don't know" (M. Hernandez, July 29, 2016). As such, parents may not be sensitive to the new expectations placed upon their children once they enter college, which, in turn, leads

family members to continue treating the student as they always have. If a child has previously helped with finances in the home, this expectation remains. If the child has previously helped with chores or childcare in the home, these expectations remain the same as well. The combination of familial expectations and the new demands of college life often overwhelm students. This places first-generation students at risk during their transition time, as they have limited access to role models who can assist them in navigating competing priorities. The young men of this study worked hard to balance their obligations to their families with their academic and social pursuits on campus. Some of the young men frame these obligations as a choice: they are dedicated to their families, and therefore will continue to perform their duties as a son. Manny illustrated this scenario through his narrative on how he spends his time when he goes home over the weekend.

The difference is that when I do go back home, I have an option. I don't have to work. I just choose to because I don't like asking my mom for money. My dad, he don't work because his injury. I choose to work. (M. Frost, December 9, 2016)

Here, Manny is describing the difference he perceives between school and home. He started his statement by saying that he has a lot of free and social time at school, but he will usually decide to work when he is home. When pressed a bit more, he shared that the reason he works is to help support himself and his mother, as his father does not work. While Manny framed his off-campus employment as a choice, he returns to his neighborhood so that he can partially support his family financially. This calls into question whether Manny's "choice" to work is a true choice, or the fulfillment of an

obligation. Contributing financially was the norm for Manny before he left for college, and remains the expectation even now that he has left the home.

Frank shared a similar sense of being obligated to his family, although his obligations are not strictly financial. Frank feels as though he needs to support his mother and brother emotionally, especially after the family experienced domestic abuse perpetrated by Frank's father. Frank shared, "Even though I kind of needed the comforting, I figured why not just comfort my mom? She's probably the one that really needs it right now" (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016). Frank feels responsible for the well-being of his mother and brother, and his perceived obligations to them inhibit him from achieving his own goals.

[My mother has] been having some health issues, having a rough time. She's doing fine right now, but I would feel more comfortable if I was close to her. Because we don't have too much family in Philadelphia, so it's just pretty much us. If I leave and then my brother leaves, and then she's basically here by herself. If she needs anything or needs help or you know what I mean?... It makes me feel like I don't really have a choice. I can't really do what I want to do. They tell you that this [attending college] is your first big decision. This is going to set off your life. You know what I mean? You have to make the decision wisely, and this is supposed to be what you want, but I got to make the decisions based off of how everybody else feels and what everybody else wants. (F. Baylor, March 6, 2017)

Throughout the study, Frank shared how unsupported he has felt by his mother through the college process. From their first visit to his institution of choice, Frank's top choice of institution, through our final interview where he shared the quote above, he feels like he has made his decisions for other people, and been left disappointed at each turn. For Frank, his family has become a roadblock on his journey through his education.

Students who perceived their relationships with their families to be negative struggled more with the college experience than those who felt well supported. Frank is

the clearest example of this feeling, but other young men expressed similar concerns as well. For instance, while Manny has a strong relationship with his mother, he also feels the need to provide for his family or others in his life. Guiffrida (2005) writes that, for some students, the emotional and financial support that they are expected to provide for their families even after transitioning to college leaves students with feelings of guilt, which often causes these students to leave school. While the young men in this study have persisted thus far, this finding highlights the negative repercussions of an onerous family relationship. Manny's desire to care for those around him was a stressor for him during his first term, in which he felt the need to both support his mother and a girl that he was seeing. Jethro also reported feeling burdened by family obligations during his first term. In November of his first year, he had a grandparent pass away. While he was saddened by the loss, he felt that the expectations his family put on him to come home during a busy time of year were burdensome, and this was frustrating to him. He said,

There was a lot of bouncing back and forth from home, classes, and things. That's been an obstacle in and of itself. I just quit my job, I guess you could say, today because I realized that a lot of things are hitting me at once and I need to focus and finish this semester. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Family expectations have the potential to cause turbulence in the lives of their students. To ensure the success of these young men and students like them, it is imperative that students and parents have similar expectations for how involved the student will be in family matters while away at school. The challenge of navigating relationships with family is compounded for commuter students, who do not have the freedom to escape to campus as the men in this study do. For commuter students, establishing boundaries may be paramount in their ability to balance school and home life (Astin, 1984/1999).

Family may be one of the greatest obstacles to success for first-generation college students, as parents lack the experience to fully understand their child's academic endeavors. Additionally, many of the young men in this study were second or third generation Philadelphians. Unfortunately, this makes it fair to assume that the quality of education received by their parents and grandparents was little better, and perhaps worse, than the education the men received within the district. As Philadelphia-area schools desegregated and then quickly reseggregated the quality of and opportunities provided by education disappeared. The generations-long lack of resources within the public education system impacts students' ability to turn to their family for assistance or advocacy in school. The inability to seek help is exacerbated when the students attend college, as all experiential advice a parent could give is bounded by their lack of a post-secondary degree.

Family as a Distraction

A subset of the students who experienced a lesser tension between their home life and school life are being described here as men who viewed their family as a distraction. This group did not express feeling the same strain as the men whom I have classified in the family as a burden portion of this paper. Rather, these students maintain relatively positive relationships with their parents, but still experience drawbacks from the closeness of their relationship, and proximity.

As described above, the young men involved in this study frequently cited the desire to stay close to home in case their family needed them as one of the key reasons for choosing a Philadelphia-area school. While many of them were not called upon

during the course of this study, the fact that their connection to family served as a primary motivator in their college decision process deserves note. Family members functioning as a distraction from a student's primary focus, in this case their education, is a lesser version of the burden just described. Families may not be blatantly unsupportive of their students, or anticipate that their son will continue to play a primary role in home life, but there is still a disconnect between parental expectations and what the student can reasonably contribute to the family while away at school. Moreover, literature suggests that a son's masculine identity intensifies his perception of pressure from the family. Young men feel as though they have become the torchbearer for their family unit, and internalize anxiety around this new role in such a way that they feel further distracted by their familial connections (Dancy II, 2011).

While the family connection was not always burdensome, some of the young men spoke about how their parents continue to pull them into home life by updating them on family drama, rather than letting their students focus on their studies and life away from home. While strong family and community bonds have been described as an important mechanism in moving low-income and urban students from secondary to post-secondary education, these same connections can serve as a distraction to students once they are on the college campus (Harper & Davis, 2013). For instance, when asked if he perceived any negative aspects to his strong family connection, Will replied,

Has there been any downsides? Yeah like sometimes the drama at home, that's really... Sometimes I appreciate like, being by myself ... And then like coming home, it's like it's back to chaos....It's some petty things, like it's arguing over the dumbest things in the world. (W. Kingett, March 11, 2017)

Despite going home to see his family every weekend, Will wishes that his mother would leave him out of the drama at home. During the week, Will is very invested in his studies, with aspirations of attending medical school. When he is on campus, he strives to maintain focus on his academics, despite being pulled back into his family life. When the family unit serves as a distraction, students' energies are divided between their academic pursuits and their responsibilities at home. This tension can quickly devolve into the family serving as a burden in the life of a student.

The literature suggests that feeling a pull from one's home community can prevent students from achieving to their potential. While maintaining a connection to one's home is important for these young men, and thus why they decided to attend college so close to home, the familial relationships they cling to may ultimately be a disservice to them. Students, therefore, must walk the line between being involved in their home community and being invested in their college community. This is not an easy undertaking, as disconnecting from one's home community may cause the student to feel as though they do not have a place to call their own (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Moreover, researchers have stated that familial relationships are not consistently found to help mitigate the negative effects of discrimination by peers on college campuses (Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016). If parental and familial relationships do not assist students in developing protective factors against bias on campus, it would appear that they function, instead, only to distract the student. While this is clearly not always the case, it remains important for students to reflect on their home and community relationships, and whether these connections are beneficial to them during the academic

year. If upon reflection the student finds that their relationships serve primarily as a distraction, it may be wise for them to limit their time spent in their home community during the academic term. Moreover, it is critical that parents work to understand their student's new role and to allow their sons the independence they need to participate fully in college life.

Family as a Safety Net

The connection to home and family was not always fraught with tension. Many of the young men of the study referred to the support their families provide them while they are away at school, and how they look to their families in times of need. Families serving as a safety net for the young men in this study started long before the men started their postsecondary education. For many of these men, their parents have long worked hard to shelter them from the negative aspects of growing up in Philadelphia.

Pretty much I was in the house sheltered by my parents. I lived with my mama, brother, and my dad. Other than that, always home. Go to family events sometimes, but the majority of my life was in the house, never really outside, because it's not really a good neighborhood. I was always in school, never had problems in school. Other than that, that's it. (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016)

As outlined in the literature above, there are times when developing protective factors, a key ingredient in cultivating resilience, looks similar to isolation. In these instances, a young person may be protecting himself from negative stimuli in their surrounding environment. Indeed, Will stated many times over the course of the project that his mother would not let him outside when he was growing up because of the violence in the neighborhood, thus shielding him from his environment's negative stimuli. While his is the most extreme example, all of the young men described how their parents tried to

shelter them while they were growing up. This is echoed in research on Black families, where students of color report feeling more secure and well-supervised by their parents than do their White peers (Love, 2008). For some families, this took the form of sending their student outside of the neighborhood for school, or enrolling them in extracurricular activities to occupy their time. For others, it meant literally sheltering them from domestic violence in the home. Regardless of what the stimuli was, each young man revealed how their parents worked to protect them from negative influences and experiences throughout their childhood and adolescence. These actions, in turn, taught the young men to protect themselves from the negative aspects of urban life.

Now that the young men are in college, many of them have maintained a similar relationship with their families: their parents continue to want to protect them and assist them wherever possible. Generally, the young men appreciate this sort of relationship with their families. However, some of the young men worry that continuing to enjoy the security of their family will leave them less prepared for adulthood and life after college.

I guess maybe I'm not as much on my own. Other students, they don't really have support from their family, just because their folks aren't able to see them. I don't know. I feel like I'm not as prepared as others for when I actually leave off without my family. I don't know. That's probably one thing. It's like, as soon as I can move off to another state or something, I'm not going to be able to receive that support from my family as much as I receive now. Maybe I'm not really prepared for that. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Jethro echoed this sentiment, saying,

The family that I come from is very tight knit and very sheltered. I have cousins that are at least well off into their 20s, their mother still treats them like a kid. When I'm at home, I definitely feel more like a kid. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Jethro and Schoolboy Q's stories are not unique. Many of the young men described how connected they are to their families, and how this tight connection can sometimes leave the young men unconvinced about their ability to succeed academically without their safety net. However, for these same men, the close family relationship has served to persuade them to focus on their schoolwork, as they know their parents will see to their other needs.

There appear to be two potential outcomes to this form of parenting. The first is prolonged adolescence, where the young men continue to cling to the security of their familial relationships. The literature indicates that students who visit home frequently are often less socially integrated into campus (Guiffrida, 2005). However, the inability to form social ties on campus does not seem to be a concern for many of the men in this study. Will, for instance, is both well involved on campus and active in his family life. He returns home every weekend to keep his mother happy, and enjoys spending time in the house with her when he is home. His parents' house serves as a sanctuary, as it did for much of his adolescence as well. Yet, while Will indulges in his prolonged adolescence, he has been able to form friendships at school and succeed academically.

The other potential result of the safety net form of parenting is that, as the men get older, they feel more and more ready to move on from their ancestral nest. For instance, right after the Thanksgiving break, Jethro shared, "I was just talking to my aunt, I'm like, 'I think living at home is done for me.' Thanksgiving is nice, I saw my family. After that, I was ready to come back to school. I need my own space" (J. Lester, November 28, 2016). Manny also described multiple times how important his mother is to him. She

helped to proofread his papers during the fall semester, if he is in need of money she will find a way to send him some, and she is encouraging him to join the Army Reserves. In the spring semester, however, he has moved away from relying on his mother for everything, and has instead started connecting with experts on campus to support his academic needs. Additionally, he is looking for an on-campus job so that he does not have to burden her financially. The literature states that family relationships often improve when a student goes to college, due to the distance and new independence of the college students (Brooks, 2015). However, these findings appear to contradict this statement, as many of the young men have expressed their preference to stay away from home when possible. After years of mothering, the young men are beginning to express a desire to be independent and seeking out ways to accomplish this on their respective campuses.

Family as Motivation

The way the young men most often described their families, however, was as a motivator for their academic success. While their parents were not able to offer vicarious experiences in the arena of education, the life experiences that parents passed to their children served to persuade the students that *their* path had not been the *best* path. Many of the young men spoke at length about the sacrifices that their families had made for them over the years, and about the hardships their families faced during their childhoods. For this, many of the young men hope to support their families when they have completed their education. Jethro described this desire, stating:

I was raised by a single mother. I knew I needed a plan, not to steer away from my plan. I've been working on this since I was younger. Seeing my mom struggle,

working multiple jobs, crying, being exhausted, not knowing where our next meal was going to come from it really motivated us. I'm a Christian and I'm strong in my faith. My mom, she instilled God in us and have faith. I really started to see the blessings because, like I said I was in public housing. Now we're in our own house, we own our house...I've seen the blessings God has done and I know if I just stay focused on that and on track I can achieve my goals. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Jethro remembers the challenges and sacrifices his mother made so that he could have a better life. These sacrifices encourage him to stay on track with his academics, so that he can repay his mother for her efforts. Schoolboy Q echoed this sentiment, stating:

I just always wanted to make my family proud in a sense. I always wanted to succeed for them and provide for them. I feel like I'm not doing that now and I have to do whatever it takes to make that happen. (Q. Wright, October 14, 2016)

Different from seeing families as a financial burden, as described above, these young men hope to provide a comfortable life for their families. There is not an expectation that these men will support their families, but rather a desire to do so, in an effort to thank their relatives for their years of support.

The young men also see their parents as a source of inspiration and motivation for their future successes. Zayion, for instance, hopes to have a job like his father's when he leaves school.

