A Narrative Exploration of College Access, College Choice, and Multiracial Background

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

In order to be most effective, college access programming should aim to provide services that account for the social realities of underrepresented students in higher education. College access programming historically has been dedicated to serving low-income and first-generation college going students at the federal level, with many local college access programs dedicated to serving monoracial minorities specifically. Presently, it is unknown if the current approach to college access is inclusive of Multiracial students. This study examined how 13 Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources.

A constructivist narrative inquiry was employed to focus the study on the perceptions and experiences of Multiracial participants as they sought out resources while pursuing postsecondary enrollment. The research was guided by three questions: (a) what pathways do Multiracial students take when accessing postsecondary education; (b) what college access resources do Multiracial students perceive as available for use; and (c) how does a student’s Multiracial identity interact with college access pathways and resources utilized?

Findings are presented narrative and comparative form. In total, nine themes were presented with each research question having three aligning themes. The college access and choice pathway themes found were community college as an entrance to postsecondary education, impact of school context on pathway, and predetermined pathways for postsecondary education. College access resources perceived for use
centered on resource utilization and were found to have the three themes of maximized college access resources, limited use of college access resources, and no use of college access resources. Finally, the interaction of participant’s Multiracial identity with their college journey fell under the themes of: no, limited, and high interaction. Findings from this study have implications for college access organizations and higher education institutions in how Multiracial backgrounds are defined and included in current models of service.
Dedication

For Grace, Alice, Cornelius, and Linda
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*Turnin nothing into somethin is God work*
*And you get nothing without struggle and hard work*
-Nasir Jones

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Voy ha vivir el momento
Para entender el distino
Voy a escuchar en siencio
Para encontrar el camino

-Marc Anthony

-BAB
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Major Field: Educational Studies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the United States, earning a postsecondary degree or credential is no longer just a pathway to enhanced career opportunities and quality of life. Current research demonstrates that more than two-thirds of the jobs that will be available by 2020 will require education beyond high school (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2012). This projection has remained consistent as Lumina Foundation (2017) reports “Since 2011, the U.S. economy has added 11.5 million more jobs for workers with education beyond high school but only 80,000 more jobs for those with a high school diploma or less” (p. 1). The United States economy is no longer a diverse representation of skills and employment opportunities for all levels of education. Individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher make up a larger percentage of the American workforce than those with a high school diploma or less (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2016). More and more, the American dream of steady employment with benefits, home ownership, and a high quality of life requires postsecondary education achievement.

Postsecondary education’s growing importance in the American workforce can be demonstrated by increased federal spending to support postsecondary attendance. In 2013, the US government spent more than $75 billion (excluding loans and tax expenditures) from the state general fund on higher education initiatives, a figure only exceeded by K-12 education and Medicaid (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Unlike funding allocated to higher education by state and local governments, which are general-
purpose allocations, federal college access initiatives outpace state spending. Of the $75 billion spent in 2013, more than $32 billion was allocated to Pell Grants and other federal financial aid programs designed to influence postsecondary enrollment and completion (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). In addition to financial programs and policies, such as the Pell Grant, designed to enhance access and completion for low-income students, a number of programmatic interventions at the federal (e.g., TRIO), state (e.g., California Student Opportunity and Access Program), and local levels (e.g., Columbus, Ohio’s I Know I Can) that target a variety of student populations.

While racial minorities, specifically Black, Latino, and Native American students, continue to lag behind their White peers in postsecondary enrollment and completion (Eberle-Sudré, Welch, & Nichols, 2015), there is evidence to suggest that access programs can have a significant, positive impact on student enrollment and completion (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Hooker & Brand, 2009; McDonough, 2004). There is scholarship that supports college access programming for first-generation college going, low-income, and racial minorities, generally, however there is little evidence that shows the effectiveness of college access programming for Multiracial\(^1\) students specifically. Although it is known that some Multiracial students participate in college access programming (Literte, 2010), it is unclear how Multiracial students perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources.

\(1\) All racial identities in this dissertation will be capitalized per the American Psychological Association’s recommendation.
Problem Statement

Research supports that to be most effective, college access programming should aim to provide multifaceted and comprehensive services to ensure inclusion of the unique identities and experiences of underrepresented students in higher education (Perna & Jones, 2013). Historically, college access programming has been dedicated to serve low-income and first-generation college going students at the federal level, with many local college access programs dedicated to serving monoracial minorities specifically (Swail & Perna, 2002). We do not know if the current model is inclusive of Multiracial students, particularly when services are not straightforward enough for these students to know if they can participate (Literte, 2010). This study explored how one group of Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access programs and resources. There is little existing scholarship on this topic within the field of higher education; however, there are related data that help us understand the need for an exploration of Multiracial students’ college access experiences. The sections that follow review both historical and current demographics of Multiracial individuals in the United States and provide a history of postsecondary access in the United States, including the founding of college access at the federal level, target populations of service, and a brief review of local and community programming.

Multiracial Growth in the United States

Over the past 20 years, interest in and information about Multiracial individuals has grown from a small, specialized body of literature to a large, cross-sectional genre
appearing in multiple fields of study (Franco, 2013; Harris, 2017; Root, 1990). The interest in Multiracial individuals has been heightened by significant population growth. The number of people in United States selecting “Two or More Races” on the U.S. Census grew by 32% from 2000 to 2010 (Jones & Bullock, 2012). Although conclusions drawn from the 2010 U.S. Census hold that the American Multiracial population is 3% of the total US population, research taking parent and grandparent racial identity into account estimates the American Multiracial population is 6.9% (n=1,555) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Further disaggregation of the population data shows that Multiracial adults with American Indian and White background account for half of the U.S. Multiracial population. The remaining groups are those with American Indian and Black backgrounds (12%), followed by Black/White (11%), and Multiracial Hispanics at 11% (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Differences in estimated percentages of Multiracial individuals are a matter of how Multiracial individuals racially identify, as well as the level of ancestry used to determine a Multiracial identity. To gain a better understanding of racial mixing in the United States the Pew Research Center (2015) defined Multiracial in one of three ways:

(a) First (self), or if the individual selected two or more races for themselves;
(b) Second (parents), if they do not select two or more races for themselves but report that at least one of their biological parents was not the same race as them, or select two or more races for at least one of their parents; or,
(c) Third (grandparents), if they do not fit the definition of Multiracial based on their parents’ racial background, but indicate that at least one of their grandparents was not the same race as themselves or their parents, or selected two or more races for at least one of their grandparents. (p. 6)

Using this multidimensional definition for Multiracial individuals, the Pew Research Center (2015) found that of the 6.9% total, Multiracial was defined as 1.4% for self, 2.9% for parents, and 2.6% for grandparents. This operationalizing of Multiracial is in stark contrast to the U.S. Census estimate of 3%, which can presumably be aligned with Pew’s “self” definition. Additionally, Multiracial identity is fluid, as 29% of adults who previously identified as two or more races now identify as monoracial (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Multiracial Americans are also overwhelmingly young, with many entering higher education within the next decade (Pew Research Center, 2015). Close to half (46%) of Multiracial Americans are under the age of 18, which is significantly disproportionate to their monoracial counterparts at 23% (Pew Research Center, 2015). This growth is important considering Multiracial students’ inclusion in the United States’ increased diversity, particularly in the millennial generation. Multiracial individuals are part of the “new minorities” that are making the millennial generation far more diverse than the proceeding Generation X-ers and Baby Boomers (Frey, 2016). Millennials are recognized as those born after 1981, which roughly aligns with the “Biracial baby boom” beginning ten years after the Loving v Virginia ruling in 1967 (Root, 1999; Strauss & Howe, 2000).
Colleges and universities can expect not only an increased number of students who identify as Multiracial in the coming years but also an overall increase in the racial diversity of their incoming classes.

Exploring racial differences among Multiracial individuals who are enrolled in postsecondary education is limited, as Multiracial students are reported federally in the aggregate. Any student who selects more than one race is assigned to the Two or More Races category without further examination (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Additionally, national statistics on Multiracial college enrollment can be of concern as the population is drawn from the U.S. Census, which does not take into account multiple definitions of multiracialism and may not accurately represent all individuals who have Multiracial ancestry. However, as the only source for year-over-year comparable data, these national statistics show instability in Multiracial postsecondary enrollment.

Reviewing data from 2003-2014 for the percentage of the United States population who identified as Two or More Races, 41.6% were enrolled postsecondary education in 2003 and 31.6% were enrolled in 2014. The percentage of those identifying as Two or More Races peaked in 2008 with 45.7% of that population being noted as enrolled in postsecondary education (NCES, 2015). Where other race categories (Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White) have more stable enrollment statistics, changes in the Two or More Races category has sizable increases and decreases, as much as 13 percentage points, a trend seen only in the Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Natives categories (NCES, 2015). Multiracial enrollment fluctuations could be attributed to
individual changes in Multiracial identity or issues of Multiracial students having access to the resources they require to prepare for, commit to, and enroll in postsecondary education. However, without specific scholarship that combines Multiracial student and college access research the factors influencing postsecondary enrollment are unclear.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reports an overall increase in enrollment of Multiracial students—3.3% of all students who enrolled in postsecondary education in the fall of 2014 were of Two or More Races, which is an increase of 1.7% since 2010. With higher percentages of Multiracial students entering college, it is important to examine how Multiracial students perceive, interact with, and benefit from current higher education access initiatives. Indeed, Multiracial students might not be aware that they can benefit from college access resources such as bridge programs and scholarships (Literte, 2010). As the Multiracial population continues to grow, higher education must revisit how Multiracial students are included and supported within college access services to increase access to postsecondary education for Multiracial students.

**Postsecondary Access in the United States**

College access in the United States has its origins in the written and enacted policies used to deny basic civil rights to the Black enslaved population (Anderson, 1988). These policies survived the United States Civil War and were reconfigured after reconstruction in the form of laws that enabled state lawmakers to institutionalize the ideas of Black inferiority and criminality (Anderson, 1988; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896).
These practices evolved and were continued during Jim Crow in the form of segregated schools until the 1954 *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling (Anderson, 1988; Love, 2004). A landmark case, *Brown* symbolized a shift in public education in the United States when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed unequal education practices. Specifically, the concept of separate but equal was decided to be inherently unequal (Love, 2004). After *Brown*, the quality of education available to underrepresented students was supported through key legal policies including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Educational Opportunity Act of 1964, Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Despite these macro level efforts, gaps in educational access remain.

The origins and current state of college access provide context to how programs were designed and who they were meant to serve. There are many populations who do not enroll in postsecondary education at high rates and there are just as many organizations and programs available to assist these populations. Swail and Perna (2002) grouped U.S. policy makers’ response to the persisting gaps in who enrolls and completes American postsecondary education in three categories: programs to supplement school-based learning, school voucher programs, and charter schools. College access programs and organizations, as we know them today, were a part of the initial response and fall under programs to supplement school-based learning. The mid-1960s saw the birth of college access initiatives implemented first by the federal government and then by local governments and community organizations.
Federal. The first federal program implemented, Upward Bound, was enacted by U.S. Congress as a part of the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964. A year later, Talent Search and Student Support Service (SSS) programs were authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965 and added to Upward Bound to create TRIO (Swail & Perna, 2002). These three founding federal programs take different approaches to target populations, with all programs requiring the majority of students to be low-income and potential first-generation college going (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Upward Bound offers academic support for students aged 13-19; Talent Search focuses on students ages 11-27 providing academic, career, and financial advising; and SSS programs provide retention and persistence services to participants enrolled at funded postsecondary institutions. Unlike Upward Bound and Talent Search, SSS also has a specific goal to serve disabled students who are low-income and potentially first-generation college going (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). TRIO programming has grown from the three founding programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, and SSS) to eight programs targeting new populations (e.g., veterans), academic subjects (e.g., mathematics), and levels of postsecondary attainment (e.g., graduate studies).

Terms such as first-generation college going and low-income reach across less palatable social descriptors such as race. Using race as primary descriptor can remind individuals of the United States’ segregated past. However, there is intersectionality among first-generation college going students, low-income individuals, and racial minorities. For children, first-generation college going status aligns with the racial groups...
traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education. Although 34% of all children are noted as first-generation college going, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic, and Multiracial children are more likely to have this status than their Asian and White peers (Aud et al., 2012).

Statistics from 2009-2014 show that the percentage of children living in poverty mirror first-generation college going rates and have grown for racial groups traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education (Kena et al., 2016). During this time, the percentage of children living in poverty increased from 20% to 21%, with the percentage of White and Asian populations in poverty holding steady at 12%. Underrepresented children living in poverty increased by at least two percentage points: American Indian/Alaskan Native (33%-35%), Black (36%-38%), Hispanic (30%-32%), and Multiracial or Two or More Races (19%-22%). Pacific Islander children experienced the most substantial increase in poverty of 10 percentage points, starting at 17% in 2009 increasing to 27% in 2014 (Kena et al., 2016). This demographic data illustrates that first-generation college going and low-income students targeted by federal college access programming include an overrepresentation of racial minority students who are not entering and completing postsecondary education at the rates of their White and Asian peers.

**Local and community organizations.** College access initiatives outside of federal programming are decentralized (NCANb, 2016). However, scholars have attempted to get a pulse on the type of college access programming offered across the United States. In
2000 and 2010, the National College Outreach Survey was administered, reaching more than 1,470 organizations in total (Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail, Quinn, Landia, & Fung, 2012). Of those surveyed, program goals consistently focused on providing college exposure. Increasing college enrollment and awareness remained among the most cited services. Programs also consistently targeted low-income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented racial minorities (which we are left to assume are Black, Latino, and Native American students) (Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail et al., 2012).

Local and community organizations combined are serving hundreds of thousands of students every year and lack capacity for in-depth program evaluation and tracking (NCANc, 2016; Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail et al., 2012; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Compounded by limited staff training and development, survey results show poor evaluation practices (Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail et al., 2012; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). This study can potentially assist in closing the evaluation gap by providing organizations with a point of reference in understanding how Multiracial students perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources.