Well, one role model that I always looked up to is my father because he comes from where I come from, a tough place. He'd still go to work every day and not let what's around him affect him physically or mentally. That's special in my book. He's able to block everything out and just focus on what's important, take care of me and my four other siblings. My dad would be one of my biggest role models I think I look up to the most. I even took up ... My dad's an engineer. I took up civil engineering because I always wanted to be like my dad. (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016)

Zayion is so encouraged by his father's career, as well as his ability to provide for his family, that he is pursuing a similar career. While Zayion has since traded civil

engineering for software engineering, his long-term goals are informed by the work of his father. Viewing families as a source of inspiration does not cease once the students enter college. Schoolboy Q shared on how his family continues to push him towards his goals. “I feel like their words of encouragement and just the fact that they decide to take the trip to my school every two weeks is heartwarming for me. It just makes me want to work harder for them” (Q. Sim, December 9, 2016). Schoolboy Q’s family continues to visit and support him, which motivates Schoolboy Q to continue to work to make them proud.

The men in this study also viewed their position as a role model as a source for motivation. For instance, Will has an older brother who, upon watching Will successfully transition to college, is considering returning to post-secondary education as well. “My brother is 23...He's like, ‘You keep beating me, man. You're beating me.’ I'm like, ‘Yeah, I know.’ Setting the bar. He's got to catch up” (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016). The young men take pride in their position as college students, and use their newfound status to positively impact those around them. The literature states that students feel as though they are enhancing the family name by attending college, and are spurred on towards their goal by the pride of their families (Brooks, 2015). The motivation to continue serving as a role model for others encourages the young men to continue working toward their goals.

The consistent support and watchfulness of their families also prevented the young men from engaging in illicit behavior, which may have ended their journey to post-secondary education. Will, the young man who was kept indoors for most of his childhood, described how his mother’s parenting style influenced his outcomes:

We were just in the house chilling, playing a game, or I was doing homework...The normal for those around there was to be out, start trouble, basically like bad things. Me and my brother were known as the good ones that were going to make it. (W. Kingett, October 14 2016)

Zayion echoed this theme, stating that his involvement in extracurricular activities growing up steered him away from “selling drugs and fighting and everything” (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016). The involved parenting that these men have described may have prevented them from a life path that did not include higher education. While we should celebrate the success of these men, it is also important to note that not all families have the resources or the time to provide such vigilant parenting, or to finance extracurricular activities. Just as schools are left wanting for resources to better educate this population, parents are left fighting to compensate for these lacking resources. Unequal levels of unemployment, single-parent households, and poverty are present in urban neighborhoods. As shown in the data, this often means that parents work multiple jobs to provide for their families, as is the case for Will, Jethro, and Manny, which in turn means that they are less able to be in the home with their children. This is not the fault of the parents, but rather the fault of a system that continues to oppress people of color and urban communities (Bandura, 1982; Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013; Yosso, 2005).

While there is no prescription for how parents should support their children, it is clear that each of these young men has been touched by the level of encouragement and assistance provided to them by their families. Much of the literature on first-generation college students points to families as a potential barrier to success, and the men did express feeling burdened by obligations to family during the course of the study; however, the primary way these men view their families is as a source of motivation. The

literature indicates that family background (feeling supported by one's family during childhood and adolescence) and feelings of kinship will affect a student and their relationship with family during the transition to college. How a student perceives their relationship with the family may also be tied to whether the family unit can continue to function once the student has gone away to school. Indeed, the men who felt that they needed to continue functioning in the same role within their family even after leaving for college are the ones who most perceived their family to be a burden. Yet, the students in this study primarily viewed their familial relationships as a positive factor during their college experiences thus far. This finding counters much of the extant literature, which claims that students who are closely tied to their home communities are less likely to be academically successful (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991; van Wormer, Sudduth, & Jackson, 2011). However, this finding confirms the limited research that has been conducted on the importance of family in academic success for African American college students, which states that, for Black students, family support is not only influential, but instrumental as they pursue higher education (Brooks, 2015; Guiffrida, 2005; Love, 2008). This theme of family support, while not an expected outcome of this study, reinforces the need for students to have strong community bonds and vicarious experience to inform their decision making and persistence to degree (Bandura, 1982).

Moreover, the masculine identities of the study participants adds further nuance to the desire to provide for their families. Harper (2004) highlights one of the key components of masculinity for high-achieving Black college men as the desire to provide for one's family. Providing for one's family shows that a man is useful and respectable,

willing to give back to the community that they came from. Additionally, the frequency with which supporting one's family was shared as a desire suggests that the young men are aware of the financial struggles their family has faced and place priority on their ability to provide (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Scholarship refers to this as "benevolent patriarchy" (Dancy II, 2011, p. 487). Hammond & Mattis (2005) found that many Black men view manhood as a redemptive process, where men work to better the place of Black people and communities in society. This, too, echoes the theme of providing for one's family. It is clear, then, that beyond the desire to thank their families for their sacrifices, the young men are asserting their masculinity through their desire to give back to their families by providing for them.

The Implications of Identity

The young men who participated in this study were each first-generation college students who identified as Black men. Additionally, each came from Philadelphia, and attended Philadelphia-area colleges. The intersection of their identities is complex and fraught with stigma. Each young man shared how his identities affected his college experience, both negatively and positively. The men described how their experiences were impacted in one of five primary ways: (1) race as stigma, (2) masculinity as stigma, (3) socioeconomic status as stigma, (4) race as a connector, and (5) identity as a catalyst for change. Their feelings of being stigmatized crossed their various identities. For instance, none of the young men pointed to a single identity when discussing the challenges they faced on campus, but rather indicated that the confluence of their identities was the cause of their target status. Critical Race Theory reminds us that all

identities are composed of intersecting factors (Freeman, 2012). As such, the narratives shared by the young men span multiple sections below.

Race as Stigma

It should come as no surprise that higher levels of racial bias on campus are accompanied by lower academic performance and social adjustment from students of color (Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016). While the men of this study were generally optimistic about their ability to succeed at the collegiate level, they still faced bias as a result of their racial identity. Four of the young men applied to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) before enrolling in their institutions. The reasons they did not attend an HBCU range from the expense associated with the school to simply not being accepted. When asked why the young men were drawn to HBCUs, they replied that there was something about the environment that felt different to them. For instance, Frank most wanted to attend an HBCU in the South. When asked why this was the school he most wanted to attend, he stated that it felt like home. When asked if the institution's identity as an HBCU had any impact on his desire to attend, he stated that it did not, but reiterated that the environment felt welcoming to him. "The students, for one, they made you feel more welcome. They were excited. They were excited; they wanted to talk to you. They were just very excited to show you what was going on" (F. Baylor, March 6, 2017). Manny echoed this sentiment in his discussion of another HBCU, stating:

I thought I got along there when I went on campus, it was a good vibe, and then outside of campus it got, like, everything there, not everything was far away, everything is right there, which is good. So I thought that was going to be a good place. (M. Frost, March 7, 2017)

While the young men did not specifically express what they mean by “environment,” it does not seem outside of the realm of possibility that they were speaking about the race-based identity of the institution, and the resources that accompany this identity. Indeed, the founding mission of HBCUs was to provide quality education and support to Black students in a time when higher education was highly segregated. With this in mind, it makes sense that the students might feel more at home at these institutions than the ones in which they ultimately enrolled.

Campus climate at predominantly White institutions was not engineered to offer the same level of support as the men may have found at HBCUs. Rather, these institutions were built without a diverse population in mind, and have struggled to retrofit themselves to the needs of a diverse cohort (Hartley, 2010). This may be, in part, the reason so many of the young men felt like an outcast in their institutions. For students of color at predominantly White institutions, encountering racial stereotypes and microaggressions is commonplace. Schoolboy Q described his experience with microaggressions on campus, stating that sometimes White students on campus will approach him using “street talk” and assuming that because he is Black he will talk and act a certain way. This is an example of stigmatization perpetuated by the perceptions of the privileged (White) majority. When asked how he responds to this, he stated that sometimes he ignores it, but sometimes he will take the time to ask the White student why they have approached him in such a manner. He is hopeful that these conversations are meaningful, but they have not stopped the microaggressions from occurring altogether. The fact that Schoolboy Q needs to have these conversations with his peers at

all is troublesome. The time and energy that Schoolboy Q spends educating his White peers about why their approach is inappropriate is now time and energy that has been diverted from academics or other endeavors (Harper, 2013). While Schoolboy Q does not shy away from sharing his unique perspective on the White students' actions in the instances he described, he feels the burden of correcting behavior for the sake of all of the students of color on campus. This feeling is akin to Black students being asked to be representatives of "the Black perspective" during classroom conversation.

In addition to facing microaggression while at school, students may also encounter more blatant forms of racism, such as racial profiling, or a questioning of student's academic ability. This was particularly evident at the smaller institutions, where there was little diversity among the faculty and student populations. Will described a recent conversation he had with classmates who accused the faculty of the biology department of being racist, because they often counsel students of color to seek other majors.

The bio department, they discourage a lot of African Americans, and a lot of African American women away from the bio department. Like, if you get a C on a test, they'll tell you like, this is not for you, and I've heard them say that... Like, one of my professors, like it was kind of heartbreaking, because it's just like, nobody's perfect, so it's like you failed a test and oh, I'm gonna drop out of school. So like, that's kind of the feeling that I got from it. It did make me uncomfortable, because like, that was crazy. (W. Kingett, March 11, 2017)

Here, Will is describing how he witnessed a faculty member from the biology department tell a Black student that she should leave the major because she had performed poorly on her midterm exam. The faculty member did not allow the student to complete her semester in the program, or offer resources to support the student academically.

Providing the student with academic interventions may have increased her self-efficacy and, therefore, her academic performance (Davis, 1994). Whether this act was racist, sexist, or some other form of bias, it impacted the students of color in the class. Indeed, Will is now concerned about his own standing in the course and is thinking about transferring away from his small, liberal arts institution all together. The perception among Black students at the small, liberal arts institution is that the biology department is not friendly towards students of color is extremely problematic. While there is no concrete way to measure the effect, the perception that the department is racist is likely resulting in a significant loss of potential talent from students of color.

Zayion was the first student to concretely describe how being Black has affected his college experience. He acknowledged that people looked at him as a “thug” because of where he came from, which motivated him to work harder to undo this perception. The literature indicates that many urban students of color give up on education long before post-secondary education (Baber, 2012), and Zayion confirms this assumption, stating, “not a lot of people where I come from go to school. So when people find out where I’m from, they look at me like a thug” (Z. Joseph, March 9, 2017). When I asked how he responded to these assumptions, he said, “It motivates me to do better, to prove them wrong” (Z. Joseph, March 9, 2017). He also described how he, and his three closest friends on campus, all of whom are Black, are regularly stopped by the police when they are all driving together. He went on to say that the police search their car around once every two weeks. The assumption here, of course, is that a group of Black men must have drugs or other illegal substances in their vehicle, and therefore they pose a threat to the

community. When I asked how he handled this, he replied that it motivated him. He was not looking to give anyone a reason to make trouble for him, so he always drives buckled in, and does not use his cell phone while driving. I told him that I found this situation outrageous, to which he replied, “If I get angry it’ll only get worse” (Z. Joseph, March 9, 2017). In recent years there have been many instances of police officers killing a young black man because he was perceived as a threat. Zayion, aware of this trend, knows that he cannot react to the injustice of his situation in the moment. Rather, he needs to remain friendly, if not docile, so as to protect himself from the possibility of a negative outcome. Critical Race Theory reminds us that, although race is a social construct, racism is supported by the law (Freeman, 2012). On an individual level, this is manifest through suspicion of young Black men and frequent interactions with the police.

Masculinity as Stigma

Zayion’s issues with the police on and around campus is not an issue solely about race. Rather, it is about the intersection of identities. He is both Black and male. Moreover, he is dark in complexion, a feature that many Americans associate with danger and criminality (Hunter, 2007). The police in and around his large, comprehensive institution perceive Zayion’s masculinity as a threat to campus or community safety. This perception is largely grounded in the traditional conceptualization of Black manhood as described by Harper (2004), and, as such, there is little that Zayion can do to address the perceptions about who he is.

As described above, Manny shared that he has a history of getting into fights. He did so, largely, to prove himself to his classmates and siblings. In one interview, he said,

“I got into fights because I got disrespected a lot. I think, mostly because, how I look and how small I am. Some fights was people trying to bully me...Especially in Philly. You got to gain respect” (M. Frost, October 14, 2016). When peers called Manny’s masculinity into question, his response was one of anger and violence. This, as he stated above, is how you gain respect. Manny has since moved away from violence as a means to assert his masculinity, and is now more focused on proving himself through his academic accomplishments and long-term goal of becoming a civil lawyer. Despite this change, however, due to his proclivity for fighting, Manny is still seen as a threat by some of his peers.

To be clear, the masculinity described in this section is traditional masculinity, within which men are seen as competitive, apathetic, and even violent (Dancy II, 2011). While this form of masculinity is not representative of how the men in this study behave in their college communities, the dominant discourse around their identities as Black men leads outsiders to perceive them as traditionally masculine. Moreover, the men themselves often ascribed to this form of masculinity before entering post-secondary institutions. Casting young Black men in traditional masculinity is problematic, as this form of masculinity in itself is the product of generations of stereotypes. Traditional masculinity has its roots in slavery, where Black men were seen as hypersexualized and brutally strong (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Painting slaves in this way served two purposes: to dehumanize the slaves themselves, and to frighten away young White women who may have been interested in pursuing romantic relationships with people of color. Given the sociohistorical narrative that Black men are violent and should be feared, it is not

surprising that law enforcement would be suspicious of them, as this is how the officers have been trained and socialized. However, this does not make it fair for young Black men to be targeted by authority figures. Nor is it fair that young Black men who do not have access to higher education are limited to the socially constructed definitions and tropes through which they can fashion their masculinity.

Socioeconomic Status as Stigma

Poverty is a complex issue, especially when paired with student academic performance. The ways in which poverty influences the life of a student are myriad: it impacts their access to resources, can leave them without their basic needs met before a long school day, and may also have long-term psychological impacts (Bottrell, 2009). When students and families live in an area of concentrated poverty, their resources are further diminished (Small & Newman, 2011). Moreover, because poverty is often an inter-generational phenomenon the likelihood of encountering sufficient resources to move out of poverty is low. Lack of resources is often tied to low academic performance (Ford & Moore, 2013), but this relationship is not as clear as it may first appear. Issues surrounding race and gender often confound the discussion of poverty in relation to academic performance, as many of the men in this study have revealed.

As of yet, there is little research surrounding how a student's socioeconomic status will impact their ability to engage with campus life above and beyond their ability to finance their participation. However, the men in this study spoke about how their socioeconomic backgrounds served to alienate them from their collegiate peers. Schoolboy Q, who is the most outspoken of the young men with regard to systematic

disadvantages, believes that his socioeconomic background puts him at a disadvantage on his college campus. While he continues to struggle against microaggressions, he also is working to combat the feeling that he is too underprepared to succeed in the elite private institution in which he is enrolled.

I just know that all schools have their problems, that [my institution] definitely has its own. Definitely about like class and stuff like that... I feel like not necessarily being a black man [has negatively impacted my experience], just being from a poor socio-economic neighborhood, mostly. I feel like I'm behind a lot, and in order to catch up I have to put in extra work. Just like what I did over winter break, was what I felt was necessary for me to be at the same level as everyone else. Yeah, that's the biggest piece. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Schoolboy Q perceives the college campus as classist, with many of the students who attend coming from affluent, well-resourced suburbs. Key to this understanding is the intersection between Schoolboy Q's socioeconomic status and his racial identity. White low-income students likely feel less under-prepared, or at the very least there are fewer assumptions about their socioeconomic status, due to their relative racial privilege. Schoolboy Q's socioeconomic status leaves him feeling not only outcast among the student majority, but feeling inadequate in the classroom despite his stellar academic record. Schoolboy Q's identity as a low-income, urban student serves to affect his psychological well-being (Freeman, 2012). Questioning his ability to succeed has roots in the history of educational exclusion experienced by African Americans, in which the perceptions of others impacts how a student thinks about his own academic abilities. Schoolboy Q's questioning of his ability also has the potential to negatively impact his self-efficacy (Baber, 2012). However, Schoolboy Q has made many connections with

faculty and racial peers, which serve to insulate him from greater anxiety and negative self-concept.

Race as a Connector

As described in the literature, having a positive racial identity and therefore racial pride serves a protective factor among youth of color (Joe & Davis, 2009; Rutter, 1985). Finding a supportive community of peers who share in this racial pride further insulates students from every day risk factors and allows them to begin building a new narrative, a counter-narrative, about Black male achievement (Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016). Moreover, having pride in oneself promotes self-definition and efficacy (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Identity-based groups serve to create solidarity and partnership among students of color, and provide them with a safe space to share their unique perspectives. These groups also foster the sense that the institutions value students of color and their unique perspectives, which promotes a sense of oneness with the institution. As Harper (2013) writes, this connection to campus is rare for students of color, and thus identity-based organizations are of great importance in connecting students to each other and to their institutions.

Two of the young men who participated in this study were very involved with identity-based organizations on their campuses. Both students participated in more than one organization, and assumed leadership roles within the groups as well.

I'm a part of two clubs. One is called Black Men United and the other is Black Students United. Basically, all we do is have meetings about what's going on as far as police brutality and just current events, like what's going on with Black people nowadays. (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016)

Identity-based clubs and organizations give students of color a platform from which to share their opinions about how their community is represented and treated in society, as well as interact with a supportive group of peers. Zayion's participation in his identity-based groups provides him with time to reflect on current events and structural oppression; his place within oppressive systems; and how his work can help in dismantling these systems and structures. Additionally, leadership within and service to one's racial or ethnic community is another indicator of alternative Black masculinity (Hammond & Mattis, 2005). Becoming involved with identity-based clubs and organizations, as well as assuming leadership positions within these groups, demonstrates Schoolboy Q and Zayion's revised framework of masculinity.

Currently I'm co-head of the Black Student League. I meet a lot of the students. I actually live right across from here. That little green and white house right there...The Sons of Africa. It's another affinity group. It's just basically those who identify as a man of color. (Q. Wright, December 9, 2016).

Schoolboy Q uses his leadership role within his identity-based groups to connect with other students of color and usher them into campus life. Schoolboy Q also resides in the Black Cultural Center, a learning community specifically for Black male students at his small, liberal arts institution. He went on to describe how the majority of his friend group are fellow Black students as well. He has situated himself intentionally within a group of racial peers at a predominantly White and wealthy institution. This serves, in part, to insulate himself from the pressures of being a student of color at a predominantly White institution. While assuming leadership roles are important in developing an alternative masculinity, leadership roles have the potential to increase the pressure put on students of color. Students of color are often left without relatable mentors, and fear that anything

short of perfection will preclude other students of color from one day assuming additional leadership roles (Harper, 2013). Schoolboy Q and Zayion, both of whom hold leadership positions on campus, and whom associate with a majority Black social group, are combating the tension between their masculinity and their racialized identity.

Identity as a Catalyst for Change

Critical Race Theory reminds us that people of color have unique voices and unique world perspectives, which are critical in understanding the world that communities and individuals of color must traverse (Freeman, 2012). The young men of this study work to share their unique voices on their college campuses, and to make their institutions a better place for other people of color through their involvement in identity-based student groups and beyond. Sharing of stories and opinions creates brave spaces on campus, and allows students to feel as though their whole identity is included and respected (Daniels-Iannucci, 2017). Zayion shares the importance of his work with these groups:

[We] talk about current events, going on in the world stuff, how people are affected by it. Basically with the new election how it would affect other races. Basically just current events, what's going on in our world today that we as a student may see but we don't get to express ourselves and say what we want to say. By going to these organizations it gives us a chance to say something and basically get it off our chests. (Z. Joseph, November 28, 2017).

Zayion's group is mindful of how the political climate in America has changed, and they seek to examine how this affects not only Black Americans, but Americans of other races as well. This group, through their discussions and idea sharing, is working to create a more inclusive campus environment where students of color can begin sharing their unique perspective on how macro-level structures impact their experiences.

In continuation of the work against macro-level structures, Schoolboy Q is widening the radius of his work with identity-based groups, by hosting programs that are open to identity-based groups from other institutions around the Philadelphia area.

So the 24th of February, at BSL [Black Student League] we threw our Black Love event. It's a trico [tri-college] held event, which alternates between campuses every year. This year it was our turn...We invited Nahla Ward, the student who got a lot of attention for one of her videos she posted online. She's just a singer. We invited another singer. We had an open mic poet. Spoken word, I meant to say...Black Love is designed to encourage people of color throughout all the campuses in the Philadelphia area to meet each other, talk with each other, network with each other. We got a lot of people to come from [a local elite university, a local public university, and several local private universities], other Philly colleges. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Cross-campus programs such as the one above serve to unite many identity-based groups for the betterment of all of them. Additionally, this sort of programming speaks to the strength of the Black Student League at Schoolboy Q's small, liberal arts institution. Scholars on marginality discuss the importance of developing strength within a single community in order to affect change in external communities (Daniels-Iannucci, 2017). By opening up their campus and themselves to visitors from across Philadelphia, Schoolboy Q and the Black Student League are beginning to affect change on more than just their own campus.

Obstacles and Motivations

All of the young men who participated in this study were optimistic about their ability to succeed in college. They viewed the academic challenge as similar to high school, and many already successfully navigated the transition to post-secondary education. Moreover, many of them discussed how college was better than being at

home, because they were less involved with home tensions and drama. For instance, Zayion shared,

It's like when I'm home, my home, I don't feel as ... I feel comfortable being home but I feel like when I'm at school, I'm able to do more and I don't have much of a worry when I'm at school... It's just different. I like the campus life way better than being home. The only time I go home is to get a haircut and to see my mom for holidays. I don't really enjoy being there ever since I've been at school. (Z. Joseph, November 28, 2016)

The students feel more able to concentrate on their goals when they are at school. Many of them also described valuing their independence and autonomy when they are away from home, and most of the men viewed college as a ticket to a life different from the one they experienced as children. As previously shown, each young man faced challenges while growing up in Philadelphia. For many, overcoming these obstacles early allows them to navigate new challenges with relative ease. This does not mean, however, that these young men are not facing obstacles within the postsecondary landscape. The young men described having concerns about academics, financing their education, feeling isolated, and experiencing racial otherness. These obstacles, described at length in the extant literature, have the ability to derail a student's academic pursuits and negatively impact their self-efficacy (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008; Wise, 2010). Finding ways to overcome the myriad challenges they face is critical for the collegiate persistence of this group.

Obstacles

As we have seen throughout the young men's journeys towards their degrees, their aspirations are complicated by the tensions between their motivations and their obstacles. Some of these themes, such as family influence, have already been explored at

length. Many of the yet undiscussed obstacles the young men of this study faced are also faced by most college students as well: their concerns ranged from being underprepared academically, to worries about how they would pay for college, both in the present and when it came time to repay their loans. Students also struggled with finding their place on campus and navigating the politics of campus life.

Academic Concerns

Educational researchers have spent decades investigating the education gap between students of color and their White counterparts (Ogbu, 1987; Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster, 1991). The scholarly discussion focuses on the poor academic performance of students of color, with a history of race based deficit theories undergirding much of the conversation. Hearing only negative statistics about their racial peers, and being constantly reminded of their subordinate place in American history creates a negative psychological effect, implying the stereotypes are correct, and that Black, low-income, first-generation, and urban men are not be able to succeed at the collegiate level (Harper, 2013; Steele, 1997). With this context, it is not surprising that several of the young men expressed concerns over their ability to be successful at the post-secondary level. Schoolboy Q, as shown previously, experienced much doubt in his ability to keep up with his peers at his elite institution. In addition, Zayion experienced academic setbacks during his first term, which he is now working hard to correct. In describing his academic challenges, he highlighted the difference in expectations between high school and college.

Like, in high school you can get more chances to make up work, but in college if you miss something, you missed it. You'll be behind everybody else. I feel like it's

more serious than high school. Because, like I said, if you miss something, you're behind. But in high school you may be able to talk to your teacher, "Oh, can I just make this up?" The professors in college are not trying to hear, "Oh, I missed this," if it's not a valid reason. It's more serious as far as the work and getting the assignments done. (Z. Joseph, January 17, 2017).

The transition from high school to college, and the level of expectation from the faculty members, caused Zayion some academic distress in his first semester. Now in his second semester, he is working hard to bring up his GPA and meet his academic goals.

Manny shared about the struggles he faced in his transition to college as they related to organization and time management. Although he believed that the work was no more challenging than the work he had in high school, the volume of the work would lead him to miss an assignment, or need to work through the night to complete an assignment.

I always have trouble writing papers. Another big problem that I always have trouble with is being organized, like organized with my time, time management. Let me see. See, I always get piled up with a lot of work. Then I forget about some work, so when I find out at the last minute that I had to do this, I gotta set down, and I just have to just do it. I've recently had to do a paper that I totally forgot about. I started it doing it around 11:00 at night. (M. Frost, December 9, 2017)

Manny, while performing well academically, is experiencing challenges staying on top of his work and staying organized. The anxiety over academic achievement may be compounded by his poor sleep schedule and neglect of self-care. Manny has taken to napping during the day, but is unable to sleep at night as a result. Other young men described the struggle to balance competing priorities.

I had to drop my History class because the work was piling up on me. I had got a job to make a little bit of extra money and balancing it all out. I felt like, I could have ended with a C, if I tried really hard, but I didn't think it was worth the stress. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Jethro decided to drop a course rather than receive a C. While he may have ensured a better GPA by doing this, his decision cost him financial resources, which are likely in short supply as indicated by his desire to have a job during the academic year. By dropping a course, Jethro will need to take an additional course later in his college career. Summer courses and course overloads are not covered by financial aid packages, which will leave Jethro to pay for this course out of pocket. The tension between maintaining a high GPA but sacrificing financial resources, and staying on track financially but sacrificing a high GPA is of no small consequence. Both decisions have repercussions that could affect the future paths of the young men: a lower GPA could lead to limited employment and further educational opportunities, while additional loans could result in greater financial hardship after the student has graduated. Institutions of post-secondary education need a system to work with students in this situation, to ensure that the student is making the best long-term decision for himself.

Financial Obstacles

As stated above, the financial cost of higher education is something the men take seriously. One of the primary motivators for staying close to home was to help eliminate the financial strain that college may cause for the young men and their families. This played out in one of two ways during the interview process. Students either wanted to stay close to home so that their family could help support them until they found an on-campus job, as in the case of Manny, or students wanted to stay close to home because they perceived they would receive more scholarships and aid, and would not have to worry about financing travel to and from school. Much of the literature indicates that

students feel as though they are putting a financial strain on their families by attending college, and this psychological stress associated with burdening their families is a significant issue in their transition to college (Brooks, 2015). However, the young men in this study did not discuss the burden they may be putting on their families by attending college. Rather, many of the young men are financing their education through a combination of financial aid, external scholarships, and loans. Many students wish to be self-sufficient in their college expenses, which is another indication that the young men of this study are transitioning to an alternative, independent form of masculinity (Brooks, 2015; Harper, 2004).

While financing their education is a concern for all of the young men, it seems to be a particularly large concern for Manny. Before winter break, he expressed a desire to go back to work during his time off so that he could afford things like soap and detergent for the spring semester. Drawing from my own college experience, which admittedly is markedly different from that of the young men of this study, I had assumed he wanted to go back to work so that he could buy his books, but his needs were deeper than that. In our third meeting, he informed me that he had not been able to work over the winter break, but was trying to find a job on campus instead. In the interim, his mother was helping support him financially so that he could afford the basic items he needed.

While financial stress continues to be a challenge facing Manny, Will made the decision to stay close to home because he believed it would limit the financial stress caused by his tenure in post-secondary institutions. When asked why he decided to stay local for college, he stated,

I chose [my small, liberal arts institution], number one, because if anything happened with my mom and my brother, I can come home immediately. And of course, money, because if you're out-of-state, it's so much. You have to buy plane tickets. It's so much more expensive. It's way more expensive, so I was just like, "Let me just stay local because I know I don't have the money." It was definitely money. (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016)

Students are concerned about traveling to and from school, and the added expense of doing so. For some, this was reason enough to stay close to home. For others, the level of aid provided by local schools was a deciding factor. Frank, who fervently wanted to attend an HBCU in the South, was swayed to attend his small, liberal arts institution because of the financial aid package he received.