College access and completion continues to be an issue on the national and local scale, with government and private sectors actively seeking best practices: Lumina Foundation’s Goal 2025 is based on the goal that 60% of Americans will obtain a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025 (a 20% increase). This goal is similar to the White House’s 2020 vision that the United States will once again lead the world in postsecondary credentials (White House, 2016). Lumina Foundation (2014) has estimated
that an additional 10.9 million students must enter postsecondary education for these goals to be met. Segmenting where the additional students can be recruited, they posited that:

…3.7 million could come from Americans between the ages of 15 and 24 who will not complete postsecondary education with our current approaches. But this can happen only through wide-scale implementation of effective strategies to increase student success and close gaps in attainment for students from underrepresented groups. (p. 4)

Indeed, it is unknown if Multiracial students should be included in the underrepresented groups that Lumina and other organizations are targeting. Additionally, there is not proof of the impact of college access approaches on Multiracial students due to the focus on monoracial students in college access literature. As the abovementioned literature and statistics suggested, we must explore the needs of students often forgotten in the literature to increase the number of Americans who enter and complete postsecondary education. Ultimately, this study aimed to understand how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from current approaches to college access.

**Key Terms Defined**

The terms listed below are used frequently throughout this work. Here, I offer definitions as used in the study.

**Biracial:** A racial identity that recognizes two monoracial heritages; similar to Multiracial (see below).
**College access:** Context dependent, the phrase can refer to (a) the level of opportunity an individual has to enroll and complete a postsecondary degree program and/or (b) a field of work or study composed of governmental departments, private entities, and individuals.

**College access resources:** To encompass all variations of college access work, the term is defined as any formal program or service provided to ensure that students graduate high school with the skills necessary to enroll in and complete higher education. Specifically, college access resources are defined as programs designed to increase academic preparedness, increase college aspirations and knowledge, and decrease financial barriers (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015).

**College enrollment:** Refers to the process of completing all necessary milestones and matriculating into a postsecondary institution to pursue a postsecondary credential.

**Monoracial:** This term signifies all individuals who do not have parents from two or more races or individuals who identify as only one of the race categories provided by the U.S. Census (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White) or as Hispanic.

**Multiracial:** Refers to any individual whose parents identify with more than one racial group. Multiracial will also be used to refer to anyone who identifies as Multiracial, Biracial, or as Two or More Races. This definition is similar to the Pew Research Center’s (2015) *parents and self* definitions of race.
**Race:** This study conceptualizes race similar to Johnston, Ozaki, Pizzolato, and Chaudhari (2014) borrowing from Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado’s (2009) differentiations of race. Specifically, race is conceptualized in terms of racial identity as the individual's perception of self; racial ascription as how others perceive and categorize an individual; and, racial category as the available option an individual chooses in a given situation (Johnston et al., 2014).

**Underrepresented students:** This term denotes those who have historically enrolled and completed postsecondary education at lower rates than majority students, including Black, Latino, and Native American students (Lumina Foundation, 2014; Perna & Kurban, 2013), and first-generation college going and low-income students (Heller, 2013; Lumina Foundation, 2014). This term is used interchangeably with “underserved students” but is different from underrepresented racial minority (URM) students.

**Rationale**

Research on college access initiatives and the students they serve is documented in the literature (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Perna & Jones, 2013). Multiracial identity scholarship has increased since the early 1990s and flourished in the following decades as Multiracial students became more visible on campuses. The increase in scholarship is supported by the federally mandated implementation of the Two or More Races option on the U.S. Census and official postsecondary institution forms (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008; U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1997). This study rests at the intersection of these two lines of research.
Literature on the ways that Multiracial students perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources is limited due to a lack of research that combines the areas of Multiracial identity and college access. Considering this intersection, the findings of this study advance access and race research and inform how different college access resources can adequately support Multiracial students. As the Multiracial population in the United States continues to grow, albeit through birth or identification (Pew Research Center, 2015), it is important to evaluate the methods used to increase access to postsecondary education.

Increasing access is not solely for personal gain, as the positive outcomes associated with postsecondary education benefit both the individual and their community (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). In order for the United States to begin to close its access gaps and reach goals stated by the White House and other national organizations, more than 10.9 million Americans must enter postsecondary education within the next decade (Lumina Foundation, 2014; White House, 2016). If scholars and practitioners are to understand how to serve this growing population, Multiracial students must be included in the access conversation, as their postsecondary education participation should no longer be aggregated with their monoracial peers. It is unclear if the current model of targeting specific monoracial minority, first-generation college going, and low-income students is beneficial for Multiracial students. Leaning on related scholarship and sound methodological choices, this research contributes to the American college access conversation with a focus on the experiences of Multiracial students.
Purpose and Design

The purpose of this constructivist narrative inquiry was to examine how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. I used a constructivist epistemology to focus the study on the perceptions and experiences of Multiracial participants as they sought out resources while pursuing postsecondary enrollment. Qualitative methodology is best employed when researching issues and processes that require a complex detailed understanding of the contexts where participants experience events and actions, and when quantitative methods do not fit the problem (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

Aligned with the methodological choices and purpose of this study, three questions guided this research:

1) What pathways do Multiracial students take when accessing postsecondary education?

2) What college access resources do Multiracial students perceive as available for use?

3) How does a student’s Multiracial identity interact with college access pathways and resources utilized?

Study Design

Aligned with a constructivist epistemology, this study was guided by narrative inquiry. This approach recognizes that individuals often experience and recount their
lives in terms of stories (Merriam, 2002). Certainly, “…narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of event/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). There are many ways to not only define what narratives are but also what narrative inquiry entails (Riessman, 2008). A thematic approach to narrative inquiry is similar to the traditional ideas of qualitative research. This approach does not include in-depth analysis of the local context or distinctions in how the story was told (patterns of speech, word choice), but rather it focuses on the actual narrative provided by the study participant. Thematic narrative inquiry was selected in order to focus the investigation on the experiences described in the narratives offered by participants, as well as other informative public documents advertising or describing the college access resources that participants chose to use or not use.

For the benefit of any investigation, clear choices must be made to ensure alignment of the research study’s purpose, methods, and findings. This study’s design constrains the research in three main areas: (a) population, (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis.

**Population.** To focus the scope of this study, specific limits were placed on the sample from which data were collected. Narrowing the criteria for this study ensured that participants could contribute meaningful experiences and assist in the recruitment of other individuals who could participate in the study. All 13 participants were (a) at least 18 years of age at the time of their interview, (b) currently enrolled in or recently left
(within one year) a degree-granting postsecondary institution, and (c) have parents from more than one racial category. Study participation was not limited based on racial composition (beyond what was stated above) or by institutional type. However, a clear pattern in participation emerged. Ultimately, all participants in this study had affiliation with a Black identity. Potential participants were identified via three established methods. I employed a purposeful sampling technique (Patton, 1990). Specifically, I sought out intensive cases that provided information-rich accounts. Culturally relevant sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) extended the investigation by reaching out to gatekeepers of relevant spaces, such as race-centered student organizations, multicultural centers, and college access organizations. Additionally, I asked participants to refer individuals to the study, known as snowball sampling (Patton, 1990).

**Data collection.** After a potential participant was deemed eligible to take part in the study and agreed to be interviewed, I worked with the potential participant to schedule an interview. The primary interactions for research purposes included the completion of a consent form; a demographic questionnaire; one 45 to 60-minute, one-on-one interview (virtual or in-person). Six of the 13 individuals participated in an additional focus group. In the interview, participants were asked to provide background information, share their racial identity, and discuss their overall college access experiences.

**Data analysis.** This investigation employed data analysis strategies consistent with thematic narrative inquiry. Analytic induction was incorporated with thematic
narrative inquiry to focus the analysis on the experiences offered by participants (Riessman, 2008; Smelser & Baltes, 2001). Data themes developed as part of thematic coding were found by employing nominal level coding, applying of thematic categories, and organizing the narrative into a chronological account or restorying (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis was then employed and in addition to a comparative analysis (Hunter, 2010). Please see chapter three for additional details regarding the study’s guiding assumptions, design, and methodological considerations.

**Significance**

Aligned with the guiding research questions, the methodological choices of this study provided an intended pathway to the study’s implications beyond the individual. Previous scholarship has used the methodological approach to “…illustrate how stories can have effects beyond their meanings for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging, and collective action” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). The study followed this tradition by connecting the research findings to the broader issue of underrepresentation of Multiracial students in college access research. The absence of research on Multiracial students’ experiences in college access is problematic as the U.S. Census Bureau projects that the number of Multiracial Americans will triple by 2060 with many entering the postsecondary age range within the next decade (Pew Research Center, 2015; U.S. Census, 2011).
Outline of Dissertation

In total, this dissertation consists of five chapters, references, and appendixes. This first chapter provided an introduction and overview of the Multiracial population within the United States and in higher education. Additionally, chapter one reviews the benefits of postsecondary education and the state of college access and success initiatives. Postsecondary access information was paired with outcomes and statistics on postsecondary success to highlight the unique placement of Multiracial students in the broader conversation. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature on college access, Multiracial students and institutions’ access and support structures, Multiracial identity development, as well as prominent college choice and enrollment models. Chapter two ends with a description of the selected theoretical frame for the study (Perna, 2006). Chapter three provides an overview of the methodology guiding the study including: research design, data collection, data analysis strategies, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. Chapter four summarizes the findings of the study with attention to the guiding research questions. Narratives are presented and major themes in participants’ narratives are compared. The fifth and final chapter discusses the findings contextualized by relevant literature and the guiding research questions. Finally, the appendix section consists of documentation from The Ohio State University’s institutional review board, consent form, demographic questionnaire, interview protocol, focus group protocol, and any other significant documentation that contributed to the research.
Summary

This chapter provided an overall introduction to the study. The problem statement was detailed and supported via review of Multiracial demographic data and college access data. Key terms frequently used throughout this dissertation were provided and defined. Additionally, the study’s rationale was addressed. The purpose and design of the study was reviewed with attention to the research question, population, as well as data collection and analysis. Finally, an outline of the dissertation was provided, as this completed dissertation serves as the final report of the research study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

When investigating Multiracial students and how they perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources, a broad perspective should be taken to better understand the context of the phenomenon. To situate the study, it is necessary to review the relevant literature exploring the origins and key components of college access in the United States. Here, college access literature is paired with college choice research to provide a detailed understanding of the entire college access journey. As this study focuses on Multiracial students, their experiences with postsecondary access and support structures as well as Multiracial identity development are examined. The chapter ends with a review of the selected theoretical frame for the present study (Perna, 2006).

College Access

There is a long and well-documented connection between underrepresented students and low rates of degree attainment. Despite the increase in college enrollment over the past 10 years, students from underrepresented backgrounds such as first-generation college-going, low-income, and racial minority continue to be less likely to enter and succeed in college (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Research has indicated that there are many reasons why these student populations are not as successful as their majority peers: Lack of academic preparedness (Atherton, 2014; Greene & Winters, 2005; Kirst & Bacco, 2004), access to college knowledge (Brown, Whon, Ellison, 2016; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Tierney & Venegas, 2009), and postsecondary aspirations (Buchman & Park, 2009; Goyette, 2008) are major obstacles in underrepresented
students’ postsecondary success. These key factors contribute to the success, or lack thereof, of underrepresented students enrolling in and completing higher education. One way that federal, state, and community leaders have aimed to address postsecondary inequality is through the implementation of college access programming. Despite millions of dollars and uncountable hours expended over the last five decades, postsecondary inequalities remain.

Between 1975 and 2013 the United States saw a 17% increase in the number of students who enrolled in college immediately following high school completion. However, the difference in immediate enrollment between high-income and low-income students endured (NCES, 2014b). When looking at more recent trends, The Condition of Education (2017) reported that between 2000-2015, immediate college enrollment rates for all students increased by 6% and the gap between low-income and high-income students’ immediate college enrollment rates narrowed. Additionally, there are differences in enrollment rates by race. Within the same 2000-2015 timeframe, White and Asian students continued to outpace their Black and Hispanic peers in immediate college enrollment.

The immediate college enrollment rate for White students was higher in 2015 (70 percent) than in 2000 (65 percent), as was the rate for Hispanic students (67 percent in 2015 and 49 percent in 2000). The enrollment rate for Asian students was also higher in 2015 (87 percent) than in 2003 (74 percent). The immediate
college enrollment rate for Black students in 2015 was not measurably different from the rate in 2000. (McFarland et al., 2017, p. 235)

There were noticeable increases in immediate college enrollment for all students, except for Black students. It should also be noted that a Two or More Race statistic is not provided for immediate college enrollment. However, general enrollment for students identifying with two or more races decreased by 4% between 2000 and 2015 (McFarland et al., 2017). Given continued disparities outlined above, both racial and economic inequalities are important to explore in Americans’ access to higher education.

More than 50 years after the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, the path to postsecondary education and the system of supports available to students differ vastly for different demographics. Specifically, as the abovementioned literature supports, students from low-income backgrounds and/or who are racial minorities are less likely to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Baum et al., 2013; Lumina Foundation, 2014). To understand how multiracialism potentially disrupts an already fragile system of support, the foundations of college access must be reviewed. Accordingly, here, I review a definition of college access and the context of the field’s key services as well as how postsecondary institutions have addressed race in support and access structures.

**Background of College Access Initiatives**

The mid-1960s saw the birth of college access initiatives implemented first by the federal government and then by local governments and community organizations.
College access is part of U.S. policy makers’ programs to supplement school-based learning in order to alleviate the persisting gaps in who enrolls and completes American postsecondary education (Swail & Perna, 2002). College access programming and policies at the federal level set the tone for the type of services provided in the field. Generally, college access programming ensures that students graduate high school with the skills necessary to enroll in and complete higher education. Specifically, services and programs are designed to increase academic preparedness, increase college aspirations and knowledge, and decrease financial barriers (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015). Within a secondary school, these components combine to create a college-going culture among students, parents, and staff (Oakes, 2003).