My thing with school is, [my institution] actually cost more than [the HBCU], but they gave me the most money for it. The thing about the school and stuff is because they're like, "It's still a good school." People were trying to tell me that [the HBCU] wasn't like, "Yes, you pay all of that, but is it really worth that much?" (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016)

Frank continued on to say that attending his institution was a mistake, because he was not getting the level of experience he thought he would have gotten from his institution of choice. In his opinion, you are paying for the experience, and he wishes he could have found a way to pay for his institution of choice in order to get a better experience. However, in the end, the cost of the institution was a deciding factor for Frank.

Students without a Sense of Belonging

Frank has commented on several occasions that he feels that there is no sense of community on his campus, nothing about which the students can collectively get excited. He wishes the school allowed for more creativity, but it is what he calls "a book school" (F. Baylor, October 1, 2016). By this, he means that folks are mostly centered around schoolwork and not the greater college experience. Throughout the year, he has come

home every weekend because he would rather have nothing to do at home than nothing to do at school where he already feels isolated.

Finding a community is important for developing protective factors (Bottrell, 2009; Small & Newman, 2001). Moreover, finding a community is important simply so that a student does not feel isolated during their college experience. Unfortunately, Frank has not been able to do this. He feels increasingly alone as the semesters pass, but does not know how to improve his situation. His absence from campus during the weekends is partially to blame for his disinvestment in his college community: he goes home on the weekend because he perceives there is nothing to do on campus, yet because he is not on campus on the weekends, he does not know what he may be missing. Frank feels isolated from his peers, partially because he does not feel as though he has a place on campus. The perception is borne out of his intersectional identities, particularly his first-generation and local resident statuses, which serve both to pull him away from campus, and to leave him without vicarious experiences through which to measure his own experience and expectations.

The literature states that students who are unable to integrate fully into campus life have more trouble succeeding (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). Additionally, Tinto (1998) writes that a lack of social activity on campus is linked with decreased student retention. While Frank is still enrolled in college, the literature suggests, and his description of his experiences seems to confirm, that his desire to persist is at risk.

Motivations, Aspirations, and Resilience

With such obstacles, one is left wondering what pushes the students to continue their education. The men gave similar responses when asked about their motivations: family, as described above; the desire to improve their life circumstances through a high-paying career; a general love of learning; and the desire not to be a statistic.

Getting a Leg Up

Most of the men aspire to find a high paying career once they leave school, and half of the men are planning to immediately attend graduate school to further increase their ability to market themselves. In fact, getting a leg up was the primary motivation for attending college, as expressed by the young men late in the interview process. As the literature states, obtaining a college degree is a way to insulate oneself from issues of poverty and violence (Oketch, Howard, Mauldin, Mimura, & Kim, 2012). By attending college and working towards their goal of a high paying career, these young men are working to not only give themselves a leg up and remove themselves from situations fraught with risk factors, but also working to break the systemic cycle of poverty and oppression, thus removing future generations from negative stimuli as well.

I think it's going to get me a better chance to get a new job. I'm not saying that I don't have a chance, but the people who don't have the grades, or people who aren't patient with their time, to go to college, I could be over them because I have the grades. So, that's what I want out of college. (M. Frost, March 7, 2017)

Many of the young men agreed with Manny's sentiment, stating that they hope that college will open up opportunities for high paying careers as well as allow them to stand out over their future competitors.

As previously described, these young men desire high paying careers not just to benefit themselves, but to benefit their loved ones as well. While students expressed motivation to get up and out of their neighborhoods, they did not plan to do so alone. Rather, their ideal outcome was to move their families out of the neighborhood with them, and to begin providing a better life for their kin. Hammond and Mattis (2005) note that, for many Black men, being grounded, holding a steady job, and being able to support one's family are all indicators of manhood and masculinity. The young men of this study seek to achieve all three of these goals, reifying their alternative masculinity and their commitments to their family units.

Love of Learning

Of the many motivations the young men outlined for wanting to obtain a degree, only one of the young men expressed that the love of learning was his primary reasons for attending college. This rationale for attending college is most linked with non-traditional, returning, and adult learners and is reflective of a mindset not often found in modern learners (Romanoff, 2016). Education for education's sake is not referenced in the resilience literature, yet when Schoolboy Q was asked why he decided to attend school, he responded,

I just hope to learn a lot of valuable things I never would dream of learning. I'm trying to take this judo class because it's free, and I get to take judo. I took a bunch of philosophy courses already. I don't know. That's the beauty of going to a liberal arts institution. I don't want to limit myself. I don't want to focus on getting this job and not take the other courses that I could potentially learn from. And gaining experiences. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Schoolboy Q is a unique example of a resilient young man. His passion for learning extends beyond his desire to lift himself out of poverty. Interestingly, Schoolboy Q is also

the student who is most rooted in his racial identity, participating in various identity based institutions, as well as living in the Black Cultural Community, a residential learning community for Black men at his small, liberal arts institution. It is possible that Schoolboy Q's protective factors, such as racial pride, have already begun to insulate him from the risk factors associated with living in an economically depressed neighborhood, and therefore he is able to view education not as a means to an end, but as the goal itself.

Resisting Stereotypes

The young men of this study seem keenly aware of the structures that have oppressed them throughout their lives. They can point to a lack of educational resources, financial struggles, and a dearth of role models as factors inhibiting them and their communities from a less harsh existence. Yet, the young men work within the confines of their oppression to open up opportunities for themselves. Attending college is one example of how the young men are carving out an alternative path, when compared to other men in their neighborhoods or schools. Setting high aspirational academic and career goals shows us that these students are not afraid of the challenges ahead of them. Indeed, for several of the students in this study, the challenge is what makes the journey worthwhile. Students actively worked to counteract the stereotypes that their collegiate peers, faculty, and administration may hold about them due to their identities, with a greater goal of creating a campus more ready to serve low-income, urban, first-generation students of color.

As described above, Zayion was the first student to talk concretely about how being Black has affected his college experience, referencing that people viewed him as a

“thug” because of where he comes from. Moreover, Zayion has felt discriminated against by the police on and around his institution’s campus, as they continue to pull him over when he and his friends are in the car together. Yet, despite the clear discrimination taking place, Zayion does not have the privilege of getting angry about the situation. Rather, if he reacts to the situation, he aptly perceives that “it’ll only get worse” (Z. Joseph, March 9, 2017). Resilience as resistance may be the most feasible way for low-income urban youth to build up protective factors. Here, Zayion is resisting the assumptions made about him in a productive way: he is using the stereotypes of others to drive himself forward, while undermining the stereotypes themselves.

Zayion went on to describe how he hopes to graduate college early. Primarily, he wants to get out of school and get on with the rest of his life. However, he also mentioned being motivated by his interactions with the police while at school. He wants to be in a place where he is not automatically suspected of something simply for being a young Black man. He shared that he and his friends do not do drugs, and do not drink very often, so he is hoping that once he leaves his large, comprehensive institution behind the sense of suspicion that follows him around will dissipate, and he will be allowed the space to prove himself through his actions.

Schoolboy Q shared a similar sentiment, stating that he not only feels that the college community looks at him with a certain lens because of where he is from, but also experiences negative stimuli from the college community because of his racial identity. Unlike the large, comprehensive institution described here, Schoolboy Q’s small, liberal arts institution is aware of the tension on campus around race and socioeconomic status,

and the institution programs in an effort to alleviate this tension. In the spring term, his institution will host its semi-annual Speak Up event, a program that takes place in the campus meeting house, where only students of color are allowed to speak. It is a safe place where all students, administrators, and faculty are invited to listen to and honor the unique voices of the students of color on campus.

Despite the microaggressions Schoolboy Q has faced during his time in college, he has already taken many steps towards achieving his future goals. During his spring semester, he interviewed for summer internships with two financial institutions, as well as applied for a scholarship program with Management Leadership for Tomorrow (MLT), which would fly him to conferences over the course of the year where he could network with fellow students and potential employers. He is also incredibly driven academically holding a GPA over 3.7. It is clear that Schoolboy Q is not letting the perceptions of his peers keep him from pursuing many incredible opportunities.

Each of the students who participated in this study experienced hardship and began developing resilience prior to entering postsecondary education, and, as such, were able to traverse their new landscape with only limited difficulty. Stigmatization due to their identity did little to deter the young men from getting involved on campus and working toward their goals, indicating the development of a resilient identity. These young men have high aspirations: Manny hopes to attend law school and become a civil lawyer, Frank aims to be a successful artist, Will aims to be a cardiologist, Schoolboy Q hopes to work at a hedge fund, Jethro wants to work at a PR firm, and Zayion wants to be a software engineer. Many of the young men hope to continue on to graduate school, and

bring their families up with them. The ambition expressed by these young men is partnered with high levels of self-efficacy and future planning, two key indicators of resilience (Rutter, 1985).

Mitigating Obstacles: Connecting to Campus

College is a fascinating time in a student's development, as youth become more and more aware of issues around race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, as well as the discrimination that accompanies these identities. For many students of color, discrimination is commonplace during their post-secondary career. However, forming relationships on campus can help to mitigate the consequences of such discrimination. Moreover, taking advantage of the myriad resources and peer groups available on campus may begin to mitigate the systemic lack of resources that many low-income, urban, and first-generation students experienced in their previous educational institutions. Students, through campus community ties, may be able to work against both micro- and macro-level campus discrimination, using their social connections for social change.

Based on the literature, building connections on campus is one of the best ways to ensure that students feel rooted to the institution and its community (Astin, 1984/1999). Additionally, if a student is engaged either socially or academically, the likelihood that a student will become engaged in other aspects of college life is increased (Panos & Astin, 1968). Unfortunately, most institutions of higher education were not built for a diverse student body, so many students of color struggle to find ways to get involved or make connections on their campuses (Kellogg & Niskode, 2008). Dancy II described the importance of feeling as though one's identity is congruent with the identity of the

institution in order to engage (2012). For the young men of this study, feeling connected to their respective institutions was reliant on feeling as though their identities, especially their masculine identities, would be respected. While finding identity-relevant ways to get involved has historically been an issue for students of color, with only one exception the young men who participated in this study found meaningful ways to engage with their institutions and to anchor themselves to campus. When evaluating protective factors in urban youth, seeking out a supportive peer group is often lauded as a positive force in the life of a young adult. Indeed, resilience scholars have written about the importance of a strong community in the life success of at-risk youth, as well as its ability to serve as a protective factor for students who encounter racial discrimination (Bottrell, 2009; Juang, Ittel, Hoferichter, & Gallarin, 2016; Small & Newman, 2001). Forming one's own strong community is seen as positive coping and resilience in urban youth, especially in the absence of strong mentors or other social ties in their neighborhood community (Claus-Ehlers, 2008). Moreover, getting involved on campus was one of the primary tools that the young men of this study used to garner success during their first year at college.

By making connections with faculty, as well as other students, the young men began the work of insulating themselves from risk factors associated with belonging to a minoritized group on a predominantly White campus. These risk factors include being subjected to microaggressions, and being asked to serve as a representative for their entire race, and the literature suggests that students of color are often left out of efforts to increase engagement with campus life and thereby retention (Harper, 2012). The young men of this study, however, did not report feeling left out of campus life. Rather, they

found myriad support systems on campus, which assisted them in persisting despite the presence of risk factors. Students found many ways to ground themselves on their campuses. Among their techniques, students formed strong connections with faculty and administration at their institutions; they participated in summer programs prior to the beginning of their first year; as well as participated in myriad clubs and organizations. Tinto (1998) and Astin (1984/1999) write that the more invested a student is in on-campus activities, the greater the student learning will be. This, in turn, leads to higher levels of persistence and retention.

Faculty Connections

Forming connections with faculty is one of the most direct ways that students can positively impact their experiences in the classroom. Research indicates that positive faculty interactions and encouragement has a greater impact on student persistence than the racial make-up of the institution that the student attends (Reid, 2013). Additionally, students who receive intellectual affirmation from faculty have higher degree attainment and perform better academically (Harper, 2013). Therefore, in terms of student engagement theory, forming strong connections with faculty members is one of the most beneficial ways for students to mitigate the stress associated with transitioning to and rooting themselves within campus culture. By attending office hours, seeking opportunities outside of class to engage with faculty, and utilizing educators as a resource beyond the confines of a semester, students begin to shape the way faculty and their classmates perceive them. When students are able to interact with faculty members in a positive fashion, they report a higher level of confidence in their academic ability, a

factor that is critical to developing self-efficacy (Reid, 2013). Many of the young men involved in this study invested much time and energy in ensuring that the faculty at their institutions knew who they were, and what they were hoping to accomplish during their college tenure. Zayion was among the most direct in ensuring that his professors were familiar with him:

I kind of force my professor to know who I am, so I sit in the front of all my classes and try to ask questions, try to participate here and there. But like I said, some of my classes are just lecture classes, just you listening to the teacher. I try to be myself as much as possible and, like I said, I attend office hours, I try to attend office hours very frequently. I'm confident that my professors know me...I know from last semester I didn't do the best. I would say last semester was probably my worst semester as a college student. So now I kind of learned that I'm doing now is I'm going to office hours and talking to the teacher more. If the teacher knows who I am when it comes to making that decision if, say, I have a 79 and I need an 80 to get my GPA to such and such, that teacher if she knows me and thinks, oh, he's a good kid, she'll give me the actual point. (Z. Joseph, January 17, 2017)

Zayion perceives that, by making positive connections with faculty members both in and out of the class, he is currying favor. Several other young men held this same belief, which was a primary motivator for connecting with faculty members outside of the classroom. In a later interview, Zayion revisited this sentiment, sharing that he believed that attending office hours makes professors “more comfortable with me in the classroom” (Z. Joseph, March 9, 2017). While the desire to connect with faculty for self-benefit remains the same, the language Zayion uses in this statement is interesting. Davis (1994) writes that Black students often perceive a lack of support, if not outright discrimination, from faculty and administration on campus. Zayion’s word choice leads us to ask the question, why does he believe his faculty members were not comfortable with him in the first place? Zayion’s intersectional identity could be one reason that his

response was phrased this way. Perhaps being an urban man of color at a predominantly White institution impacts Zayion's campus experience more than he has outwardly expressed. Perhaps the indication here is that faculty members are often White, and are not able to provide a learning environment that is welcoming to all students. There are many ways to interpret Zayion's words, but undergirding them all is the sense that Zayion does not feel fully at home in his classes despite his efforts to connect with faculty members.

Upon entering college, Manny was among the most reticent to interact with the faculty outside of class. In his fall term, he was primarily concerned with his social endeavors: going to the gym, partying, and making friends. However, as Manny adjusted to campus life and began to delve deeper into his academics, he quickly found that forming bonds with faculty assisted him on his journey through post-secondary education. He spoke about one professor in particular who had an impact on his first-year experience at his large, comprehensive institution.

I had a civil lawyer, she was my public speaking teacher, and I talked to her about it. She thinks that I should do civil lawyer because it's better. She said that you make more money, too. She said even though it's not all about the money, it's what you like to do...I mean criminal lawyer, I don't want to defend actual criminals. I feel as though I might see someone who actually is guilty.... I'm supposed to email her to try to talk about internship, I was thinking about doing an internship with her so she can show me, take me to an actual job to show me around, show me what she's doing. I talked to my advisor about that and he said it sounded like a plan. (M. Frost, March 7, 2017)

In previous interviews, Manny described how much he enjoyed the public speaking class because the professor seemed invested in him. She encouraged him to represent their class in a public speaking competition, and although Manny did not win, he appreciated

being nominated to participate. The connection that Manny made with his public speaking professor has now translated into goal setting and career planning, both of which are indicators of self-efficacy in students (Bandura, 1982). It is encouraging to see that Manny has found a mentor on campus.

In one interview, Schoolboy Q described a professor who was having a large impact on his experience at his small, liberal arts institution. His math professor would take the initiative to reach out to Schoolboy Q if the professor perceived that Schoolboy Q was struggling with a concept in the course. This sort of personal care for students is beyond what the other young men in this study experienced. Moreover, the connection with this faculty member did not end when the semester ended. Rather, Schoolboy Q described how this faculty member continued to nurture their relationship after the course had ended:

Yes, I still speak with [my math professor]. He actually got me to ... I was going to take linear algebra with another professor here in [my institution], and he advised me to switch out of that one and take it at Bryn Mawr, because he thought it was easier, and he thought it was more suited for my stats major, because there's not as much theory involved, and proofs involved in the one at Bryn Mawr. So, he advised me to take that one, and it's been going great. (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017)

Schoolboy Q is describing here how his professor reached out during the registration period to recommend that he take a course elsewhere because the focus of the course would be more meaningful for his major. This professor is also the Director of the Multicultural Scholars Program at his small, liberal arts institution. He is a white man, but has research interests surrounding underrepresented minorities in STEM fields. The connection with this professor has made a significant impact on Schoolboy Q's year at

his small, liberal arts institution. He feels well supported. In fact, when I asked him what most connects him to campus, he responded, “I guess my relationship with some of the professors, and also my friends” (Q. Wright, March 10, 2017). To reiterate, Schoolboy Q’s first answer was the faculty, followed by his friends. This is significant; especially considering the other young men spoke specifically about their social groups when asked this question.

Despite literature stating that low-income and first-generation students are often conditioned not to question instructors, the young men of this study are invested in pursuing meaningful connections with the faculty at their institutions, as well as engaging in the classroom (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Once again, it is interesting and unfortunate that none of the faculty members the men most connected with are identity peers. The literature states that if young Black men encounter supportive instructors and administrators, particularly other Black male role models, than a positive academic identity is fostered (Whiting, 2009). The young men are indeed encountering supportive faculty, staff, and administration at their institutions, which allows the students to feel positively engaged with their institutions, but none share the intersectionality of identities that makes college such a complicated endeavor for these young men. While the young men are benefitting from the guidance and vicarious experience of the faculty with whom they connect, one is left wondering what the impact of these relationships could be if men of color were available as mentors for the young men of this study.

Resource Offices

In addition to connecting with faculty members, utilizing campus resource offices positively impacts a student's perception of campus life and ability to succeed. The data indicate that when students take advantage of the resources offered on campus, they are not only increasing their likelihood of academic success, but also rooting themselves to campus. This finding is echoed in the literature, as well. As described above, Manny has found independence from his family through various campus resources such as the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. The Office of Services for Students with Disabilities provided Manny a link to myriad resources across campus, which he may not have known to connect with otherwise. If the young men are able to connect with even a single office, the professionals therein will be able to help direct students to the plethora of support systems available to them.

As discussed above, the students who participated in this study had limited access to educational resources while growing up. Therefore, maintaining connections to resource offices is particularly important to their academic success. Zayion, who has previously struggled with his academics, turned to his advisor for consistent support throughout the year.

That's because I talk to my advisor a lot actually. Basically we try to talk every week about how I'm doing this semester and my advisor he just tries to keep me on top of everything. He helps me, gives me study tips and ideas. He basically, we have check-ins every week. I would say the ADP office, which is the summer program that I went to, I go there every week. It's not part of the program, but it's a promise, but I told my advisor that I would. I stuck to my word by going to him every week. (Z. Joseph, January 17, 2017)

Zayion, on a mission to improve his GPA, dedicated himself to visiting with his advisor every week during his second semester. The consistent contact appears to be working, as his grades in his second term have been improving. Students display higher levels of resilience when they have a strong support structure. When students fail, or are on the precipice of doing so, the knowledge that they have at least one person that they can turn to for assistance increases their belief that they can overcome the obstacles in front of them. Moreover, while the student is away from home, faculty and administrators constitute the majority of the adults with whom students interact. These college officials have great potential to shape a student's identity development, as well as support their academic and social endeavors (Corprew III & Cunningham, 2012; Whiting 2009). By connecting to faculty members and resource offices, the study participants are simultaneously increasing their self-efficacy through their increased network and ability to succeed.

Summer Bridge

Literature shows that students participating in pre-college summer programs can result in an increased sense of belonging on college campuses. Previous research also indicates that an increased sense of belonging is linked to better first year college outcomes, as well as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Sablan, 2014). Three of the students who participated in this study also participated in their institution's pre-freshman year summer program. For two of these students, the summer program was a prerequisite for full admission into the institution, as their high school record and SAT scores were not enough to establish whether the students would be successful at the post-secondary level.

For another, the summer program was social in nature, giving a limited number of students an opportunity to interact with faculty, upperclassmen, and one another prior to the beginning of the school year.

Participation in summer bridge programming has been linked to students developing an increased sense of academic efficacy. Additionally it has been linked to better retention in some majors. Beyond the academic benefits, summer programs are seen to serve social purposes such as fostering relationships between other students and university faculty and staff. Students from urban high schools frequently struggle when attending postsecondary institutions because of the disconnect between their high school level work, and the expectations of college professors. As a result, interventions that increase the chances of student success in college classrooms are of particular import. College supports should not only increase access for students, but also provide them with long-term support once they have arrived on college campuses (Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2016). Summer bridge programs have previously been shown to accomplish all of these goals.

Literature also indicates that students will often squander their first semester by continuing to engage in their high school behavior (Romanoff, 2016). Poor time management and a lack of self-discipline impact a student's ability to achieve academically. Summer bridge programs, however, may assist students in shedding their previous study habits prior to the official start of the academic year. Zayion and Manny, both of whom participated in summer bridge in order to gain full access to their large, comprehensive institution, were connected to various resources through their experience.

Zayion, who was not happy with his grades in his first semester, visited the advising office every week to check in with his summer bridge advisor, and create a plan to improve his academics. Satisfied with both his time in the summer bridge program, as well as the support he has received since, Zayion encourages others to participate in the summer bridge experience.

I encourage people to go to the summer program because not all people get to have people that support you like that. Everybody has an advisor, but not every advisor cares for the student. By you going to the summer program, that gives you a chance to get to know your advisor and you get to know that person a lot more so they know who you are, they've seen your accomplishments... My advisor has seen me basically grow academically. I feel not everybody has that support so I think going to the summer program that's another bonus to it. (Z. Joseph, January 17, 2017)

Feeling well supported is paramount to Zayion's persistence at his large, comprehensive institution. Self-efficacy theory highlights the process through which students can develop resilience via interactions with supportive networks such as advisors and resource centers, which undergirds understandings of resilience as a positive adaptive behavior (Bandura, 1982). Zayion's desire and ability to connect as well as to improve his academic standing indicate that he not only feels well supported, but also that he has developed positive adaptive behaviors.

As previously noted, Manny connected with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities through his summer bridge program, which, in turn, connected him to a curriculum advisor and a writing tutor in his second term. He has since utilized these resources rather than relying on his mother, who did not attend college, to edit his essays and give him advice on how to interact with his advisors. In his spring interview, Manny bragged about his GPA, talked about wanting to raise it to a 3.8 so he could get into

Harvard Law, the institution his mentor attended, and saw no possible obstacle that could keep him from his goal. It appears that being connected to resources allows Manny to feel more independent and confident in his ability to excel academically.

Volunteering and Civic Engagement

Service and Civic Engagement are two high-impact practices, or techniques that have been proven beneficial for engagement and increasing learning among students (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012). The Indiana Campus Compact conducted a study from 1997-2000 about the potential service activities hold to further engage students in campus life and better integrate them into the institutional culture. Students who participated in the study indicated that the service learning experience had been responsible for increasing their interest in community engagement in the future (Indiana Campus Compact 2002). Offering opportunities to affect their campuses and communities through service and activism gives students a sense of agency and ownership over their academic experiences. When asked how the students connect the campus, Will shared about his first-year seminar professor who connected him to summer service opportunities.

[Is there anyone I] really connect to? Yeah, I can say, her name is Ms. Carrie Madden. She's really a good model. She just really want to make sure everybody's on the right track. She makes sure nobody's left behind. She's really good... She's one of my professors. She do the service trips of the school, so she really knows a lot. She keep in contact with me a lot too...I'm going to be going on one of her service trips in the summertime. It's in Atlanta, Georgia, we're going to be going to a camp called Twitch and Shout, it's a camp for Tourette's students and stuff like that...She had asked me, because she thought that I would be interested, and I was, so I had to do the application and I got interviewed. I passed everything so far. Now it's just the final phase. The people at the camp got to interview me now. I'm ready. (W. Kingett, November 26, 2016)

Will was first connected to service opportunities during his freshman year seminar. Courses such as these, which are designed to introduce students to campus culture, as well as connect them to one another, are linked to increased persistence and involvement (Tinto, 1998). Additionally, volunteerism and the opportunity to give back to a community is linked not only with increased involvement, but increased self-concept, which in turn is related to student self-efficacy and resilience. Manguvo, Whitney, and Chareka (2013) found that not only does volunteerism promote self-definition and re-conceptualizing one's role and purpose, but it also encourages social ties and valuing diversity. In addition to increased retention, the potential benefits of civic engagement among first-generation and low-income students include increased engagement with social justice activities, positive social attitudes, empathy, and self-understanding, while it also has the potential to decrease risk-taking behavior such as alcohol and drug consumption, which can all be linked to greater overall engagement and academic success (Bernacki & Bernt, 2006).

Moreover, general participation in civic engagement gives students a sense of ownership over their campus community, which is of vital importance in allowing them to feel safe and invested in collegiate culture. Schoolboy Q is engaged in social activism at his small, liberal arts institution, working to make the campus a more welcoming place for people of diverse backgrounds.

Especially during the times now, we are trying to do more of offering spaces for people to feel comfortable, and feel comfortable within their own skin. We feel like it's hard to do that, and also we tended to ... We're doing a lot of action. Recently there was an article posted in Swarthmore just talking about how students on financial aid should be thankful for those who pay full tuition because they're paying for them to be there. They're paying for us to be at this school, or

whatever. We launched a campaign called, we are not here to say thank you. First we wanted to engage the community by having discussions. We invited basically the entire campus to come to a space in the dining center and speak with a financial aid officer, and he explained what exactly happens in financial aid, explains how basically everyone here has received financial aid based upon endowments and other things like that. Then, afterwards, we created t-shirts and then we all sat together in the dining center at one big giant table. We put some of the tables together, because we actually wanted people to see what we were doing, see us, see us together...I hope we get into much more deeper discussions, other than just fighting with this big umbrella of financial aid. I hope we go into a little more specific things such as race and identity, stuff like that. We don't want it to stop here. We feel like a lot of the things that we do, especially like other people do on this campus, it happens once and then it's just forgotten about. We want it to continue on. (Q. Wright, December 9, 2017)

Through the actions of his organization, Schoolboy Q is creating a space for diverse students at a predominantly White institution to feel recognized and appreciated. These actions serve to support other students of color, which in turn may increase their own self-efficacy. Schoolboy Q is using his own experiences as a student of color on an elite campus to begin conversations around stigmatized identities, which then serves to inform the ways other students of color tackle oppression within the collegiate sphere. It is fair to assume then, that Schoolboy Q is serving as a role model for other students of color, and allowing his actions to serve as vicarious experiences for others. Harper (2013) described this as peer pedagogy, wherein students of color assist the new cohort of students acclimate to campus life through informal mentor-mentee relationships. Indeed, Schoolboy Q is becoming the role model that Bandura (1982) describes as necessary for the success of this student group. Harper (2012) indicates that this sort of support from upperclassmen is integral in bolstering success among students of color, as it helps to mitigate feelings of otherness. Providing informal mentorship to other students of color

has profound potential to increase engagement and retention among this group of students.

Learning Communities

All of the young men involved in this study lived in campus residence halls for the duration of their first year. Many of the men referred to the idea that their experiences would be vastly different if they were not living on campus during their college experience. One of the young men stated, “I feel by commuting you're not getting your full experience. I feel like if you're going to go to college you should be on campus” (Z. Joseph, October 14, 2016). This opinion mirrors Astin (1985) and Tinto’s (1998) student engagement theories, which hold that experiences such as living on campus result in increased student involvement and persistence to degree.