The attributes of governmental and nongovernmental programs are almost universal in that key services aim to reverse larger negative societal inequities that impact the American education system. The areas of academic preparation and access to college knowledge provide students and their families with the opportunity to learn about their options after high school and the requirements to pursue those options. Aspirations are consistently cited as an area of service for college access programming (Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail et al., 2012) and are operationalized through conveying a consistent message and expectation that all students can enroll in and complete postsecondary education. These key areas reviewed here are part of a larger body of literature that informs educators and practitioners on how to enhance the environment, practices, and attitudes
of schools and communities as it relates to college preparation, enrollment, and completion (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009).

**Academic Preparation**

Academic preparation is a leading starting place in the investigation of the persisting gap in underrepresented students’ postsecondary enrollment and completion. There are many ways that academic preparation is measured. Depending on the research, it is defined in terms of course offerings completed and grades earned, standardized test scores, or the concept of proficiency versus being college-ready (Atherton, 2014; Chait & Venezia, 2009; Greene & Winters, 2005). How academic college-readiness is defined is of importance as it has the potential to change the size of the college-ready population and the services provided as a college access resource. ACT, a recognized leader in the college choice process, created college and career readiness benchmarks that aligned with its ACT college entrance exam (commonly employed for 11th and 12th grade students) and the ACT Aspire exam, which has benchmarks for students 3rd through 10th grade. The benchmarks are academic subject level specific and provide context for overall comprehensive scores (ACT, 2016). These types of clear guidelines support promoting college readiness. However, some students still experience a disconnect between college readiness indicators and their personal performance. Scholars have found that students who perform poorly on standardized tests and have lower high school grade point averages still self-report positive academic abilities (Atherton, 2014; Bunchmann & Park, 2009).
Academic preparation falls within the context of K-12 education. The quality of K-12 education, including academic rigor, in the United States is closely associated with neighborhood and/or financial resources. Higher income families have access to better-resourced schools through well-funded neighborhood schools or the ability to provide alternatives to their neighborhood school in the form of out-of-classroom academic experiences or enrolling in a private school (Condron & Roscigno, 2003). To this end, who lives where becomes an important factor in predicting academic preparation for postsecondary enrollment (Condron & Roscigno, 2003). Neighborhoods are also where the effects of major identity dimensions become difficult to disaggregate. Low-income communities in the United States often have disproportionate populations of racial minorities. In 2006, Black students attended schools in which 59% of their classmates were low-income; this is an increase of 16% since 1988 (Orfield, 2009). Statistics from 2015 show uncomfortable realities for children living in poverty. Disaggregated by race, 11% of Asian, 32% of American Indian/Alaskan Native, 36% of Black, 30% of Hispanic, 22% of Pacific Islander, 12% of White, and 19% of children who are Two or More Races were living in poverty in the United States (McFarland et al., 2017).

**Access to College Knowledge**

An unfortunate reality of the American educational system is that even the most academically gifted student may not enter and complete postsecondary education. Despite national policy and local efforts, it is more likely for a low achieving high-income student to graduate from college than a high achieving low-income student (Cruz,
underrepresented students, entering and persisting through college is a web of complex negotiations through academic, financial, and social norms. Lack of college-ready skills and qualifications necessary are compounded as parents and students often overestimating the cost of college, making college aspiration, enrollment, and completion less likely to occur (Greene & Winters, 2005; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Nienhusser & Oshio, 2017; Tierney & Venegas, 2009).

College knowledge is vital to postsecondary education access, but for many underrepresented students this information rests beyond the boundaries of their networks. The gap in knowledge is not an issue of actually accessing the information, as students have access to a wide array of college information. However, students encounter obstacles when attempting to interpret and use said information (Brown, Wohn, Ellison, 2016). College access programs aim to enhance students’ networks through increasing the accessibility of college knowledge resources by serving as knowledge translators.

French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1977) coined the term social capital in discussions about social mobility and reproduction. While there are many definitions of social capital, the definition most frequently used in educational research was developed by Coleman (1988). Coleman (1988) posited that social capital refers to access to information and opportunities through one’s social network that can lead to advantageous outcomes. Educational experiences that promote supportive relationships can serve as avenues to gain social capital that fosters postsecondary
enrollment and completion (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). The value of one’s capital is often determined by how many individuals comprise a network. In school contexts, institutional agents, such as teachers, counselors, and college access advisors, provide social capital for underrepresented students and their families. Such institutional agents are important in providing knowledge about the college-going process and completing the necessary tasks to enroll (McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

The power of education to provide social mobility has been a motive for many college access programs. Funds provided to college access organizations seek to solve the underlying problem: the current K-12 pipeline is failing to adequately inform and prepare underrepresented students for postsecondary education. Thus resources must be directed to organizations to attend to the leaks in the pipeline. In recent years, state-level policy makers have worked to restructure the educational pipeline for all students, moving from a K-12 to a K-16 perspective including job placement as an additional concern (Ewell, Jones, & Kelly, 2012). College access programs build social capital for underrepresented students through formalized promotion of human capital to underrepresented students’ networks (NCAN, 2016a; Swail & Perna, 2002; Swail et al., 2012). Building underrepresented students’ networks assists in the navigation of the complex postsecondary system and the accumulation of college access resources, both social and economic.

Research demonstrates the types of information and tasks that correlate with increased postsecondary educational access, further supporting the importance of
building students’ social capital (Lareau, 2011; NCAN, 2016a; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

However, underrepresented students do not participate in these activities at the same rate as their well-resourced peers (Bennett, Lutz, Jayaram, 2012; Kao, 2004; Shoji, Haskins, Raigel, & Sorensen, 2014). A common issue is that key social capital agents in schools, such as school counselors, have other professional responsibilities that reduce the time available to build relationships with students and their families, assist them in completing college tasks, and offer college knowledge (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; McDonough, 2004). College access programs provide additional support and human capacity so that families have access to assistance and the college knowledge needed to develop and implement a college access and college choice pathway.

**Aspirations**

Promoting college access and success requires the cultivation of aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in postsecondary education. Ideal college access resources are tangible, pervasive, and beneficial for students. Additionally, effective college access programming necessitates a targeted approach to serving students by supporting their salient social realities (Maynard et al, 2014). Research indicates that American students generally have postsecondary aspirations, yet many students’ dreams of earning a postsecondary credential go unrealized (Buchmann & Park, 2009). Goyette (2008) examined students’ college aspirations finding that all students, no matter their background, are likely to claim aspirations to attend college. Expanding access to postsecondary education has increased
the possibility of students believing that they are able to go to college. However, moving away from a college for some to a more inclusive idea of college for all has not made a large impact in the reduction of social stratification (Lumina Foundation, 2014).

Many factors are associated with college aspirations including socioeconomic status, academic ability, academic performance, parental expectations, significant others’ expectations, and parental education (Goyette, 2008). More recent research shows how social media is serving as a form of social capital for underrepresented students during their postsecondary journey (Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, & Gray, 2013). The social networks that underrepresented students create online are filling their social capital support gap (Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, & Gray, 2013). It is within these makeshift networks that underrepresented students may find themselves modifying their postsecondary aspirations based on secondhand information. Disparities in underrepresented students’ aspirations for postsecondary education also show the disconnect in social capital within K-12 education. Indeed, providing students with guidance about the critical support areas of academic preparation and access to college knowledge gives them realistic ideas about what is required to not only aspire to postsecondary education, but also to enroll and complete their chosen program.

Acknowledging the abovementioned key factors, college access programming has demonstrated that when developed and implemented in a targeted manner, they are successful at providing impactful opportunities for underrepresented students (Maynard et al., 2014). College access programing has a positive impact on first-generation and
low-income students including summer transition programs that increase college matriculation (Castleman & Page, 2014; Hicks, 2005) and increased levels of college knowledge (Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007). Other more targeted programming for low-income minority students is shown to increase college enrollment and the completion of the first year of postsecondary education (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). However, due to significant issues of capacity, not all evaluations of college access programs’ efforts are rigorous (if an evaluation is completed at all) (Gandara & Bial, 2001; Swail & Perna, 2002). Evaluations are also limited because Multiracial students are often sorted amongst their monoracial peers in postsecondary education research, particularly in the college access literature. Not only is the field left to wonder if there are any distinct differences in college access experiences for Multiracial students, but also about their rates of participation in college access programming. In sum, college access programs must direct more resources to evaluation and, when appropriate, provide outcome data for Multiracial students as well as their monoracial peers. In the next subsection, I review an area of research that has begun to recognize Multiracial students’ experiences, postsecondary access and support structures.

Multiracial Students and Postsecondary Access and Support Structures

Although organizations dedicated to and inclusive of Multiracial experiences in higher education were increasingly appearing on college campuses in the mid-1990s (Ozaki & Johnston, 2008), postsecondary institutions were not required to track or collect Multiracial-specific demographic data until 2010 (Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016;
Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). In 1997, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget issued a directive to provide the option of choosing more than one race on institutional forms. However, the Department of Education, aligned with many higher education institutions, pushed back, stating that the implementation of a Multiracial-inclusive demographic data system would be more burdensome than anticipated and required an extension of the January 1, 2003, deadline (Kean, 2006). The final guidance for higher education was issued by the Department of Education in 2007, and, although it encouraged institutions to implement the two-part question as soon as possible, the new deadline was not until autumn 2010 (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008). Individuals were to be allowed to select as many race options as they wanted, with those selecting more than one race being placed in the Two or More Races category (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Allowing students to select more than one race category provides a base for understanding how new generations of students entering and completing postsecondary education identify and acknowledge the existence of multiracialism. Conversely, the 2010 directives are concerning given the collapsing of all Multiracial students into one Two or More Races category. Having all individuals who select more than one race included in the Two or More Races category does not account for the variations in self-identification and the multitude of heritages/cultures contained within the category (Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016). In an effort to have multiracialism acknowledged, the uniqueness of Multiracial students has become invisible in aggregated federal and institutional data (Lucas, 2014). Despite its flaws, data from the Two or More Races
category provides postsecondary institutions with a better understanding of their student population, including the number of student who identify with more than one race.

Literte (2010) examined how Multiracial identity comes into conflict with the way many institutions organize race-oriented student services (ROSS). By investigating Multiracial students’ perceptions of and participation in ROSS, Literte exposed flaws in how postsecondary institutions operationalize racial identities on their campuses. ROSS emerged as part of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s as minority students on campuses throughout the United States fought to be represented and supported in American higher education (Williams, 2006). ROSS served as symbolic and physical representations of minorities on campuses and were structured on monoracial identities. There continue to be ROSS-related services provided, but these services are are often inferior to those received by other student services (Literte, 2010). Increasing capacity and support for different ROSS is often seen as a zero-sum game for minority organizations and can potentially cause conflict between monoracial and Multiracial organizations (Literte, 2010; Ozaki & Johnston, 2008).

Zero-sum identity politics on college campuses, or the idea that there is finite space and/or resources for racial identities, mirror larger societal issues, with some monoracial leaders shaming Multiracial individuals for dividing the cause, as seen in the debates that took place surrounding the prospect of adding a Multiracial option to the 2000 U.S. Census (Williams, 2006). Monoracial minority civil rights organizations including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mexican
American Legal Defense Fund, and the National Asian Pacific American Legal
Consortium opposed the addition of the option fearing racial flight (Espiritu & Omi, 2000). It was believed that a mass exodus of individuals who previously identified as one of the monoracial minority categories would disrupt accurate measurement of racial minority communities’ needs. Indeed, political and personal motivations have a major influence in how ROSS are designed, implemented, and communicated. This is compounded by historical ideas of the purpose of ROSS. Asserting a Multiracial identity challenges historical boundaries of ROSS at postsecondary intuitions, as Literte (2010) argued, “…the nature of ROSS’ historical origins and commitments to students of color, and biracial students’ nuanced and complex racial experiences, almost inevitable breed a disconnect between the two” (p. 127). Current perceptions assist in the enactment of institutional limits that are built on larger racial histories and politics.

**Multiracialism and Perceptions**

The perceptions of Multiracial individuals are related to the Multiracial individual and the person perceiving them (Herman, 2010; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2009). One of the first studies on how Multiracial individuals were visually perceived was conducted by Peery and Bodenhausen (2009). The authors found that, with time, individuals were able to racially ascribe ambiguous Black/White faces as Multiracial; however, under time constraints, categorizations aligned with hypodescent norms in which individuals are categorized to the “lowest” status group within the United States’ racial hierarchy. Research supports hypodescent and racial hierarchy when categorizing and perceiving
Multiracial individuals, even when the option for either race is equally presented (Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji, 2011). Herman (2010) built on previous literature and found part-Black Multiracial youth were more likely to be seen as Black. These Multiracial youth also were more likely define themselves as Black when forced to chose only one racial category (Herman, 2010).

These research findings support the “one drop rule,” or the disbelief in the existence of any Biracial or Multiracial identity given the notion that “one drop” of minority “blood” or ancestry makes an individual a monoracial minority (Love, 2004). Originating in the American South, this “rule” has other titles including the “one black ancestor rule” and the “traceable amount rule” (Davis, 1991). The specific idea of part-Black Multiracial individuals identifying as Black has been explored in the literature, as some believe the growing Multiracial population in the United States crumbles the current racial paradigm and provides a space to improve how Americans racially identify (Daniels, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002). Others focus on the racial identity and ascription of part-Black Multiracial individuals, arguing that the one drop rule still shapes race in the United States (Khanna, 2011). The one message that can be taken from the research on part-Black Multiracial individuals is that there are multiple influences and perceptions that contribute to Multiracial identity.

Research has found conflicting perceptions of Multiracial identity; this reflects demographic differences in the United States. Investigations have shown Multiracial children are seen as having difficulty in social settings (Chelsey & Wagner, 2003; Harris,
2013; Jackman, Wagner, & Johnson, 2001). Scholarship at the college level has not provided more positive findings, highlighting that White college students viewed Multiracial students more negatively than their monoracial minority peers (Jackman et al., 2001). Additionally, there is a growing body of research on Multiracial microaggressions that provides evidence of the negative perception of Multiracial students (Harris, 2017; Johnston & Nadal, 2010). This is in contrast to research that found White media perceived Multiracial identity in a positive light (Thornton, 2009).