Participation in learning communities is also considered a high-impact practice, and has been linked to positive academic and social outcomes for college students (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012). Learning communities provide students a space not only to live, but also to access various support systems and discover the value of a post-secondary education (Romanoff, 2016). Two of the participants were connected to learning communities in some way during the study. Will was scheduled to move into the Honors learning community, while Schoolboy Q was actively engaged in the Black Cultural Center (BCC), a learning community designated for Black students. Will spoke about his desire to join the Honors learning community, describing the opportunity as beneficial for his academic life on campus.

I'm in the honors program there, so they're going to move me to the honors house. So I know that's a community, but right now, I don't know none of them. They all

know each other. It's a little house for all the honors students and stuff like that. I know they have some type of academic support center where all the students can go in there and help each other study. They have a few professors in there ready to help. Other than that, we have a lot of supportive things like the students like to work together. (W. Kingett, October 14, 2016)

As of the spring, Will is at the top of the list to be placed in the Honors house. The academic supports available to him there may help mitigate the bias he may face as a student of color in the college's biology department.

A typical component of learning communities is that students move through courses together in a cohort-style process. While this was not required of the students living in the BCC at one small, liberal arts institution, many of the students took advantage of the opportunity to take courses with their housemates. More importantly, perhaps, the space served to connect students of color to one another, as many of the members of the Black Student League (BSL) were also residents of the BCC learning community.

Black Cultural Center. Yeah, that's right. I still live there. I feel like most of the other people in the house take classes together. Everyone else all has this one class together, and I don't take classes with any of them. I think it's more of an interest thing. All of them are interested in the same thing. I'm the only one that's interested in Econ... I mostly hang out with my BSL board, and the people I met at Horizons [summer bridge] when I first came to campus. They all live in a house as well, so it's really easy to talk with them. (Q. Wright, December 9, 2017)

For Schoolboy Q, the Black Cultural Center is the nucleus of his college community. His learning community, while not explicitly grounded in a cohort model, gives Black men a space that is explicitly theirs on a predominantly White campus, allowing them a place where they can be authentically themselves, rather than who they are expected to be. This intentional community serves a psychological purpose for the young men of the Black

Cultural Center, allowing them to escape from the academic, social, and race-based pressures of campus life (Freeman, 2012).

Clubs and Organizations

Involvement in clubs and organizations is at the heart of student engagement theory. Finding a home within a peer group is often the first step students take towards campus engagement (Tinto, 1998). Organizations are an outgrowth of this first step, and give students an opportunity to connect with peers over shared academics, hobbies, or interests. These groups function to bond students to one another, thereby rooting them to campus, which improves retention. Beyond their participation in identity-based groups, the young men found time to participate in a variety of other activities on campus. Once again, research suggests that first-generation students will have little knowledge about what opportunities await them on campus, and therefore may have a harder time finding ways to get engaged (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The young men in this study, however, do not appear to be hindered in their engagement and involvement in their campus communities due to their first-generation status, and continue to find new ways to become involved as their first year proceeds. Jethro, for instance, expressed interested in leaving his comfort zone and auditioning for the Spring Musical.

What I want to do that I haven't already done...In my campus life? I said rugby. I actually want to do the spring musical. I want to give that a shot. When I'm alone, I like to sing. I get into it. I want to give that a shot, see if I can pull this off. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Jethro, who has previously expressed his desire to start a rugby club on campus, is also looking for opportunities to use talents that he does not often share in public. The desire to open up in this way suggests that he has found a supportive peer group at his small,

liberal arts institution, and is not afraid of the stigma associated with participating in an extracurricular that is not included in the traditionally masculine array of activities, such as playing basketball or video games (Harper, 2004).

The men of this study are also making connections through employment opportunities on campus. Will, for instance, is the manager of the men's volleyball team, and holds a work-study job on campus. Each of these employment opportunities have given Will new connections across his small, liberal arts institution's campus.

I have been the manager for the volleyball team.... So I met them ... Then I'm cool with a couple basketball players. What else can I say. I've been doing my work study, I guess you can consider that extracurricular. What else have I really done. Other than that, I don't really know what you'd consider extracurricular. I guess I can say applying to the service trip, that's a form. (W. Kingett, November 26, 2016)

While Will did not make the volleyball team in his freshman year, he is hoping to start a club team before the end of the spring semester. Many of the young men with whom Will has become close are excited for the club volleyball team; they are looking to Will as a leader to complete the steps necessary to allow the group to be officially recognized. Moreover, when he talks about his friend groups on campus, he references the men of the volleyball team as among his closet.

Athletics also appears to be a central part of how these young men connect to campus. Although none of them are on their college teams, many of them continue to play sports recreationally. Time spent at the gym, on the court, or on the fields is primarily seen as social time, and allows the young men a venue to connect with other people with similar passions. Manny, for instance, regularly plays basketball with people he has met throughout his time at his large, comprehensive institution. Additionally, he

views his time playing basketball as an opportunity to connect with people he does not already know, thus expanding his social network.

Sometimes [I play basketball] with random people. Other times, it's people that I played ball with before the semester, like at summer program. I play ball with them. I play with people that I'm used to playing with during the semester. They see me, they know how I play. (M. Frost, December 9, 2016)

Manny, specifically, was concerned about getting involved in extracurricular activities during his first year; he worried that a club might distract him from his academic endeavors, or further disrupt his already odd sleep schedule. While Manny did not join a formalized club or organization during his first year, his time playing basketball serves to connect him to other students, and root him to his institution's campus life. The reticence to get involved and thereby over-extend themselves was shared by several of the young men during the course of the study. Ultimately, however, all but one student engaged with extracurricular opportunities available to them, or took the initiative to create their own opportunities.

Perceptions of campus life were often closely tied to how involved these young men were. The students who had built a web of connections to campus resources, faculty, and student groups often felt that campus life was more appealing than their experiences at home. Students reflected on their active social lives at school, comparing them to their lives at home over breaks or on weekends. For instance, Zayion shared:

It's like when I'm home, my home, I don't feel as ... I feel comfortable being home but I feel like when I'm at school, I'm able to do more and I don't have much of a worry when I'm at school. (Z. Joseph, November 28, 2016)

Those who had made few connections, however, felt that campus life was lacking in some way. For instance, several of the young men, particularly those who were at smaller

institutions, commented on how there was very little to do on campus. At the end of his first semester, one young man shared, “I’m just ready for finals. Ultimately, I’m ready for this to be over. Yeah, I’m tired of this semester. I guess the class is just, they’re just boring down there” (W. Kingett, November 26, 2016). Additionally, one student commented that there were not any people he felt that he could connect to on campus. This was largely because the school was so small.

It's hard to meet people. I need to be doing something in the meantime until I'm able to do it. If I'm here, not everybody is creative, and in the books and stuff like that there's not much to do. I can't really do my art or stuff like that. If there are people here, they're not my type of people. I don't really click with anybody super well. (F. Baylor, November 28, 2016)

One of the tensions that became clear through the interviews was the binary between receiving individualized attention at a small institution and being exposed to a thriving social scene at a larger institution. Many students who were experiencing one of these supports communicated that they wished the other was more readily available to them.

Resilient Masculinity

The young men of this study, through their various leadership roles on campus, academic achievement, future planning, and self- and racial pride, displayed a resilient masculinity. As Harper (2004) and Dancy II (2011) write, high achieving and highly engaged Black men on college campuses view masculinity as working hard, giving back, and proving oneself useful. A key component in the literature on resilience and masculinity is independence, or the ability to do for oneself. Many of the young men are still developing their resilient masculine identity, as we see above in the section on family. While the men still utilize their familial connections for support, they are growing

into their independence while away at college, especially as they form academic and social connections on campus.

I think I feel like the same person still. Just, like, independent. That's the only difference, is being independent...I don't really get help from my mom anymore. It's more like she's just there now. If I need money she's there. If it's something about my career, she'd give me advice. So everything I've been doing work-related, I've been doing on my own. Essay-wise, I've been getting help from the library, like the writing center. I've got a writing coach, and I've got academic tutor as well. (M. Frost, March 7, 2017)

In his first semester at college, Manny ascribed to what Harper (2004) describes as traditional Black masculinity. This form of masculinity was defined by engaging in his sexual, often problematic relationships with women, competing both in sports and at video games, and reliving his more violent days through story-telling. However, in his second semester at school he has started to move away from this form of masculinity. Now, he has stopped partying, is not currently pursuing romantic relationships, and is focused on his academics and his family. In one interview, he stated, "I got a lot of friends, most I play basketball with. Others, just chill in their rooms.... go to the library, do work together... Lately I just wasn't in the mood to go partying, and I quit all my drinking" (M. Frost, March 7, 2017). This transformation from traditional to high-achieving masculinity came as Manny sought independence from his home community and family, which largely occurred during the break between semesters.

College is a time for young people to discover who they are. As such, many young men do not begin to establish their resilient masculinity until they reach this life event. Both Manny and Zayion described how they have changed since entering college: Manny feels more independent and able to take care of himself academically. Zayion

initially struggled with the academics at his large, comprehensive institution, but has taken a semester to get his grades back on track.

I'm not satisfied with it [my GPA] at all, to be honest with you, because I feel like I haven't given it my all yet. But this semester I would say I am satisfied with how I'm doing now because I am giving it my all. Like last semester ... I would say I was slacking, because I was more focused on the campus life than the academic life. Now I just feel I'm more focused, so I would say I'm happy with how I'm doing it now. I'm taking it way more serious than I did and that just comes from the transition from high school to college. (Z. Joseph, January 17, 2017)

Zayion recognized that he was not fulfilling his academic potential, and re-arranged his priorities so that he can meet his goals. Taking responsibility for one's success and failure is highlighted in the literature as an important theme in the construction of masculinity, particularly a non-traditional Black masculinity (Hammond & Mattis, 2005). Initially, Zayion was caught up with the social aspect of college (campus life), but has connected to resources, regularly visits with his advisor, and has redirected energy towards identity-based organizations. Pride, sense of self, the search for self-betterment, and the ability to overcome challenges with dignity are also indicators of an alternative masculinity (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Each of these also appear to be portrayed in the narratives presented by both men. Zayion attributes his revised path to fully transitioning from the high school way of life to the college way of life. Literature indicates that maturation allows men the time and space to self-define masculinity, usually moving away from dominant, traditional configurations (Dancy II, 2011). Completing the transition from high school to college appears to be critical in moving from traditional masculinity to an alternative form of masculinity.

In addition to his work with identity-based clubs and organizations, Zayion is currently trying to join a fraternity. Interestingly, some literature connects fraternity membership to traditional masculinity because of a fraternity's ideological connection to American patriarchy, capitalism, and Eurocentric notions (Dancy II, 2011; Harper, 2004). Other literature, however, indicates that fraternity members may be one of the best ways to engage young Black men on college campuses (Patton, Bridges, Flowers, 2011). Zayion has begun to move away from traditional masculinity and a focus on his social life through academic goal setting and reprioritizing. Joining a fraternity may encourage him to re-establish his original masculine identity. However, joining a fraternity may also encourage him to get more engaged on campus, which would increase the likelihood of his persistence to degree. This is an interesting tension that he will need to navigate.

The resilient identities that these men are building during their time on campus will be particularly important when they return to their home communities. Often, when young men return home, they are expected to resume their traditional masculine behaviors. Literature suggests that being academically successful is seen as "soft" to community members who have not attended post-secondary institutions, and have not had the opportunity to develop an alternative vision of masculinity (Dancy II, 2011). Additionally, scholarship indicates that a masculine identity is negotiated along with one's peers (Harper, 2004). The expectation to regress to prior notions of masculinity in order to re-assimilate to the community or peer group puts pressure on the young men, and may result in a depleted sense of self by the time the second year of college begins. This, in turn, could result in lower self-efficacy, which has potential to negatively

influence the young men academically and socially. Navigating their new sense of masculinity with old expectations can be mitigated by the resilience that the young men have developed through their various successes during their first year at school. Authenticity, or “realness,” has been acknowledged as a significant component in allowing men to envision and invent their conceptualization of manhood beyond the expectations of others. Remaining true to their new selves is paramount in their ability to continue developing their resilient and alternative masculine identities after their first summer break.

Epilogue: Life after the 2016 Election

This research project started during the 2016 election season. During the course of my interviews, Donald Trump became the 45th president of the United States of America, and ran both a campaign and an administration focused on dismantling many of the rights and protections given to low-income Americans, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, and many more. After a campaign filled with hateful rhetoric, it is not surprising that many of the young men brought up the election and the Trump administration during the interview process. While this was not the focus of the study, I would be remiss if I did not include these data.

Concerns about Financial Future

One student in particular, Manny, worries about his ability to finance college, generally, but in particular, since the Trump administration took office. While he admits that he does not have a firm sense of how his financial aid package works, he does know that he is fearful that aid will be cut, particularly to students of color who come from the

“inner-city” which Trump has ridiculed and stigmatized at length in his speeches. Moreover, Manny receives a gap-filling scholarship from CS, a nonprofit serving urban, low-income student. Manny is always sensitive to the fact that CS may cease to exist if funding cuts to support such programs continue. At the time of writing, CS is still functioning as a non-profit with a mission of opening up college pathways for underrepresented, urban students. Additionally, as of yet their ability to provide their “last dollar” gap filling scholarship has not been inhibited. The future of this organization and organizations like it, however, is not guaranteed in the current political climate. If CS disappears, the young men and women who rely on the services offered by this community partner will be faced with even greater challenges than the ones they already face in obtaining access to and affording institutions of higher education.

Bias Incidents and Tension on Campus

Shortly after the election, two students described incidents on campus where a segment of the student population was targeted. At his small, liberal arts institution, Jethro described swastikas drawn in one of the residence hall. A similar incident occurred at another small, liberal arts institution, where Schoolboy Q is a student. While young men did not feel personally affected by the bias incidents, they were deeply troubled that these sorts of actions were taking place at all.