Some monoracial minorities see Multiracial identity as a negative step towards Multiracial individuals assuaging their inferior cultural heritage and minorities losing voice in the national civil rights conversation (Thorton, 2009).

Perceptions of multiracialism may impact Multiracial students’ access to and success in postsecondary education. Research supports a negative perception of Multiracial students when they seek out college access resources. Sanchez and Bonam (2009) used warmth, competence, and minority scholarship worthiness as indicators to measure perceptions of hypothetical Multiracial students. Findings suggest that Multiracial students were seen as colder and at times less competent than their monoracial White and minority peers. Additionally, Multiracial individuals were perceived as less qualified for minority scholarships than monoracial minorities. In their experimental study, Sanchez and Bonam’s (2009) participants were less likely to choose a Multiracial applicant for a minority scholarship when applicants disclosed their multiple heritages. This led the authors to question if Multiracial individuals should
disclose their Multiracial background when seeking out postsecondary access resources, such as minority scholarships. The authors found that a Multiracial identifier not only made the applicant seem less scholarship worthy and less competent, but also made the Multiracial student applicant vulnerable to negative feedback, which affected the applicant’s mood and self esteem. Recently, Freeman, Pauker, and Sanchez (2016) found evidence of bias towards Multiracial individuals when investigating Multiracial prejudice and interracial exposure.

The challenges faced by postsecondary institutions in acknowledging and providing support services for Multiracial students are logistical and ideological. King (2008) recommends that postsecondary institutions “create space” for Multiracial students through the development of student programs. However, the abovementioned scholarship shows that most postsecondary institutions may only have three to nine years of disaggregated data to develop or implement an institutional response to a growing Multiracial population (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008; Literte, 2010; Lucas, 2014). The absence of demographic data on Multiracial students, combined with competition for funding among student groups and conflicting perceptions of multiracialism leaves higher education, in some instances, struggling to restructure student services to be inclusive of Multiracial students (Literte, 2010). Exploring the foundations of college access and postsecondary institutions’ access and support structures provides a macro level context for a personalized experience. An understanding of Multiracial identity development and the racial identities used by Multiracial individuals is critical to postsecondary
multiracial students.

**Multiracial Identity Development**

Exploration into identity development of multiracial individuals gained momentum in the early 1990s when researchers reconfigured current minority identity models to encompass the non-binary identities of multiracial students (e.g., Root, 1990; Poston, 1990). This scholarship extended what was known about multiracial identity development and offered healthy identity development trajectories. This was particularly important, as prior research suggested there were no avenues for healthy identity development for multiracial individuals (Stonequist, 1937). More recent studies on multiracial student identity center on three areas (Renn, 2008): patterns of identity (e.g., Huang & Stormshak, 2011; Renn, 2003), factors contributing to identity choice (e.g., Johnston et al., 2014; Johnston-Guerrero & Pecero, 2016; Renn, 2003; Townsend, Fryberg, Wilkins, & Markus, 2012; Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2012), and the psychological impact of a multiracial identity (e.g., Brittian, Umana-Taylor, & Derlan, 2013; Kellogg & Liddell, 2012).

**Patterns of Identity**

In the groundbreaking 1992 anthology *Racially Mixed People in America*, Root and other scholars explored how the multiracial experience in the United States was categorized and the importance of the freedom to name oneself. Root (1992) explained:
In essence, to name oneself is to validate one’s existence and declare visibility. This seemingly [simple] process is a significant step in the liberation of multiracial persons from the oppressive structure of the racial classification system that has regulated them to the land of “in between”. (p. 7)

Healthy identity resolution for Multiracial identity development research came in the early 1990s (Poston, 1990; Root, 1990). Root (1990) put forth four possible resolutions of Multiracial identity: (a) acceptance of the identity society assigns, (b) identification with both identity groups, (c) identification with a single racial group, and (d) identification with a new racial group. Root’s (1990) resolutions served as the foundation of Multiracial identity development scholarship, specifically in the area of patterns of identity. Renn (2008) found that patterns of identity stayed consistent across previous research despite a difference in the number of identities used by Multiracial individuals (Renn, 2003; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001).

Renn (2000, 2003) contributed to the major lines of literature of Multiracial college students by exploring the larger questions of “What are you?” and “How do you experience that identity?” Renn (2000) revisited Root (1990) and explored possible identity labels for Multiracial college students. Renn (2000, 2003) found five patterns of identity that aligned with Root’s (1990) foundational resolutions: (a) monoracial, which aligns with Root’s single racial group; (b) multiple monoracial identities or identification with both identity groups; (c) Multiracial identity, which aligns with Root’s new racial label; (d) extraracial identity, which was not a resolution presented by Root but
references a refusal to align with a racial identity; and (e) situational identity, which Renn states is inherent in Root’s resolutions (Renn, 2008). As Multiracial patterns of identity are explored, the difference in the conceptualization of race within identity development is critical to understanding how Multiracial students perceive themselves. Whereas Root’s (1990) resolutions crossed conceptualization of racial identity and racial ascription, Renn’s (2000, 2003) patterns can be used in describing all conceptualizations of race.

Scholars have examined general factors that contribute to the identity choices of students with parents of more than one racial category, including family influence, physical appearance, environment, and cultural knowledge (Johnston et al., 2014; Johnston-Guerrero & Pecero, 2016; Renn, 2003; Townsend et al., 2012; Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). As some researchers investigated how Multiracial individuals constructed their racial identity, others pushed the scholarship forward by exploring what factors would influence identity choice (Johnston et al., 2014; Johnston-Guerrero & Pecero, 2016; Renn, 2003; Townsend et al., 2012; Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2012).

Factors Contributing to Identity Choice

The most widely covered topic within the current research on Multiracial college students has been the general factors that contribute to the identity choices of Multiracial individuals. Several prominent factors include ancestry, family influence, physical appearance, environment, and cultural knowledge (Johnston et al., 2014; Johnston-Guerrero & Pecero, 2016; Renn, 2003; Townsend et al., 2012; Wallace, 2003;
Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Perhaps Wijeyesinghe’s (2012) work on an evolving factor model of Multiracial identity provides the most comprehensive list of factors. Updated in 2012 and depicted as a galaxy with the choice of racial identity at its core, Wijeyesinghe’s Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity includes factors that contribute to a Multiracial individual’s choice of racial identity. These factors include physical appearance, other social identities, cultural attachment, and social and historical contexts, which “orbit” around the choice and interact.

Townsend et al.’s (2012) research contributed a predictive analysis to generalize what Wijeyesinghe theorized as a highly personal and complicated process. Aligned with the researcher’s hypothesis, Townsend et al.’s (2012) findings supported the notions that Asian/White Biracial individuals were more likely to identify as Biracial than Black/White and Latino/White Biracial individuals. Middle class participants were more likely to identify as Biracial than working class individuals. Townsend et al.’s (2012) conclusions aligned with the notion of hypodescent racial identity, as the Biracial identity seemed to be more available to individuals whose identity (racial or socioeconomic) was higher in the United States’ hierarchy. These findings highlight the impact of societal connotations of racial and socioeconomic hierarchy in the United States (Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji, 2011).

In higher education research, Multiracial identity studies have found that navigating college environments, especially in race-based spaces, created obstacles for Multiracial student identity development (e.g., Harris, 2017; King, 2008; Literte, 2010;
Renn, 2003; Wallace, 2003). Through the exploration of Multiracial students’ experiences on college campuses, research has shown two major issues Multiracial students face that influence their racial identity: a student’s physical appearance and cultural knowledge (Renn, 2008).

Physical appearance is cited in the media and research as a powerful influence for Multiracial students. Former President Barack Obama is a great example of the power of physical appearance. At a 2007 event then Senator Obama was asked to racially identify and his response relates to his physical appearance. He stated, “I self-identify as African American — that's how I'm treated and that's how I'm viewed. I'm proud of it.” (CBS News, 2007). In Renn’s (2003) Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development, racially identified physical appearance is influenced by skin color, eye color, hair color, and hair texture; eye and nose shape; and body proportions.

Renn (2003, 2004) noted similarities in her findings to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1993) ecology model. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s ecology model as a conceptual framework, Renn situated the campus environment among the microsystems (classes, friends, roommates), mesosystem (combination of the microsystems), exosystem (federal policies, parents social position, faculty decisions), and macrosystem (historic trends and events, social forces, cultural expectations). Employing Bronfenbrenner’s model of ecology to the campus environment, Renn (2003) was able to highlight the campus spaces and population types allowing for racial border crossing, which is more likely to have increased inclusion and support for Multiracial students as they explored their
multiple heritages. In some cases Multiracial individuals recounted being invisible within the systems.

Renn (2003) and King (2008) expanded on the issue of Multiracial individuals feeling as though their multiple heritages were invisible. One of Renn’s participants described a time when a close friend did not know his background:

I think it’s a little different because some people don’t even realize that I’m half-Japanese. Actually, one of my good friends for a year or two just found out last semester. He was talking to my friend and they were talking about it, and they actually made a bet about me. He didn’t believe it, he was talking to my roommate, and he was surprised. (Renn, 2003, p. 110)

King also spoke of her personal experience as a college freshman with individuals asking her “What are you?” and the confusion surrounding her physical appearance. She noted, “…as a light-skinned multiracial woman with a racially ambiguous appearance and no knowledge of what my racial identity is because I was adopted, I was often miscategorized” (King, 2008, p. 36). Multiracial college students are faced with constant reminders from their peers to behave in a manner that matches their perceived racial and cultural appearance.

Physical appearance does not stand alone as the deciding factor for Multiracial identity development. Barack Obama stated that he racially identifies as how he is treated and perceived, however if Barack Obama did not have the cultural knowledge that accompanies an African American identity, research suggests that it would be more
difficult for him to declare an African American identity and have it accepted by others. One of Renn’s (2003) study participants spoke of not having ethnic (Filipino) traits, such as knowing Filipino foods and dialects, which created an uncertainty in her ability to find a sense of belonging and commonality with other Filipino students on her campus. This example aligns with the work of Wallace (2003) who found that students who have “cultural legitimacy and loyalty” issues with a racial group encountered obstacles of acceptance that influenced their identity development. Renn (2003) described the impact that student groups have on Multiracial identity, “Feelings of incongruity in microsystem groups of mono-racial peers led some students…to question their legitimacy to claim a particular racial identity” (p. 324). Cultural knowledge and physical appearance interact to influence personal and social experiences as well as identification with one or more races. Capturing the moments when identity development is influential for Multiracial students and what factors contribute to this identity has proven challenging, with scholars structuring research studies that focus on distinct periods of a person’s lifespan (e.g. adolescence, postsecondary education). This study focused on the college access and enrollment time frame to contribute to what is known about the interaction of Multiracial identity during the critical high school-to-postsecondary education transition.

**Psychological Impact**

As Multiracial students are permitted to have simultaneous membership as well as multiple fluid identities (Root, 1992), the choice of identity is often related to the context in which the individual finds him or herself at the time. The reviewed literature examined
the patterns of and contributions to Multiracial individuals’ identity development. Here, I reviewed what has been found to be the psychological impact of environments and Multiracial individual identity choices.

Kellogg and Liddell (2012) reported on the psychological impact of critical moments for Multiracial students at two institutions. Outcomes were categorized into four categories with multiple subcategories: confronting race and racism (realizing the saliency of race, encountering racism), responding to external definitions (dealing with racial ambiguity, checking one box), defending legitimacy (questioning academic legitimacy, challenging racial legitimacy), affirming racial identity (possessing racial and cultural knowledge, sharing similar experiences). In sum, racial encounters, both positive and negative, with those around them, impacted Multiracial students' psychologically via racial consciousness.

When elaborating on participants’ responses to external definitions of their race, Kellogg and Liddell (2012) found that Multiracial identity can sometimes be ambiguous, which leaves openings for others’ asserting racial ascriptions. This often leads to a Multiracial student becoming more aware of and interested in defining their race for themselves, both informally in social settings and formally on official documentation, while also having a firm understanding of what their chosen label means to them. Other scholars have contributed to this line of research by investigating possible commonalities in meaning making among Multiracial students. Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck (2007) investigated the potential difference in how monoracial students and Multiracial students
understand the construct of race. Their investigation was not only to observe any variance in racial understanding but also to discern if a different understanding of race and the inclusion of an individual’s racial identity in a given situation could predict psychological impact. The researchers found that Multiracial individuals were more likely to understand race as a social construction than their monoracial peers.

Combining the literatures of Multiracial identity development and racial identification scholars allow for an examination of the psychological impact of Multiracial identity choices. Due to the noted fluidity of Multiracial identity for some individuals, research highlights the negative effects of inconsistency and instability of the self-concept, a key area when investigating patterns of identity in Multiracial individuals (Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia, 2009). Psychological impact of an inconsistent Multiracial identity is found throughout the individual’s lifespan, from early adolescence through college-age individuals (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006). Multiracial adolescents who changed their racial label within a five-year time frame were found to have lower self-esteem than their peers who held one racial label (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006).

Sanchez, Shih, and Garcia (2009) tested the proposal of malleable racial identification. A malleable racial identification refers to the act of an individual having more than one racial identification depending on their environment. The authors found evidence of an increased propensity for depression or lower psychological well-being was associated with malleability in racial identification and was predicted by a Multiracial individual’s unstable regard for their Multiracial identity. These research
findings are alarming for the psychological well-being of Multiracial individuals, as a malleable identity is a common identity pattern (Pew Research Center, 2015; Renn, 2003). Additionally, the current monoracial-centered model of ROSS at many postsecondary institutions and college access programs promotes malleable racial identification (Literte, 2010).

**Multiracial Identity Development Summary**

Important aspects of understanding Multiracial identity include patterns of identity, factors that contribute to their chosen identity, and the psychological effects of those choices. This subsection of Multiracial identity development examined foundational patterns of Multiracial identity and their evolution in the literature, paying particular attention to the conceptualization of race. Factors that contribute to Multiracial identity were discussed. Specifically, the impact of physical appearance and cultural knowledge was addressed. Finally, psychological effects of Multiracial identity from various lenses were reviewed.

**College Choice and Underrepresented Students**

This study focused on college access and thus, I will now review college choice literature to provide a guide for understanding access to postsecondary education by exploring both models (economic, sociological) and predictors (student characteristics) of students’ college choice journey. For the past three decades, college choice scholars have made significant contributions to the body of literature framing and attempting to predict student enrollment. As the scholarship advanced, so did perspectives on critical
predictors in underrepresented students’ college choice and access programming designed to increase completion of enrollment predictors. Of the many college choice models published during the 1960s through the 1980s, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model became the most widespread. Its popularity can be attributed to its comprehensiveness and ease of use in empirical testing.

This section reviews Hossler and Gallager’s (1987) college choice model, as well as how scholars advanced the model to incorporate underrepresented students’ experiences. Without specific research on Multiracial students’ experiences in the college choice process, I lean on the existing scholarship of underrepresented students, with attention to Black students. An attention to Black students may be applicable given all the Multiracial students in this study were affiliated with a Black racial identity.

A College Choice Model’s Utility for Underrepresented Students

In 2012, close to eight million underrepresented students enrolled in postsecondary education (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). Several trends exist in the type of institutions chosen by underrepresented students when compared to their White peers. Although underrepresented students made up 40% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education that year, they account for 45% of all community college students and 53% of all students at for-profit institutions (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). This is problematic for a number of reasons. Most importantly, research supports that underrepresented students often require additional support services to enter and persist in postsecondary education; and community college and for-profits institutions often have
limited support systems (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). Additionally, for-profit institutions have been investigated for predatory marketing and enrollment practices that involve recruiting students regardless of their academic ability to perform college-level coursework (Iloh & Tierney, 2013; Seiden, 2009). As the abovementioned statistics support, there is a continuing gap in college access among student populations. By narrowing their sample demographics, researchers have found that Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model summarizes the college choice progress in a usable manner. However, the generalities gloss over important distinctions for different underrepresented populations.

Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model includes three stages of the postsecondary seeking process: predisposition, search, and choice. The first stage, predisposition, focuses on sociological factors such as income, peers, and involvement. The second stage is the search stage. Here, more postsecondary institutional components are addressed in how they assist students in developing choice sets. The final phase, choice, is when students chose or commit to an institution and matriculates (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

**Stage One: Predisposition**

In the original creation of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model, ages were not assigned to the three stages. However, later research aligns the predisposition stage with the middle school years, specifically the seventh grade (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). During this stage, involvement and engagement patterns, especially those that are associated with postsecondary success, are formed (Hill & Tyson, 2009). As such, the predisposition stage attends to the factors that impact students’
postsecondary expectations and aspirations (e.g., demographics characteristics, involvement characteristics, and interactions with higher education institutions (Perna & Titus, 2005). Outcomes of the predisposition stage center on academic ability as well as career and educational aspirations.

Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee (1997) used Hossler and Gallagher’s model to investigate the college application behaviors of different racial/ethnic groups as a means of understanding the college choice process of underrepresented students. Results revealed gaps in all three stages for underrepresented students, with particular focus on the factors that influenced predisposition. Hamrick and Stage’s (2004) quantitative investigation of eighth-grade students reinforced the known impact that parental expectations have on a student’s predisposition to postsecondary enrollment. However, results highlighted the complications that arise when parents have high expectations with limited supportive resources, leaving students to themselves to translate postsecondary aspiration to positive postsecondary results. The importance of integrating parents into the college choice process within the high school and higher education contexts is supported by scholarly investigation. When exploring who influenced predisposition scholars found an association between Black male students’ postsecondary success and their father’s level of education, thus integration of the male role model in a Black male student’s college choice process supports positive predisposition to postsecondary enrollment (Hine & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).
Stage Two: Search

Associated with the 10th through 12th grades, the search stage is marked by students seeking out additional information about postsecondary institutions (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000). Students tend to have a short list of institutions which they accumulate information; this list is influenced by adult encouragement (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). At this stage, peer influence also gains greater importance. When parents are not able to provide direction for the creation of a choice set, students often seek out the advice of additional significant others in learning about postsecondary options. In addition to the input of significant others, outcomes from the predisposition stage combine with school and community resources to narrow the college choice set (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000).

Galotti and Mark (1994) conducted a longitudinal investigation and found that parental education, academic ability, and informational sources impacted students’ postsecondary decision-making. Additional, studies using Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college search stage found the need to adjust the boundaries of the stage when applying to Black students and their parents. Observing the imbalance in Black student enrollment by gender, Smith and Fleming (2006) examined parent involvement in Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) search stage. The authors found that parents were more involved in the college choice process overall and their postsecondary aspirations differed depending of the student’s gender. Contextualized, these unique differences were put forth to explain the gender imbalances in the Black collegiate population.
Stage Three: Choice

The final stage of the model, the choice stage, is the culmination of the factors and outcomes of the previous two stages. Generally occurring in the 11th and 12th grades, the choice stage includes the important factors of specific institutional characteristics and the family’s perceived ability to pay the costs associated with attending the institution. These major factors inform the final institutional list that students will use to choose their postsecondary future. Technical outcomes associated with this stage include increased awareness of institutional characteristics and financial aid as well as the submission of financial aid and college applications (Cabera & LaNasa, 2000). The final outcome of this stage, and that of the college choice process as a whole, is the student selecting an institution and completing the enrollment process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Research supports that students, especially underrepresented students, reacted differently to various changes in college cost even if the economic value of the changes were the same (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Heller, 1997). Indeed, this impact is supported in underrepresented students’ overrepresentation at two-year and for-profit institutions (Iloh & Tierney, 2013).

With the publication of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) model of college choice, researchers began to narrow the focus of sample populations in their research. Indeed, scholars examined the unique experiences of minority populations including racial/ethnic groups and low-income students (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hurtado et al., 1997). To that end, college choice literature no longer assumed college as a choice for all students and
began to provide unique contributions to the issues of college access for all student populations.

**College Choice and Underrepresented Students Summary**

This section reviewed college choice literature to provide a framework for understanding access to postsecondary education through an economic and sociological lens as well as student characteristics that have been used as predictors for postsecondary enrollment. The three stages of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model (predisposition, search, and choice) were reviewed in their original manifestation. Each stage was then reviewed from an underrepresented student lens using previous research that highlights limitation of the model in relation to the experiences of underrepresented students. Indeed, scholars found that although a useful model for summarizing the major components of college access and choice, the generalities neglected critical experiences for underrepresented populations. Thus, the next section reviews the theoretical framework by Perna (2006), which is inclusive of the experiences of underrepresented students.

**Theoretical Framework**

In addition to the reviewed literature concerning Multiracial students’ identity development, their higher education experiences, and previous college choice models I now turn to a review of the guiding theoretical framework of the study, a Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment (Perna, 2006).
**Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment**

The relationship between college access and college choice research is such that college access is a foundational assumption for college choice and college choice is an essential component of college access’ ultimate outcome. College access literature often serves as a springboard for college choice researchers to use in their efforts to understand the process, information, and factors critical to students’ postsecondary choice. As a whole, college choice research is undertaken with the general assumption that the student has access to postsecondary education (Bergerson, 2009). However, patterns of enrollment show that underrepresented students’ college access, and ultimately their college choice, is limited as seen in their over representation at for-profit and two-year institutions (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). Perna’s (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment is a most helpful framework when exploring college access literature in college choice as it is guided by three important assumptions: (a) to fully understand the college enrollment process multiple theoretical perspectives should be included, (b) college enrollment processes happen and are influenced by multiple contexts and, (c) college enrollment is not universal and varies across groups (Perna, 2006). These assumptions and the model’s multiple contexts recognize and allow space for the unique experiences of all students.

To understand college choice with a more inclusive approach that is applicable to different populations or groups of students, leading scholar Perna (2006) advanced four contextual considerations. The model itself centers around components of human capital
theory. Specifically, that a student’s college enrollment is based on a costs/benefits comparison of monetary and nonmonetary benefits, college costs, and foregone earnings. Academic achievement and financial resources influence the student’s comparison. Overall, this comparison is nested within four contextual layers. The first layer is the student and family context; the second layer is the school and community context; the third layer is the higher education context; and the fourth is the social, economic, and policy context. Figure 3.1. is a visualization of the model.

Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment with policy linkages
When applying this model, choice and access literature have unique considerations. For Multiracial students, the contexts have similarities to Renn’s (2003, 2004) systems, her ecology model situated the campus environment and Multiracial experiences within them. Whereas Renn (2003, 2004) examined the college environment, Perna’s (2006) model allows for an exploration of the spaces and influences during a Multiracial student’s transition to college.

**Student and family context.** This innermost layer “…may be understood as the internationalized system of thoughts beliefs, and perceptions that is acquired from the immediate environment” (Perna & Kurban, 2013, p. 14). This context aligns with the idea of habitus or how an individual perceives the world and how they respond to it (Bourdieu, 1977). Unlike the general literature, for African American students, the family context can be interpreted not by whether a family member attended higher education or earned a college degree, but rather, as the family wanting the student to achieve beyond the level of other family members (McDonough, 1997).

When examining the student and family context, African American students report higher rates of self-motivation (avoidance of what students do not wish to become). This can cause internal conflict based on the access literature, which suggests that these students, although self-motivated from the unique student and family context, lack the social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college enrollment procedures (Freeman, 2005). Family context and its role in influencing college choice can also have important interpretations within the Latino community. For example, Battle and
Lewis (2002) found that the value of *familismo*, or a profound devotion to family demonstrating a sense of obligation to the family network, can overshadow individual aspirations, such as educational attainment. As a more collectivistic than individualistic nature of college/society as a whole, this value can influence Latino students’ college choice in that they may choose a college close to home, which sometimes means a community college. Aside from the impact on college choice, college access literature recognizes this proximity to family as an emotional support system for students throughout the college journey (Martinez, 2013).

School and community context. The next layer of context in Perna’s model is the school and community context. Here, as with the access literature, choice literature also makes clear that social structures can promote or inhibit student enrollment. Both in access and Perna’s model of enrollment, institutional agents provide access to resources and opportunities (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton–Salazar, 1997). The school and community context is of particular importance for Multiracial students during the college choice progress as students look to institutional agents for guidance and college knowledge. However, Harris (2013) found conflicting perceptions among school counselors of Multiracial students.

Perna (2006) stated this context is driven by “availability of resources, types of resources, and structural supports and barriers” (p.117). Available resources are often a reflection of the demographics of the community. Schools are often described with similar demographic assumptions of race, class, and gender; often with schools that have
larger minority, or low-income/working class populations being seen as inferior, from an access perspective, in providing resources and supports than those of their White, middle-to-upper class counterparts (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). With regard to Multiracial students, Harris (2013) found that there are distinctions in school counselors’ perceptions of Multiracial students. Patterns in perceptions were dependent upon a counselor’s length of employment, grade level of students served, and the racial diversity of the counselor’s school. Without an understanding of Multiracial student academic and behavioral outcomes or the ability to identify Multiracial students, institutional agents in the school and community context (such as school counselors) are not properly equipped to assist all students in the college choice process.

Aligned with college choice and access research Hurtado et al. (1997) found that underrepresented students who do enroll in postsecondary education are undermatching. Although Black students have high college aspirations, they rank second only to Latinos for students who have not applied to college by the end of their senior of high school. Hurtado et al. (1997) found those who did enroll were significantly less likely to report enrollment in their first choice institution than their White peers. Closer examination of these findings can relate not to the preparedness or aspirations of Black students, but the availability of institutional agents to assist students in completion of key college access milestones that promote college access and the ability to fully exercise the college choice process (NCAN, 2016; Stanton–Salazar, 1997).
**Higher education context.** The third context is the higher education context, which recognizes the role higher education institutions play in influencing college choice. Here, the connection between access literature and choice literature resides in whether students perceive institutions as accessible (based upon consistency with their personal and social identities) (Perna & Kurban, 2013). College choice and access is influenced by postsecondary institutions’ targeted interventions. Hoxby and Turner (2013) found that low-income, high-achieving students were more likely to attend a selective institution when provided with institutional information designed for that specific student. If underrepresented students are unable to find a sense of belonging at an institution, mismatch can occur. Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as having seven core elements, the third of which is that a sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, times, and among certain populations. For underrepresented students, the college choice timeframe is one of heightened importance, both socially and financially.

Belonging literature is best paired with Multiracial microaggression themes to highlight the role higher education context plays in Multiracial student college choice (Harris, 2017; Johnston & Nadal, 2010). Johnston and Nadal (2010) posited five themes of Multiracial microaggressions. Of the five themes, three can be operationalized within the higher education context: exclusion and isolation, assumption of a monoracial identity, and denial of a multiracial reality. These microaggressions can happen when institutions market, or do not market, minority college access resources to potential
students. Nora (2004) found through an investigation of precollege psychosocial factors that students chose to attend institutions where they felt they were accepted and fit in, which are key aspects of sense of belonging. Coupled with Multiracial microaggression themes, these experiences can effect sense of belonging and college choice for Multiracial students.

Additionally, access research supports that aside from a lack of academic preparation, researchers and policymakers agree that the cost of college is the largest deterrent for low-income students to postsecondary education (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). This context highlights how underrepresented students' college access and choice decisions are disproportionately effected by changes in postsecondary costs (St. John & Noell, 1989). Chen and DesJardins (2008) explored race and ethnicity when capturing the reality of financial aid and its impact, both positive and negative, on various students. The authors found underrepresented students who were offered and received greater amounts of aid at their chosen institution, were more likely to enroll and persist. How higher education institutions market and display personal and social identities, in addition to what financial aid is offered can significantly impact college access and choice for underrepresented students (Heller, 1997; Nora, 2004).