Campus life has been a bit of a disconnect, I would say, between the student body. More black students and different students of different races feel some type of way toward the other. I feel like, when it first happened, there were a lot of incidences in my resident hall... Disagreements and things... I think there's probably been a fight or two. (J. Lester, November 28, 2016)

Post-election, minoritized students were not guaranteed safety from the ridicule or violence of their more privileged peers. As referenced above, Zayion and his identity-based organization were offering space to students to discuss the election, and how the subsequent events impacted students. These conversations focused on both the Black community on campus, as well as how the election may be affecting other groups. These conversations serve as an opportunity for students to say aloud, and to a group of supportive peers, their truest thoughts about the current state of affairs in America.

In addition to blatant bias incidents, two students described an increase in tension on campus. Zayion discussed being targeted by the police, both college and town, for being a young Black man who was out with other young black men. The first time Zayion mentioned these incidents was after the Trump inauguration. In prior interviews, he described how much he enjoyed his time at his large, comprehensive institution and his activity with identity-based groups on campus. However, in his interview following the inauguration he seemed less pleased with his college experience, and focused more on the efforts of his groups to soothe the tense campus climate.

Additionally, Schoolboy Q described two articles in the college newspaper that were troubling to him. The first, referenced above, was an opinion piece where a fellow student stated that all students who received financial aid, a group with a high ratio of students of color, should thank their non-scholarship peers for paying for their education. Schoolboy Q and the Black Student League led a campaign to educate other students about the financial aid system, and explain to fellow students of color that they do not need to thank anyone for their education. Additionally, around Halloween, the school

paper published an article written by a student who believed that the institution's Honor Code impinged on freedom of speech. This student was brought up on sanctions for wearing black face to a Halloween party. After the student's case was adjudicated, he brought the issue to the school paper. Once again, Schoolboy Q brought the Black Student League together to discuss the article and its implications on the students of color at their small, liberal arts institution. White students were also invited to this discussion as an opportunity to learn from their peers. Schoolboy Q shared that there have not been any further racist incidents on campus since.

Schoolboy Q also spoke about one of his institution's end of term events, the Speak Up Forum. This is a program that takes place in the campus meeting house, and only students of color are allowed to speak. It is a safe place where students, administrators, and faculty of all races come to listen to the unique voices of the people of color on campus. When I asked what his main take away from this event, he said that he was surprised at the sorts of everyday micro-aggressions that the other students on campus felt. He left the previous forum wondering, "Will these things happen to me?" When questioned on whether he felt the forum was useful, or if, given the feeling he walked away with, it further divided students he replied that it was useful, because it gave the White students on campus a glimpse into the life of a student of color on campus. In the post-election environment, Schoolboy Q is hopeful that bringing diverse groups together, and particularly the inclusion on White students and other privileged identities, will help to alleviate some of the tension he continues to feel on campus.

Where They Are Now

At the time of writing, all six of the young men who participated in this study plan to continue their post-secondary education in some form in the coming academic year. Will is in the process of transferring to another institution, and changing his major to nursing. While he enjoyed his time at his small, liberal arts college, he feels strongly that a larger institution will provide him with more resources and more opportunities. Additionally, although he has enjoyed studying biology, he believes that he will develop the skills needed to be successful in the medical field if he changes his major. Jethro, too, is considering transferring, but has a less concrete plan to do so. Much like Will, he believes he will be afforded greater opportunities at a larger institution. Frank, as well, hopes to leave his small, liberal arts college for a larger one. Frank's desire to leave stems from the perception that he has not made any connections with peers at his institution, and he wants to go to a larger school where he can find people who are more artistic and have similar interests to him. Additionally, he plans to change his major to focus on visual arts, rather than marketing. He has shared that he does not have a great GPA, largely because he is not motivated in school, so he plans to attend community college to improve his academic standing before transferring to a large, public institution in Philadelphia.

Conversely, Schoolboy Q is content on his small, liberal arts campus. He feels as though the campus community is open to dialogue, and that he has made strong connections to both students and faculty. Moreover, he believes that the academic rigor of the institution will lend itself to future successes. He is still waiting to hear back about

the various summer internships he has applied for, but is confident he will be awarded at least one of them.

Manny is excited about entering his second year of college, and has no plans to leave the large, public institution he attends. He is still considering joining the Army, and has decided to invest fully in his Criminal Justice major. Zayion is also very pleased with his experience at his large, public institution. He has made strong connections with other students, and is currently pledging a fraternity there.

From the collegiate decisions these young men are making for their second year, a common thread emerges: the young men want access to resources and opportunities. For most of these students, that means attending a large institution (15,000 undergraduates or more), where they perceive greater access to resources and opportunities across both social and academic realms. Lost, however, is the individualized attention and support students are able to receive at smaller colleges. While the desire for greater resources is valid, students may have a more challenging time finding systems of support once they enter a larger institution.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

During their first year in college, the young men in this study navigated complex relationships with family, peers, and college representatives; reflected on the importance of their identities; and overcame many challenges. The influence of families on the young men's academic success and motivation shaped how they viewed their collegiate experience and created their goals. For many, the tension between feeling supported and feeling distracted by their families caused the young men to set high aspirational goals, while also commuting to and from their home neighborhood frequently during the academic term. For others, the tension caused them to disconnect from their home community altogether during the term to focus on campus life. Moreover, all but one of the young men took advantage of the myriad engagement opportunities available to them on their college campuses, and set to work creating a unique and connected college experience. These connections helped the young men navigate the identity-based stigmas they encountered, and use their unique perspectives to begin important dialogues around race, socioeconomic status, and privilege on their campuses. Through their actions, the young men displayed their burgeoning self-efficacy and independence. Finding and connecting with supportive communities both on campus and in their neighborhoods, shedding their risk-taking behaviors, managing the expectations of others, and finding motivation in even the most nefarious interactions or obstacles will likely allow these young men to continue to accomplish their goals.

Building Resilient Identities

As you have now seen, the young men who participated in this study faced numerous life challenges prior to post-secondary education. As a result, students accessed community resources, such as the non-profits described within this work, as well as high school mentors, to assist in their educational goals. The challenges the young men faced appear to have prepared them for their collegiate journeys, as few of them described the difficulties they faced in successfully transitioning to post-secondary education. Rather, the young men entered college knowing that they need to make the most of the educational experience, as few of their peers and even fewer of their family members were afforded the same opportunity. Moreover, the vicarious experiences shared by family and community members served as motivation to succeed at the post-secondary level. Vicarious experiences are a key component in developing self-efficacy, and family and community members used their own life experiences as a lesson in what the young men of this study should avoid (Bandura, 1982). These real life examples encouraged the young men in this study to focus on their studies and steadfastly pursue their goals.

According to Michael Rutter, the key facets of developing a resilient identity are: “(A) the reduction of negative outcomes altering either the risk or the child’s exposure to the risk, (b) the reduction of a negative chain reaction following risk exposure, (c) the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) the opening up of opportunities” (Winfield, 1991). While the young men of this study had little control over the challenges they faced early in life, many of them are now taking control of their journey through the reduction of risk taking behaviors, adopting an alternative form of

masculinity, and pursuing a plethora of new opportunities on their college campuses. Indeed, they are enacting Rutter's model of resilience and thereby insulating themselves from further risk factors. Veritably, the adverse life experiences seem to have better prepared the students for future life experiences, as they already knew how to cope with and plan around obstacles.

Risk Taking Behaviors

In examining the risk-taking behaviors that could inhibit these young men from accomplishing their goals, it is striking how absent these behaviors are. The participants' exposure to violence (physical, emotional, symbolic, or otherwise) within their communities prior to entering college appears to have influenced the way these young men make decisions about their futures. For instance, the students who were more apt to party in their first semester of college have moved away from that life, as is the case of Manny and Zayion, each of whom has re-dedicated himself to academics in the second semester. Both of these men have connected with academic resource centers, which are providing them with the resources they need to increase their GPAs and academic independence. Additionally, Manny was one of the only young men who spoke explicitly about dating during his first year. By the end of the study, he had decided to take a break from dating to focus on the work in front of him. Will also commented on dating, stating that "I'm not gonna play myself like that. I've happily been focused." (W. Kingett, March 11, 2017). It appears, then, that the young men of this study are staying away from the traditional indicators of college masculinity and risk taking behavior to focus on their long-term goals.

Several of the other men were risk adverse upon college entry, as in the case on Schoolboy Q, Jethro, and Frank, who, while interested in the social aspects of college, are most concerned with creating a good life for themselves upon graduation by investing fully in opportunities that they perceive as stepping-stones to a brighter future. Schoolboy Q, for instance, is applying for internships and planning large-scale events for the Black Student League. Frank, while dissatisfied with his college experience, is looking for ways to make art his priority moving forward. Actions that these young men perceive as distracting from their educational goals, such as partying and dating, are carefully weighed, and when these actions pose a risk to goal attainment, they are abandoned.

Throughout their interviews, the men spoke of their motivation to do well, to make their families proud, to serve as a role model for others, and to move themselves and their families out of their current situation, both monetarily and geographically. These desires focus the priorities of the young men, which allow them to eschew activities that may inhibit their ability to achieve their goals. The movement away from risk is yet another indicator that these young men are building their resilient identities.

Masculinity

The men in this study appear to be at a critical tipping point in their lives in terms of defining their masculinity. While several of the young men entered their first year of college ascribing to the traditional form of masculinity, which is defined by competitiveness, pursuing sexual relationships with women, displaying wealth with material possession, and lack of concern for academic endeavors, all of the young men transitioned to the alternative “high-achieving” masculinity by the end of the study.

Traditional masculinity is fraught with outdated stereotypes about Black men, and a product of a socially constructed idea with roots in slavery (Hunter & Davis, 1992). “High-achieving” masculinity is defined by the assumption of leadership positions, concern with academic achievement and career success, and a desire to provide for one’s family (Harper, 2004). As students begin to refine their future plans and life goals, they are in turn defining their own version of masculinity, and thus moving away from societal expectations and stigmas surrounding Black masculinity in America.

One interesting component of this transition is that the timing coincides with the transition from first semester to second semester. Student engagement theory holds that the first semester, particularly the first eight weeks, are the most critical time in a student’s transition, as this time is when they establish their social groups and personal affiliations (Tinto, 1998). It would appear that once this initial transition has occurred, and the young men have established their groups and affiliations, the process of re-examining their form of masculinity begins. It is possible, then, that students who do not feel well rooted to campus, or have made negative choices of affiliations during their first eight weeks will be unable to transition from traditional masculinity to alternative masculinity. Subsequently, it is imperative that colleges and universities work to ensure that urban, low-income, and first-generation students of color are being connected to faculty, staff, and fellow students who will be able to positively initiate them into collegiate culture, as well as connect them to needed resources and peer groups.

Alternative masculinity plays a large role in the way the men of this study think about their families. Indeed, even the men who primarily view their families as a burden

feel indebted to them, and want to support them moving forward. The complex nature of familial relationships, then, is even further muddled by the gender of the participants of this study. Further research is needed to analyze the ties between prescribed gender roles and perceived duty to one's family.

Retention and Resilience

At the time of our final interviews, all six of the young men expressed their intention to return to school in the coming academic year. Even Frank planned to continue his education, despite his disappointment with his first year. He is investigating alternatives, such as community college, or a larger institution, which may give him the experience he most desires. While his small, liberal arts school may not be able to retain Frank, he is persisting towards his degree, which is the primary concern of this study.

Moreover, the men display resilience in many different ways. For Frank, resilience is a quiet, keep-your-head-down, do-what-you-need-to-do process. Navigating challenges is not easy, nor is it something he looks forward to. Rather, traversing the various challenges he has experienced leaves him drained, unmotivated, and disconnected from his college community, but, so far, he persists. Despite feeling as though he does not belong in his current setting, he is working to find a setting in which he will be able to connect to others and feel passion for his program. He is tired, but he is still fighting. Manny, on the other hand, embodies a more agile form of resilience. He jumps quickly to a solution when a problem arises. He has full confidence in his decisions, his ability to do well and achieve his future goals. For Manny, resilience is more acrobatic—he springs nimbly through structures to find the path most suitable to him. Whether that is choosing

a major based on perceived difficulty of the courses and potential careers, or finding a way to go to college for free through enlisting in the Army Reserves, he looks for every opportunity to reduce the obstacles in front of him. Doing so takes a keen awareness of the obstacles he will face, and quick planning in order to navigate through them.

Much of the extant literature consistently underestimates this population of students, focusing on their failures and statistics around crime, imprisonment, and low percentage of degree completion. Justice Scalia's sentiments outlined in the introduction of this dissertation do not exist within a vacuum. Rather, there are many Americans who believe that students of color do not have the ability to succeed at elite colleges and universities. However, the young men of this study consciously work to disprove this notion. Not only are they aware of the obstacles in front of them, but they are finding creative ways to navigate through these obstacles. They are innovative in their solutions, and work to carve out an easier path for others like them. Moreover, this group has high aspirations and will not be easily deterred from their path, as demonstrated time and again in the data. Current literature seems to suggest that because this group possesses highly vulnerable identities they are sure to fail. African American men are still underrepresented on college campuses because of the systemic divestment in their neighborhoods and their educations. It is not surprising, then, that the breakdown in the college pipeline appears to occur during secondary education, as once the men of this study arrived on campus there was little that could be done to stop their successes. Yet, students of color enter college at a significantly lower rate than their White peers (Baber, 2012). The men of this study continue to have conversations around privilege and identity

on their campuses, to become civically engaged, and to perform highly in the academic arena. We are able to conclude, then, that the resilience in the group is high. The life events they have overcome, the support they have received from family, community, and college professionals, as well as their own aspirations insulate them from the threat of negative stigma and stimuli. What's more, this group can serve as mentors for other Black men in their lives. Will is already serving as a role model for his older brother, who hopes to return to college as a non-traditional student. Mentorship and role modeling is something that all of the research, including this project, believes is critical in the continued educational improvement for Black, first-generation, urban, and low-income students. While this is not the narrative for all young men of color hailing from low-income, urban areas, the men of this study have clearly illustrated that this population of students should not be underestimated. Low teacher expectations and life obstacles continue to lower the self-efficacy of students like those who participated in the study. To increase the success of this group, educators must empower these students in the classroom and assist them in defining their own vision of what it means to be successful.