**Social, economic, and policy context.** The final context Perna (2006) provided considers social, economic, and policy contexts. In this context, there is recognition that environmental considerations, such as demographic shifts and policy at the local, state, and federal level (e.g., state testing mandates, Pell Grant reform), can directly and
indirectly impact both access and choice. Within this context, one can connect choice with access literature by studying college enrollment trends during recessions. Scholarship demonstrates that students, including underrepresented students, were more likely to enroll in college and were more likely to stay in college during recessions. College-going rates have increased in every recession since the 1960s because of the decrease in the opportunity cost of attending (Brown & Hoxby, 2014). This particular economic context is postulated to apply to underrepresented students, particularly Latino students, and their increased likelihood to prioritize family income obligations over college enrollment (Battle & Lewis, 2002). Additionally, in terms of Multiracial students an increase in the overall population, Multiracial college enrollment, and research, such as the study presented here, supports Multiracial students’ college choice experiences in this context.

Perna and Thomas (2006) described the strengths of the model, which also provides evidence to its fit and contribution to this study:

By recognizing the role of multiple layers of context, the conceptual model assumes that the path to student success is not universal but may vary across racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups based on differences in culture, family resources, local school and community structures and supports, economic and social conditions, and public policies. (p. 11)
Using the Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment as the theoretical framework for the study provides structure and analysis guidance for the key contexts participants occupied as they perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources.

**Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment Summary**

This chapter subsection aimed to introduce and describe the chosen theoretical framework for the study, Perna’s (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment. The four contexts of the model were presented (student and family context, school and community context, higher education context, and social, economic, and policy context) and paired with relevant racial demographic research and college access literature to integrate the theoretical framework with the key components of the study.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed major areas of research that this study touches. The four areas reviewed were as follows: college access, including support for the provision of key college access services aligned with academic preparation, access to college knowledge, and aspirations; postsecondary institutions’ access and support structures; Multiracial identity development; and a review of college choice using Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model as a guide. Perna’s (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment was introduced as the study’s theoretical framework. Through a review of previous scholarship on college access, Multiracial students, and prevalent models on college choice and their components, this chapter has connected lines of literature that are at times paired, but not always explicitly combined.
Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

This chapter provides details on the research design and methodology that I employed to gain insight into the ways in which Multiracial students’ racial identity influenced how they perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. The design and methodology detailed for the present study is organized in eight sections: research questions, analytical paradigm, research design, data collection, data analysis strategies, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, as well as limitations and delimitations. I employed qualitative research methods to provide a thorough design that aimed to explore the significance of Multiracial student experiences in accessing postsecondary education. Qualitative research requires a research design and methodology that is unique to the phenomenon being studied (Watson, 2002).

Qualitative research crosses a broad range of academic fields and research traditions. As the strength of qualitative research rests in the methodology’s ability to reveal rich, in-depth details about a targeted phenomenon or population, it is well suited for this study. Qualitative research typically involves a densely contextualized report of an issue. Indeed, one key reason for choosing to conduct a qualitative research study is the need to present a complex, detailed understanding of Multiracial students’ college journey (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I relied on qualitative relational processes that were context dependent. Contextualizing participants’ accounts allowed for a better understanding of the specific environments that the participant deemed important to the situation (Josselson, 2011). The participants’ college journey experiences are
contextualized within Perna’s Conceptual Model of College Enrollment (2006), which displays the environments a student navigates as part of their college access and choice processes.

**Research Questions**

I employed a constructivist thematic narrative inquiry to investigate the ways in which Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. Three questions guided my research:

1) What pathways do Multiracial students take when accessing postsecondary education?

2) What college access resources do Multiracial students perceive as available for use?

3) How does a student’s Multiracial identity interact with college access pathways and resources utilized?

By answering these questions, this study contributes to the larger college access and college choice literature by providing college access and higher education professionals with the opportunity to learn about the ways that Multiracial students approach, prepare for, and enroll in postsecondary education.

**Analytical Paradigm**

I used a constructivist paradigm to focus the study on the perceptions and experiences of participants as they sought out resources in pursuing postsecondary enrollment. Constructivist researchers are guided by three basic assumptions. First,
constructivists understand that reality is socially created and as such the results of a study are formed through interactions between researcher and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Second, constructivist seeks to understand a phenomenon from those who experienced it (Kramp, 2004). Finally, those who prescribe to the paradigm emphasize that the values of the researcher cannot be separate from the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2014).

Constructivism is often seen and implemented as a philosophy. A descriptive and not prescriptive model, constructivism explains that the nature of knowledge is constructed based on the individuals who are currently discussing or experiencing an event, action, or process. As individuals create unique meanings of the event, action, or process, they make use of existing beliefs and experiences, thus making all knowledge tentative and subjective. The notion that reality is socially created is taken one step further, as constructivists reject that there is a single reality (Mertens, 2014). Given that there is no single reality, the multiple constructed realities of individuals may conflict. Put another way, the acceptance of the notion that reality is uniquely composed may result in different events, actions, and processes evoking different meaning for different people. The reality composed in the co-constructed narratives created from one-on-one semistructured interviews and focus groups as part of this study will serve as the accepted reality of the events, actions, or processes being discussed, which aligns with the basic assumptions of constructivism outlined above.
The constructivist paradigm is associated with many other labels including naturalistic, participatory action research, and hermeneutics (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lather, 1992). Hermeneutics are an appropriate association with the paradigm as constructivism grew out of the work of German philosophers’ quest to understand the study of interpretive understanding, or hermeneutics. Constructivism is seen as an opposite of positivism, which recognizes an objective reality, and postpostivism, which recognizes an imperfectly obtained objective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). A key figure in articulating the characteristics that distinguish constructivism was Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey (1976) made the difference between the natural sciences, Naturwissenschaft, and the human sciences, Geisteswissenschaft, clear, stating that the purpose of the natural sciences is explanation, whereas the purpose of the human sciences is to understand the meaning of social phenomena (Dilthey, 1976). Constructivist research is aligned with the human sciences in this distinction.

Given that each study participant’s reality, and therefore the findings of the study, is socially constructed, my choices in term of constructivist research are integral to understanding the significance and purpose of the research. Similar to the axiological characteristics of qualitative research, as a constructivist, I understand that research is value-laden and biases will occur throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007; 2013). Specifically, Creswell (2007) stated that constructivist researchers “…recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal,
cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21). Therefore my background and experiences, like those of the study’s participants, are not only active in the creation of the reality of the research but also the meaning of the research findings. Given constructivism’s three basic assumptions of a socially composed reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the need to understand a phenomenon from those who experienced it (Kramp, 2004) and acknowledgment that the values of a researcher cannot be separate from the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2014), I employed the constructivist paradigm to develop a study that provided participants and me with the opportunity to create meaning through the co-creation and interpretation of their narratives.

**Participant-Informants**

Multiracial students who participated in this study were incorporated into the research. Individuals who agreed to participate in this study and provided their narrative for analysis are considered participant-informants. This descriptor aligns with the idea that the individual is not only taking part in a research study but also informing the researcher of an important aspect of the inquiry. Participant, as defined in this study, is aligned with a larger consideration of power dynamics in academic research. As a constructivist narrative inquiry, this final report of findings is heavily guided by presenting data in its original state. This implicit component of the research design is acknowledged as a trusted way to include the participant by giving them “voice” (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Johnson-Bailey (2004) highlights the need for voice through Robert Coles’ experience as a psychiatry intern. Coles (1989) speaks to the need for
narrative researchers to understand their position in the researcher-participant relationship:

…the people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope to tell them well enough that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is their story. (p. 7)

Additionally, the “informant” portion of the descriptor was operationalized in this study through member checking. This is further described in the Trustworthiness section below. As part of the focus group, participants discussed preliminary themes I found in the interview narratives (Kramp, 2004). Thus, participants were aware of the research design and contributed to its content.

Morse (1991) described informants as “…a term derived from anthropology and this term is used because the investigator is considered naïve and must be instructed about what is going on in a setting, about cultural rules, and so forth” (p. 403). Although I may have a similar experience as the study participants, as I am a Biracial woman who used college access resources to complete my postsecondary journey, I am naïve to the current breadth of experiences of Multiracial students in accessing postsecondary education. Without the Multiracial individuals, hereon referred to as participants, who agreed to provide their unique narratives for analysis, this research would not be possible.
Self-as-Instrument

In constructivist research, it is assumed that the truth gained and reality created through the research process will be impacted by a multitude of conditions that are intentional, potentially uncontrollable, and possibly unique to the study. My personal history and experiences completing and working professionally in postsecondary access, in addition to how I relate my personal identity to the many different dimensions of identity represented in this study, can result in findings that are not informed by the participants. Although some environmental contextual influence was to be expected, my personal influence must be addressed. As such, I offer what I consider my salient identity dimensions and experiences that had the potential to influence the study.

I approached this research with some understanding of one way that Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. I am a Biracial woman who is currently earning my doctoral degree in higher education and student affairs. My interest in this topic stems from an ongoing observation of how Multiracial students choose college access resources. Beginning with my first-hand experiences as an undergraduate student and observations as a part of my professional work, my initial ideas about the college access resources Multiracial students seek are founded by these experiences. As a recipient of a scholarship from the Gates Millennium Scholars Program, I have used college access resources for minority and low-income students to fund my postsecondary education journey. Professionally, I work to help
students, who are predominately low-income or underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities (including Multiracial students), request and navigate college access resources.

Through my personal and professional experiences, I have discussed the entitlement of Multiracial students within the context of minority-based college access resources. With a Black and White background, and an ambiguous phenotype, my use of minority resources has been called into question. These conversations often included quantifying the authenticity of my “Blackness.” For instance, someone would ask about my parents’ and grandparents’ race or reference my cultural knowledge as a determining factor in my entitlement to receive the Gates Millennium Scholarship. In these conversations, I have heard comments such as “Well you are 50% Black, I mean it’s not like you are 25% or something low” or “I can tell by the way you talk you are Black.” As a teenager it never occurred to me that I would not use resources for Black students. This sentiment is echoed by many of the Multiracial students with which I worked.

Most of the Multiracial students with whom I worked, including the Black/White individuals, were encouraged by their minority monoracial family members to take advantage of any resources available to them. There are few professional occasions in which I can recall a Multiracial student opting out of participation because their racial category was not represented on the scholarship or college access resource application. However I, like most of the students I served, am from a low-income, first-generation background and anything that helped me reach my college dreams was perceived as available. I did not care if I could not mark myself as Biracial, and, with my father by my
side, I was told to check all that apply and keep going because I was trying to make history for my family.

“Research is a process not just a product” (England, 1994, p. 82). England (1994) speaks to a larger perception of how I, as a primary instrument of data collection and analysis for this study, influenced the study’s outcomes. My perception is present in every component of the research design, beginning with the implementation of a constructivist epistemology, through data collection via interviews and focus groups, analysis of said interviews and focus groups, and writing the final report. Acknowledging my personal experiences and those of the students that I serve are not in any way universal, and implementing accepted measures of trustworthiness as a part of this study, ensured that I, as one of the primary instruments of this investigation, did not become the primary component of its findings.

**Research Design**

Aligned with a constructivist epistemology, this study was guided by narrative inquiry. This approach recognizes that individuals often experience and recount their lives in terms of stories (Merriam, 2002). Indeed, “…narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of event/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). Chase (2011) posited that the definition of narrative inquiry should include the meaning making of the individual, “[Narrative inquiry]…is meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experiences…” (p. 421). Narrative inquiry emerged not from a rejection of other research
methods in multiple fields of study, but from the inclusion of other forms of data gathered during the research process (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

If constructivists seek to understand the meaning of social phenomena (Dilthey, 1976) and narrative inquiry is aligned with the researcher, whose goal is to understand a phenomenon from those who experienced it (Kramp, 2004), then the selected design and methodology were appropriate for the study. As I explored how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources, the strength of the selected paradigm and methodology provided me with “…access to the personal experiences of the storyteller who frames, articulates, and reveals life as experiences in a narrative structure…” (Kramp, 2004, p. 70). Narratives were constructed during the research process, creating connections among a series of events, actions, and processes, and providing the opportunity to shift focus from the unique to the general and back to inform findings (Kramp, 2004).

There are many definitions of narratives and what narrative inquiry entails. Riessman (2008) offered four typologies or methods of narrative inquiry: (a) thematic, which focuses on what is spoken or written; (b) structural, which focuses on “how” the story is told; (c) dialogic/performance, which examines language among speakers; and (d) visual narrative inquiry, which involves interpreting images in conjunction with the creator of the image. This study uses thematic narrative inquiry.

A thematic approach to narrative inquiry is similar to traditional ideas of qualitative research. A thematic typology focuses on the events, actions, and processes
(or the story) told by each study participant (Riessman, 2008). The emphasis on the story excludes an in-depth analysis of the local context and distinctions in patterns of speech and word choice, the inclusion of which is common in other narrative methods. As a common method used across social science disciplines, thematic narrative inquiry is closely associated with folklore and history and often combined with archival data. Health professions, such as nursing, have used the thematic approach to assist in connecting patients’ experiences with illness. The strength of this approach is its ability to provide connections across multiple individuals’ experiences around a specific issue. A thematic narrative approach has the ability to “…generate case studies of individuals and groups, and typologies” (Riessman, 2008, p.74).

Thematic narrative inquiry was selected for this study in order to focus the investigation on the experiences offered by study participants as well as other informative public documents advertising or describing the college access resources that participants chose to use or not use. Thematic inquiry “…can be applied to stories that develop in interview conversation and group meetings, and those found in written documents” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). The distinction in what is provided in the narrative centers on contextualization versus categorization, with categorical being analysis-focused on coding and comparing text across narratives (Maxwell, 1996).