Implications for Policy

Based on the findings of this study, several implications for policy can be formulated. Primarily, the young men who participated in this study, and students like them, would benefit from mentors and peer contacts who share in their identities. This need is described at length in the extant literature (Boxer & Sloan-Power, 2013; Harper, 2013; Yosso, 2005). While the men of this study were able to form positive connections on campus, one is left to wonder what type of impact a male faculty member of color, or

an upper-classman of color serving as a peer mentor may have had on the young men during their transition or other particularly stressful points in the first year of college. As Bandura (1982) writes, vicarious experiences serve as the second most powerful tool in the development of self-efficacy, and are most powerful when a student is learning from a person similar to them. One opportunity to create these connections is through the work of City Scholars (CS). As stated above, all of the college counselors employed and placed in Philadelphia's most under-resourced schools by CS are women. For the young men of this study, many of whom grew up without male role models, the college application process was a time of transition, rich with opportunity to form supportive networks and absorb vicarious experiences, if the men had been connected to male mentors to help guide them through their process. As non-profits such as CS look to the future, increasing the number of men of color who work with their students may have a significant impact on their work. Moreover, colleges and universities should look to further diversify their faculty and administration, to show students that all identities are welcome and respected on their college campuses, and to provide mentors to a wide array of students on college campuses.

If faculty, staff, or community mentors are not readily available, the formation of a peer mentor network may serve as a valuable alternative for students of color. Harper (2012) outlines the ideal circumstances for such a partnership: incoming students need to be approached by upperclassmen early in the semester to form an informal mentoring relationship. In his study, Harper found that many students claimed that they would not have survived the college experience without the mentor-mentee relationship, as feelings

of otherness and alienation would likely have caused these students to leave their course of study. Ideally, each incoming student would have at least one student contact on campus that he could turn to for advice and support. Initiating this type of peer mentoring program requires little financial input from a college or university, but may have tremendous effects on retention and persistence of students of color.

The men who participated in this study attribute their successful transition to college on their ability to get involved and make supportive connections early. In order to ensure that all students have access to support networks, colleges and universities need to introduce students to a variety of resources as part of an institution-wide orientation program. Traditionally, orientation is viewed as a purely social endeavor, where students meet their peers and form friendships. However, infusing information about academic advisors, counseling services, career development opportunities, and sessions on resilience, stress, and problem solving during these events may help ease the stress of transitioning to college. Re-affirming for students that there are resources available to them as they experience academic and psychological stress can reduce feelings of isolation and otherness; factors which often compound the negative aspects of the transition to college.

Connecting students to appropriate resources and opportunities, on a micro-level, could take the form of colleges encouraging identity-based organizations to host mixers or other events focused on bringing together the campus's minoritized groups to extend their network of support. Moreover, this may allow student groups to pool their resources and affect greater change on their campus through co-hosted, large-scale events around

issues of identity and bias on campus. The Black Love event hosted by Schoolboy Q's Black Student League is one example of how such an event could occur. On a macro-scale, institutions may look to create a climate survey, in which minoritized student groups can highlight the additional resources that they feel they need to be well supported on campus. This step emphasizes that an institution is looking to ensure that campus is a place where all identities are respected. It is important, however, that the climate survey is not a symbolic measure. Rather, institutions that are serious about improving support systems for their minoritized students need to use the data to inform decision making moving forward. Too often, this step does not occur and students are left frustrated at the lack of progress.

Investigating ways to extend and nurture the relationships that first-generation college students have made with high school mentors may also increase the retention and persistence of these students. Institutions of higher education should tap into the connections formed between high school teachers and counselors to improve student readiness for higher education. This may take the form of communicating important college policies with those at institutions of secondary education, so that students are exposed to both expectations and resources early in their thinking about college. Additionally, if institutions of higher education can find ways to welcome local high school mentors onto the college campus, doing so may help to bridge the gap for students as they enter their transition period. As describe above, the transition to post-secondary education is a time fraught with challenges for all students, but particularly for low-income, urban, and first-generation students. These students are often entering

environments that are incredible dissimilar to those they left behind, and they may begin to doubt themselves during the transition. By including high school mentors in the transition period, as well as the early months of college, students will have a familiar person to turn to who can assist them in accessing important resources and opportunities.

In practice, this may take the form of inviting high school administrators onto college campuses during the summer months, when many teachers are out of school, for a brief orientation program. Using this technique, mentors will be able to continue to connect with students prior to them leaving for college, as well as once they make the transition. High school mentors, however, may have other employment commitments during the summer months. If this is the case, institutions may want to offer an online option for high school teachers and counselors who are interested in knowing more about college policies. Additionally, if there are events to which high school mentors would be welcome, providing those individuals with the dates and times early would increase their ability to attend as well as their ability to continue to support their graduated students.

Further, finding ways to include the family members of first-generation students may decrease the amount of pressure from home these students experience, and turn these complex relationships into firm support networks. Welcoming families of first-generation students onto campus may allow family members to understand the new demands placed upon their student. As such, the familial expectation that these students maintain their home responsibilities may lessen. Opportunities to welcome families onto campus already exist on many campuses within orientation programming and family weekend. Additionally, if families are available, a summer orientation program, much like the one

just described for high school mentors, may be useful. Unfortunately, however, families like the ones described in this study often have dense work schedules, and taking time away from work may not be an option. If this is the case, institutions should again consider online options, or newsletters to home informing parents about opportunities and resources available to their students, as well as success stories from college students within the institution. A recurring column targeted towards parents of first-generation college students may be particularly helpful. The content can range from information on how parents can support their students' educational and career journeys, to highlighting scholarships available to first-generation, urban, or low-income students, to introducing key members of the college community that parents may wish to connect with; information that parents who have attended college may already possess. The benefit of this sort of recurring column tucked into a larger parent communication plan is that it gives access to those who would not otherwise have it, without drawing attention to that lack of access.

Finally, and perhaps most challengingly, institutions across the United States should continue to investigate ways to financially assist low-income, urban, and first-generation students. As described throughout this dissertation, the confluence of these identities leaves these students at a particular economic disadvantage. While there are many non-profits working to increase the population of urban, low-income, first-generation students of color at the post-secondary level a gap remains. As described in Chapter 1, the political climate in America currently threatens the limited aid available to students who wish to attend college. Non-profits are being defunded, and urban areas are

being further stigmatized. While it is too early to predict with authority how these factors will impact trends, it would not be surprising if these elements culminate in a drop in college attendance by urban, low-income, first-generation students of color. To prevent this downturn, institutions of education at all levels, non-profits, even corporate businesses need to evaluate their responsibilities to their communities, and look to support the young students who live in the metropolitan areas in which they operate. Indeed, financial hardship was one of the main concerns among the men of this study, and further research on how cost shapes the ways decisions are being made by students and families similar to those who participated in this study is warranted. Luckily, for these men, financial hardship was not enough to deter them from their goals. This is not the case for all students, however.

Implications for Further Research

This study leaves many questions unanswered: do women of color feel the same familial responsibilities as the men of this study? Does an alternative version of femininity or feminism develop within women as they experience post-secondary education? Does the desire to achieve independence also have gender-based ties? Are these concepts racially derived, or do all college students struggle to develop a new self while attending institutions of post-secondary education? How does a lack of parental support affect a student's psychological state throughout their college years? Are there ways to mitigate the negative consequences of feeling unsupported by loved ones during post-secondary education? The questions are rich and ongoing.

Based on the findings of this study, further research on the tension between what a large campus can provide (resources and opportunities) and what a small campus can provide (individualized support) is needed. Is there an ideal campus size for young men like the ones who participated in this study? Is it more important for them to have access to additional resources and opportunities than to individualized support? Are there large institutions who have found a way to provide a blend of these experiences to their students? If so, how can these models be replicated at other large institutions across the nation? Determining whether there is a “right size” institution may help college counselors steer students towards institutions more able to engage with and support a diverse student population. While it is unlikely that a one-size-fits-all recommendation could be made from this research, it may help to fine tune the conversations around size, cost, and fit that high school students have with their college counselors, as well as with their parents during their college selection process. It is also paramount that research on these questions be disseminated outside of academia, so that practitioners are able to access the information and allow it to inform their work.

Additionally, an expanded view of student engagement may be necessary to ensure that urban, low-income, and first-generation students of color are being connected to all of the resources that may benefit them. The literature on student engagement theory currently describes the importance of living on campus, making friends, and joining clubs, but does not include high-impact practices such as living in learning communities, volunteering, or participating in summer programs prior to the regular semester to assist with the campus transition (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012).

Yet, this literature does not specifically focus on the needs of students of color. Rather, student engagement theory is often “raceless” and therefore most applicable to the White majority. (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, Howard-Hamilton, 2007). The data indicate that the young men of this study need to make numerous connections in order to be well supported. However, many White students easily pass through college with little effort exerted to make such connections. Each of these components served to better acclimate the young men of this study to campus, and further research to parse out the extent of their effects would benefit the field of educational research. Moreover, the young men in this study were future-oriented, thus connecting them to resources such as career development, fellowship offices, or other areas that could impact their future plans is paramount. Will these offices change or augment the way the young men think about their future life goals? Are other engagement opportunities critical for shaping a student’s college experience as well as their future life plans? Is isolated participation in a summer program tied to increased engagement or GPA? Does living in a learning community impact these factors? Is there a blend of engagement techniques that creates a higher retention and persistence rate for young men like those in this study? Evidence surrounding the impact of these techniques, particularly on low-income, urban, and first-generation students will help inform how college and universities implement or mandate various practices. Moreover, introducing students to high-impact practices and the related engagement opportunities early in their college career is paramount to their success. A student who is struggling academically but is unaware of the resources available to help him improve his grades is less likely to succeed than a student who is aware of and able

to access the resources available. Research on how and when students should learn about the campus connections available to them may also serve to inform campus policies.

Above all, continuing to investigate best practices in supporting minoritized students is key. Until such a time where academics and practitioners alike have shed the discourse around identity-based student failure, the work is ongoing. As researchers continue to examine the perennial problem of educational persistence through a critical lens, and away from individual or “cultural” centered explanations, we will be able to more deeply understand and interrogate the myriad ways institutional racism has impacted the success of these students. Additionally, as more and more students of color enter college campuses, they will be able to share their stories of success with others, serving as the mentors to which they themselves did not have access. The continuation of this work is paramount to sharing the unique world perspective and experiences of diverse student bodies, especially those who are able to succeed at a post-secondary setting. It is my hope that the stories of the young men who participated in this study will be heard and shared to inform the ways in which we support our students of color, connect them to resources, and encourage them to engage with the opportunities higher education has to offer them.

Examining My Lens: White Privilege in Academic Research on People of Color

During the proposal process for this research, my committee asked me if I thought I would be able to make connections with the young men in this study despite our divergent identities. This was a major consideration, yet I felt strongly that I should use my privileged voice to tell the stories of the young men who participated in this study, as

Critical Race theory, particularly Derrick Bell, instructs White allies to do (1995). While I would not undo this work, I am also very aware of how this project may appear to others: a privileged White woman interrogating, if not exploiting, the poverty and adverse life experiences of men of color of academic gain. I would be remiss if I did not pause to address these concerns. Senator Cory Booker once said, “The most perverted privilege is if there is a serious problem that doesn’t affect you personally then it is not a serious problem” (Booker, 2016). Urban poverty, a dearth of resources available in urban schools, and systemic racism are not issues that affect my daily life. However, they are problems that impact my studies and the work I aim to do, and it did not feel responsible to conclude this dissertation with only a short mention of my lens as a researcher. The intent behind this dissertation is to celebrate the successes of the young men who participated in this study, describe the resilience they have developed in the face of challenging life circumstances, and to inform fellow scholars, policy makers, and educators about the potential of this group when they are given the support they need and deserve. I truly hope this study has accomplished these goals.

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APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

Institution 1:

A coeducational, private, Roman Catholic liberal arts university in the Philadelphia metropolitan area within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The current undergraduate enrollment is 1,400 students. The institution employs 76 full time faculty, and 143 part time faculty. First to second year retention sits at 77%, with a four-year graduation rate of 50.3%. Additionally, the institutions offers more than 50 student clubs and organizations, and 40 undergraduate majors. This institution also awards masters and doctoral level degrees. The average cost for an undergraduate to attend this institution is just over \$19,000 per year, and, on average, a student will accumulate \$38,648 in student loans during their undergraduate career. Jethro and Frank both attend this institution.

Institution 2:

A coeducational, private, Catholic liberal arts college in the Philadelphia metropolitan area within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The current undergraduate enrollment is 1,100 students. The institution employs 26 full time faculty, and 90 part time faculty. First to second year retention sits at 67%, with a four-year graduation rate of 42.9%. Additionally, the institution offers 14 student clubs and organizations, and 24 undergraduate majors. This institution also awards masters level degrees. The average cost for an undergraduate to attend this institution is just over \$29,000 per year, and, on

average, a student will accumulate \$27,776 in student loans during their undergraduate career. Will attends this institution.

Institution 3:

A coeducation, private, liberal arts college located in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The current undergraduate enrollment is just under 1,300 students. The institution employs 146 full time faculty, and 25 part time faculty. First to second year retention sits at 97%, with a four-year graduation rate of 94.2%. Additionally, the institution offers 145 student clubs and organizations, and 28 undergraduate majors. This institution does not grant graduate degrees. The average cost for an undergraduate to attend this institution is just over \$47,000 per year, and, on average, a student will accumulate \$23,444 in student loans during their undergraduate career. Schoolboy Q attends this institution.

Institution 4:

A public, comprehensive university located in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The current undergraduate enrollment is just over 14,000 students. The institution employs 146 full time faculty, and 25 part time faculty. First to second year retention sits at 88%, with a four-year graduation rate of 67.1%. Additionally, the institution offers 280 student clubs and organizations, and 44 undergraduate majors. This institution also awards masters and doctoral level degrees. The average cost for an undergraduate to attend this institution is just under \$24,000 per year, and, on average, a student will accumulate

\$33,472 in student loans during their undergraduate career. Manny and Zayion both attend this institution.