Creswell (2007) identified an informal procedure for conducting narrative research: determine fit, collect stories and artifacts, gather context to the stories and artifacts, restory, and collaborate with participants to negotiate the stories. Given the
limitation and delimitation of the study (outlined below), I determined that the guiding research questions are best aligned with a thematic narrative research study. The focus on how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources required capturing detailed accounts to better understand the issue of interest. I will now elaborate on how data was collected the study.

**Data Collection**

The overall data collection process for this study proceeded as follows: secured approval from The Ohio State University’s institutional review board, recruited participants, gathered stories through the completion of interviews and focus groups, transcribed interviews and focus groups, and gathered artifacts. I secured approval from the institutional review board in February 2017, and I immediately began recruitment efforts. The first interview took place in March 2017, and the final focus group was completed in May 2017. Transcription, artifact gathering, and participant collaboration were ongoing during the data collection process.

**Sample Selection and Access**

To focus the findings of this study, specific limits were placed on the data collected. Narrowing the criteria for this study ensured study participants could contribute meaningful experiences and assist in the recruitment of other individuals who could participate in the study. All participants were (a) at least 18 years of age at the time of their interview, (b) currently enrolled at or recently enrolled (within one year) in a degree-granting postsecondary institution, and (c) have parents from more than one racial
category. Study participation was not limited based on racial composition (beyond what is stated above) or by institutional type. However, it became apparent that the majority of potential study participants affiliated with a Black identity. Potential participants were identified via three established methods. Initially, I employed the purposeful sampling technique using wide parameters to provide the opportunity for a maximum variation sample (Patton, 1990). To this end, shared my recruitment materials with large, national associations that catered to college access organizations and other groups whose members represented postsecondary institutions. After four weeks of recruitment, all of the individuals who completed the demographic questionnaire and consented to participate in the study were located in the Midwest. As such, I narrowed my focus to a regional approach to increase the likelihood for in-person interviews and focus groups if the participants allowed.

Additionally, adapting to the aforementioned racial identity trend in participation, I began to seek out individuals to create a homogenous sample, also taking advantage of the opportunity to conduct an in-depth investigation of the access narratives of Multiracial individuals who affiliated with a Black identity. Culturally relevant sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) extended my investigation by reaching out to gatekeepers of relevant spaces, such as race-centered student organizations on college campuses, multicultural centers on college campuses, and local college access organizations in the region. Gatekeepers were contacted via email and social media. Please see Appendix A for all recruitment materials. Finally, I asked current participants to refer individuals to
the study, also known as snowball sampling (Patton, 1990). In total, 19 individuals consented to participate and completed the demographic questionnaire. However, six individuals did not respond to my follow-up invitations to schedule one-on-one interviews, thus their data were not included in the study.

The number of Multiracial participants targeted varied as the research process unfolded. Previous scholarship using thematic narrative inquiry shows there is no set rule to the number of participants for a significant study. Indeed, I found sample sizes that ranged from four individuals, as in the work of Auerbach’s (2002) investigation of Latino parents in a college access program, to 38, as seen in Holmegaard, Ulriksen, and Madsen’s (2014) exploration of student’s identity work as a part of choosing higher education. It should be noted that narrative inquiry methodology focuses more on the quality than the quantity of study participants. When describing the type of research questions and number of study participants that align with narrative inquiry, Creswell (2007) stated, “narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories of life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (p. 55).

A potential participant was deemed eligible to participate in this study via use of an online consent form and demographic questionnaire that was sent as an email link. Once the individual agreed to be interviewed, I scheduled an interview with the potential participant via email. Employing the secure Qualtrics software provided by The Ohio State University, the demographic questionnaire collected the following data: preferred pseudonym, racial identity (and ethnicity, as applicable), gender, sexual orientation, age
(in years), home community details, high school of graduation, most recent postsecondary institution attended, current academic standing, primary academic major(s) and minor(s), educational background of parents/guardians, race of parents/guardians, Pell Grant eligibility, and general questions related to college access resources. Please see Appendix B for the demographic questionnaire. The potential participant was not able to complete the demographic questionnaire until they had provided an electronic signature consenting to participate in the study. See Appendix C for a copy of the consent form. On average, participants took 13.5 minutes to review and sign the consent form and complete the demographic questionnaire. Before conducting the interview, I verbally reviewed the informed consent form with the participant, emphasized the purpose of the study, the participant’s voluntary participation, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In total, this is a study of 13 individuals.

Participants from this study represent a number of racial categories with all individuals having an affiliation with a Black identity. All participants are currently enrolled, recently enrolled, or have recently graduated from an accredited institution of higher education in the Midwest. Pseudonyms for participants and school names have been used to preserve anonymity. Table 3.1. provides an overview of relevant characteristics of the participants followed by a brief biography of each participant.
Table 3.1. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Racial Categories</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>First-Gen</th>
<th>Received Pell Grant</th>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>4-Yr Public</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Sleep</td>
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<td>Black, White</td>
<td>4-Yr Public</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Biographical sketches of participants.** Here, I present a synopsis of each participant including racial identity information, key high school details, and experiences with college access resources.

**David.** David is from the central coast of California and grew up in a single parent home with no siblings. David attended multiple high schools. He described his alma mater as predominantly White and small, with about 400 students evenly distributed throughout the four grades housed in the building. David experienced constant bullying about his racial identity and ascription from his White peers. David now identifies as...
Puerto Rican, however during his high school career he identified as Black. When asked if he had any positive memories about being Multiracial, he quickly responded “No. None."

Although he described the high school he graduated from as prestigious and affluent, most of the students attended the local community college, Coastal College (CC). David was no exception. After attending the community college for four years he transferred to a large land grant institution in the Midwest, Big State University (BSU), reporting that he was one credit short of an associate’s degree due to an academic advising error. After deferring his enrollment for one year to meet qualifications for in-state tuition, David enrolled at BSU where he received his bachelor’s degree. The college access services David used include applying for and receiving scholarships, participating in one college access program, and taking survey course for transfer students during his first term at BSU.

**Jalen.** Jalen is a first-year student at SCC. Jalen attended the same high school from 7th through 12th grade. His high school is a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-focused high school, which serves a predominately low-income, racial minority student population. Jalen describes the school and his neighborhood as one that should be avoided. Jalen identifies as Black. Although he previously identified as Multiracial, he stated that his mother changed his mind, “My mom tells me I'm Black. Birth certificate says I'm Black, so I just say Black [sic].” When speaking about his college choice process, Jalen said his college choice process was twofold: subconsciously
during his 10th grade year and actively during his senior year. Jalen stated that his college options were few, and he only applied to one school.

Jalen plans to have two college transitions, as he wants to transfer to a four-year institution after completing two years at State Community College (SCC). His high school-to-college transition was smooth due to the limitation of his choices. He took advantage of college access resources including the Pell Grant and a small need-based grant from a local college access organization. Jalen has a close relationship with his district-contracted college advisor and has worked with her throughout his first year of college. He plans to continue to work with her during his second year of college to apply for scholarships and research college transfer services for his two-year to four-year college transition.

**Lee.** Lee is a graduate of a midsized public institution in the Midwest, Family University (FU). Lee believed that he had to pursue a college education because of all of the effort and sacrifices his mother endured to give him a “better” life. A product of a private K-12 education with older siblings who recently transitioned and graduated from college, Lee had resources to assist in his college choice process. Lee describes himself as Multiracial, stating that he is proud of his Black and Filipino background, specifically because his mother “came from basically a third world country” and built a life for herself and her family in the United States.

Lee participated in a variety of college access programs, including participating in an event for a Black sorority that provided him with a scholarship for college. Lee’s
college choice process is marked by family expectations and financial aid. Lee stated that he wanted to college far from home to make a name for himself. However, he chose to attend the same institution and participate in the same summer bridge program, organizations, and events as his older sister.

_Liberty_. Liberty is a junior at a small private university in the Midwest, HS University (HSU). She chose her postsecondary institution because of a partnership between the institution and her high school. Liberty sought out the program and her high school after attending a traditional high school for two years. Though the partnership, Liberty’s cost of attending her first full year of college was paid as part of a fifth year of “high school” enrollment. She was also able to take college-level courses as part of her general high school curriculum.

Liberty stated that many of her peers did not take advantage of the free first year of college, and many of those who went to college returned home without a degree. She stated her mother worked a substantial number of hours to provide for Liberty and her siblings. As such, finances were an important factor, if not the most important factor, in her college choice. Liberty attended a predominately Black high school. Although she identifies as Black, she stated that it was jarring to attend a high school where everyone looked and sounded like her. For most of Liberty’s life, she attended predominantly White schools. Liberty’s college transition is marked by support including one-on-one advising from an on site college advisor in high school and financial support. Her choices
were fueled by financial concerns so much so that her overall institutional fit and sense of belonging at her selected university suffered.

**Little.** Little is a second year at a regional campus of a large public university in the Midwest, Even University (EU). This institution was not the first that he attended. He began his college career immediately following high school at a local community college, SCC. After one semester he left SCC, took some time off, and then enrolled at an EU regional campus to pursue an engineering degree. However, because of the difficulty of the major, his work schedule, and his inability to complete the degree at the regional campus, he changed his major to history.

Little identifies as Black and stated that he was aware of college access resources during his high school-to-community college transition. He chose not to use any support, including financial and social support from his family. His stance was that he did not want to accept financial support from his parents and never really thought to ask his siblings for college advice because he wanted to enroll and complete college on his own. Little received the Pell Grant to assist in his college journey; however, his earned income soon made him ineligible for the grant.

**Love.** Love is a recent graduate from BSU. Originally from New York City, Love traveled to the Midwest and fell in “love” with her alma mater after a college visit with her mother. Love grew up surrounded by her mother’s family with many living in the same residence. Love identifies as Multiracial. She stated that she has closer and more relationships with her Black family than her Puerto Rican family but believes it is
important to represent both of her backgrounds. Love attended two high schools. The first was a diverse early college high school that was not a good academic fit. Her final high school was smaller compared to others in the area. Love’s high school graduating class was 63 students, of which less than half enrolled in college.

Love participated in what she describes as a poorly executed college access course during her senior year of high school. In addition to her course she had assistance from two teachers, both of whom met with her throughout her college career to discuss her progress. However, she credits the course and seeing her friends applying to college as key motivating factors in her college decision. In total, Love applied to 30 colleges and universities, including both predominately White institutions (PWI) and historically Black college and universities (HBCU) via the respective common applications, and was accepted to 29 institutions. After receiving scholarships from multiple institutions, she chose the institution that gave her the leanest financial aid package.

*Monika.* Monika is a graduate of BSU. Monika did not travel far to attend college, as she has lived within 20 miles of the institution her whole life. Monika graduated from a public high school that she described as one of the largest and most diverse in her school district. Monika claims a Multiracial identity and participated in a college access program housed at BSU. In high school and in the BSU college access program, most of her peers were Black, and she cited feeling comfortable in predominately Black spaces because of her background and upbringing.
Monika’s college transition was very smooth and did not require last-minute decisions because of her six-year participation in BSU’s college access program. Although Monika wanted to attend a HBCU, she instead enrolled in the institution that provided the most generous and comprehensive financial aid package. Monika also had a unique transition as she enrolled, matriculated, and attended college with her mother. They took many of the same courses and, in some cases, sat side-by-side.

No Sleep. No Sleep is a current student at a medium-sized public institution in the Midwest, Blue University (BU), no more than two hours drive from his home community. No Sleep’s home community and high school community differed. He describes his home community as a racially diverse middle-class area in comparison to his wealthy predominantly White high school. An all boys private high school, it is one of the most prestigious and academically rigorous high schools in his hometown. No Sleep appreciated the challenging nature of his high school, as he stated that it made his university academic experience easier. When asked about his racial identity, No Sleep described himself as Multiracial, specifically Black and White, which is reflective of his friend group in high school and college.

His college access and transition is marked by his status as a recruited football player. After receiving multiple athletic scholarship offers, No Sleep had a clear understanding of what he wanted from a university and what was expected of him in return for his scholarship. As a part of his collegiate athlete preparation, No Sleep arrived on campus early to complete degree credit bearing courses and attend football practice
the summer before his freshman year. When asked about his college journey No Sleep stated that he was happy with his decisions and would not change anything.

**Olivia.** Olivia is a recent alumna of EU. Despite being no more than a two-hour drive away from her hometown, EU was very different culturally and racially from where she grew up. During high school Olivia inhabited three distinct high school communities that had different academic rigor, college-going culture, and student populations. She and her mother were very active in her high school choice. After attending a low-performing high school for one year with hopes of receiving promised academic opportunities that did not occur, Olivia “lottered” into the highest performing high schools in her district.

Olivia applied to specific postsecondary institutions, participated in campus visits, received scholarship opportunities from her school counselor, and chose a university that “felt like home.” Olivia sought out ample college access opportunities for Black students (her racial identity is Black) but not any from her other backgrounds. However, her college choice was heavily influenced by financial aid. When asked if she would choose her institution again, she stated she would not because of a lack of appreciation for diversity.

**Paula.** Paula is a female graduate of a small private liberal arts institution in the Midwest, Robin University (RU). RU is located in a suburb of her hometown. Paula attended one public high school that she described as one of the more academically challenging and college-going high schools in her district. She lived on the other side of the town and lottered into the school. Her home community is an impoverished area with
a predominantly minority population. This is in contrast to her middle class, White high school. Paula stated that while she attended school in her home community before high school, there were not any major shifts in her classroom demographics, as her earlier class peers were mostly White despite the majority of the school’s population being racial minorities. When asked about her racial identity Paula identifies as Multiracial and celebrates her many backgrounds. She believes it allows her to navigate multiple spaces in ways that others cannot.

Paula took advantage of multiple college access resources, although she spoke of a knowledge deficiency when it comes to postsecondary access opportunities. She did receive scholarships and participate in a summer bridge/first-year experience program. Paula speaks about divine intervention when describing her postsecondary matriculation. Like many others, Paula committed to a college during her senior year of high school. However, during the summer she had issues with her financial aid package and chose to pursue other postsecondary options. With some advice from a friend and support from an institutional agent, Paula was able to enroll in a different college full-time the fall immediately following her high school graduation.

Q. Q is a second-year student at BSU. She is from a rural, predominantly White community. She states that she is from “a town, definitely not a city” where the only major point of interest is large university (EU). Q’s high school was reflective of her community, with the majority of the students being White and the largest minority population being Asian, which she attributes to business affiliations and exchange student
programs. Like most students in her high school, Q was planning to attend EU. After receiving a cost of attendance scholarship from BSU, she backed out of her plans for EU. When asked about her race, Q describes herself as Black but said “I mean, if people want to get specific, I'll say, ‘Biracial’ but more generally, I'll say, ‘Black.’”

During her college choice process, Q did not participate in any college access programming that was not associated with her BSU scholarship. She was unaware of many postsecondary options and regrets not applying to an HBCU. She did not do so because she felt uncomfortable with large groups of Black people and thought there was only one HBCU. She stated that applying for her BSU scholarship was a fluke, but she was glad she did.

Steve. Steve earned his undergraduate and law degrees from BSU. Steve is from a small town near EU. He went to a predominantly White high school that has a range of socioeconomic diversity and large student body (1,000 students). His high school mirrored the demographics of his community but not his nuclear family. Steve stated that his Multiracial family was at the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum as “...nobody has much of anything.” Steve identifies as Black to the dismay of his mother, “I think my mom kind of doesn’t like to hear that I feel-That I identify as Black, because she feels like I’m leaving out part of my White [sic] identity…” Most of his close family is and high school friend group was White.

Steve applied to three colleges and actively sought out scholarships. Similar to his peers, Steve planned to attend EU. He experienced conflict in his college choice when he
was awarded cost of attendance scholarships from BSU and EU. Steve’s parents were supportive of his college aspirations but had little knowledge to assist him in the process. He credits his high school friends as a major factor in his college decision. With support from his high school friends, he attended BSU and participated in summer bridge/first-year experience programs.

**Taryn.** Taryn is first-year student at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, Yahoo University (YU). The institution is located not too far from the similar community she grew up in and college where her parents work. Having parents who work in a small community enabled Taryn to grow up surrounded by close knit, consistent friendships. When asked what she remembers most about her high school to college transition she responded with accounts of leaving friends, family, and “the little things” that she had grown accustomed to growing up in a small community. The consistency in her friend group made conversations about her race rare. Taryn’s mother is Black and father is White. She states that within her friend group her Black racial identity was “just normal” and continued that “There was nothing to talk about.”

Taryn’s college access journey is marked by distinct college access opportunities. For instance, Taryn went on multiple college tours with her parents and participated in multiple overnight visits when deciding which college was the best fit for her. Additionally, financial matters were alleviated because of her parents’ place of employment. These opportunities were not common at her predominantly White, low-income high school. Although advantages provided by her parents eased her college
choice and transition, she noticed that the advantages also excluded her from programs at her chosen institution.

**Interviews and Focus Groups**

The primary interaction for research purposes included the completion of a consent form; a demographic questionnaire; one 45 to 60-minute, one-on-one interview and participation in a focus group. In total, 13 individuals were interviewed one-on-one, with most interviews taking place via FaceTime. Of the 13 participants, less than half (a total of six) participated in two additional in-person focus groups. In the initial interview, participants were asked to provide background information, share their racial identity, as well as their overall college access experiences. The protocol for the follow-up focus group was determined by common experiences conveyed during the interviews. Considering that there are multiple reasons why college access and choice decisions occur, I relied on the selected theoretical frame paired with preliminary findings to explore any details that the participants may not have given in the one-on-one interview during the focus groups. Details of a narrative that were not included in the one-on-one environment were included in the group-constructed environment and was compelling to the research findings. See Appendix D for a copy of the one-on-one interview protocol and Appendix E for the focus group protocol.

The one-on-one interview protocol consisted of questions surrounding patterns of racial identity and how students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. Specifically, the protocol prompted reflection on (a) context related to
their home and high school communities; (b) what resources, organizations, and individuals the student used to access postsecondary education during their high school to postsecondary education search and transition; (c) the institutions they applied to; (d) scholarships or programs they applied for, received, and accepted; and (e) any stories surrounding their initial introduction to postsecondary education (including the institution that eventually chose to attend). The interview aimed to identify what the participants believed were significant experiences with individuals, groups, organizations, and postsecondary institutions in regards to their access to college and enrollment with particular attention to race identity, ascription, and category.

After the completion of the one-on-one interview, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a subsequent focus group with other study participants to discuss any emerging themes. Six participants took part in two, in-person focus groups (three participants in each focus group). The focus groups explored (a) what the participants believed was most important factor in their college access journey, (b) how they perceived their experiences as different from their peers, (c) what types of race-based college access opportunities they took advantage of, and, (d) how the marketing of college access opportunities influenced their decision to participate. Focus groups enriched the narratives created during the one-on-one interviews. Morgan (1988) stated that focus group interaction produces additional data, “The hallmark of the focus group is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 12). I employed the technique on
a small scale closer in size to a mini-focus group to maximize depth of conversation between participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

**Transcription**

All interviews were digitally recorded to ensure that participant responses were gathered verbatim. To ensure confidentiality of data, recordings and transcripts are stored in a password protected file folder on the university’s secure online storage space, box.com. Upon completion of the study, data collected will be archived for five years, while retaining information as long as needed to protect any intellectual property resulting from the study (The Ohio State University, 2014). Findings are the product of an analysis of transcribed interviews and focus groups and are reported in chapter four. Additionally, discussion of data analysis is provided in a subsequent section.

**Gather Artifacts**

The act of gathering artifacts in narrative research provides contextual insights for narratives created during the research process. These artifacts situate narratives within broader societal constructs including cultural, historical, and field specific contexts (Creswell, 2007). I implemented the tradition of gathering artifacts by obtaining information pertaining to the specific college access resources, such as scholarships and summer bridge programs, identified by participants. Online and paper informational materials (websites, applications, brochures) were organized and included as part of the findings reported in chapter four.
Data Analysis Strategies

Riessman (2001) argued that “the meanings of life events are not fixed or constant; rather, they evolve, influenced by subsequent life events” (p. 705). This investigation employed data analysis strategies consistent with thematic narrative inquiry to capture such evolution of meanings across life events associated with college access and choice. Thematic narrative inquiry techniques were incorporated with the guiding method of analysis, analytic induction (AI). AI was used as a guide to analyze the narratives created during the research process. AI is a way to explain how a phenomenon occurred rather than why it occurred (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). AI “…calls for the progressive redefinition of the phenomenon to be explained (the explanandum) and of explanatory factors (the explanans), such that a perfect (sometimes called “universal”) relationship is maintained” (Smelser & Baltes, 2001, p. 1). Using the method of AI, this research focused on following the data obtained to understand the process under investigation, acknowledging that my intended path differed from the one that was followed. Data themes were developed as part of a two-step coding process, nominal level coding and the application of thematic categories (Riessman, 2008). Once thematic codes emerged and were applied, narratives were then restoried.

Nominal level, or what Riessman (2008) described as a surface level analysis, is grounded in Foucault’s ideas, she cited; “instead of going deep, looking for origins and hidden meanings, the analyst is working on the surface, constructing [angles rather than many sides noting] various minor processes that around the emergence of an event” (p.
64). Riessman (2008) provided the work of Tamboukou (2003) as an exemplar of the process. Indeed, Tamboukou read through the letters of women teachers marking recurring and significant words and phrases. For the purposes of this study, I read and reviewed each narrative from the 13 interviews and two focus groups noting significant and recurring language. These noted language occurrences served as the primary codes that were used in the application of thematic categories.

Once nominal coding was complete, narratives were analyzed for similarities within and across the transcripts of each participant interview and focus group, and from this analysis thematic categories emerged. Through additional readings of each participant narrative, and with the emerged thematic categories in mind, I assigned appropriate thematic categories to each narrative. A thematic category does not indicate agreement among study participants, only similarity of broader concepts discussed. Riessman (2008) cited a similar process in the work of Tamboukou (2003) and Cain (1991). Both researchers use multiple sources of information and rereading of narratives as the process to identify distinct similarities and differences within and across the narratives while keeping the stories intact.

Restorying the narrative is a process that reconstructs the interview and focus group transcripts into a narrative that is attentive to timing of the events, activities, and explanans described (Riessman, 2008; Smelser & Baltes, 2001). Creswell (2007) defined restorying as “…an approach in narrative data analysis in which the researchers retell the stories of individuals’ experiences, and the new story typically has a beginning, middle,
and ending” (p. 234). Riessman (2008), using the work of William’s (1984) study, highlighted that thematic narrative inquiry’s use of the whole story as it unfolded over the course of the interview is a hallmark of the methodology.

I used the restoried narratives to create condensed participant biographies that highlighted their unique contribution to and commonalities related to the guiding research questions. After the biographies were completed, each of the restoried narratives were explored and analyzed. The comparative generated thematic categories were then paralleled to the restoried narratives to ensure proper consistency and data analysis. The thematic categories serve as a summary of the restoried narratives and are presented in a comparative manner common in qualitative research. Please see chapter four for findings.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the consistency and goodness of the findings in the data analysis process, I employed generally accepted constructs for qualitative research as well as thematic narrative inquiry with specific considerations including collaboration with participants and knowledgeable colleagues. Although opinions differ as to what is specifically considered to be an appropriate assessment of good qualitative research, there are general themes to employ (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). As with all good research, the study should be consistent. Said another way, the researcher’s ontological worldview should be consistent with the epistemology foundation of the study. Those larger ideas should inform the research questions, which determines the appropriate methodology, data collection, and data analysis. For instance, this study is situated in the constructivist
paradigm and as such utilized a narrative methodology to learn how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources directly from Multiracial students. Guiding research questions acknowledged the strengths and limitation of the selected paradigm and methodology. Additionally, data analysis and the final report of the study are grounded in the narrative tradition of keeping stories intact. Indeed, not only must researchers remain consistent, they must properly employ the assumed procedures of the chosen methods. Exclusion of an expected standard because it might complicate a study does not ensure goodness of findings. Researchers must be informed of the context of the study, clear on why the presented findings were chosen for presentation, and the value of the study to the field. This study affirmed these standards by employing the techniques of reflexivity, peer debriefing, and triangulation with the overall research process being constantly reviewed by my dissertation committee chair.

**Reflexivity**

The guiding foundations for this study acknowledged that the researcher and the research are not inherently separate. Constructivists believe that knowledge is co-created and narrative inquiry encourages the restructuring of traditional boundaries between the researcher and the researched. As such, the study design necessitated the use of reflexivity. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) suggested questions for higher education researchers to consider when engaging in reflexivity:

1. Why is it that I am engaged in the present study? What is it about me and my experiences that lead me to this study?
2. What personal biases and assumptions do I bring with me to this study?

3. What is my relationship with those I study? (p. 38)

Guided by these questions and others that arose throughout the research process, I maintained a journal of my questions, comments, and concerns related to the study. Ultimately, I gave much consideration as to why I engaged in research on Multiracial students as well as my relationship to participants. Reflexivity heavily informed my self-as-instrument perspective. In terms of the study participants, I conducted member checks as part of the focus groups to ensure that the interpretation presented is credible, plausible, and applicable to the participants’ stories (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). This entailed not only reviewing and dialoguing about the interviews, but also about the themes gathered from their stories.

Peer Debriefing

Through ongoing personal reflection on the study, I continued to investigate and analyze the choices made in the research process to increase my understanding of my self-as-instrument position. As a part of my task of researcher reflexivity, I employed the technique of peer debriefing to increase credibility and trustworthiness. Peer debriefing, or the process of meeting with one or more knowledgeable, yet impartial, colleagues to critically review and discuss the choice and implementation of research methods, is an important part of qualitative research (Spillett, 2003). With the guidance of my committee members and intensive debriefing with my dissertation committee chair, as well as on-going conversation with select academic peers, I continually reviewed
research method choices. Qualitative research allowed the opportunity to present unique findings by contributing my subjective knowledge, skill, and experiences to the study. By employing peer debriefing, I recognized and understood how subjectivity influenced the study and was able maintain its virtuous contributions (Peshkin, 1988). I included written accounted of my peer debriefing sessions in my researcher’s journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Triangulation**

Reflexivity and peer debriefing in absence of incorporating the findings into the overall study is meaningless. For this reason, I used data triangulation to cross check the accuracy and consistency of data and to create themes. This process occurred by using multiple sources and, when possible, multiple methods to check data items (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 1990). Specifically, I used the demographic questionnaire to review consistency in how study participants described themselves, family, and college access resources. This information was paired with artifact analysis using materials obtained after study participants disclosed what, if any, specific college access resources they used. Finally, appropriate data items were triangulated via the abovementioned peer debriefing and reflexivity transcriptions.

**Ethical Considerations**

There are three areas of concern that impacted the creation, implementation, and final documentation of this study: my identification as a Biracial person, the study’s focus on personal experiences, and perceived participant coercion. As an individual who has
parents of more than one race, my self-identification as a Biracial individual influences my perspective on Multiracial scholarship and how I analyzed participant responses. As a member of the studied group, my advantages exceed those of a different researcher conducting this study. My bias in this matter was regulated by an understanding of the growing literature on Multiracial students and learning from the methodological limitations of other Multiracial individuals who study various aspects of the Multiracial population. In an attempt to increase the trustworthiness of the study, I requested the guidance of other researchers who do not identify as Multiracial to assist in my study via debriefing.

Participants were asked to discuss issues related to past social experiences in high school and postsecondary education, which included discussion of mental health repercussions and illegal behaviors, such as violent acts. Participants were also asked to speak about racial identity and encounters with college access staff. In addition to a consent form that states their release of information, the form clearly described my responsibility to report specific information and limits of confidentiality. A two-step consent process minimized the possibility of coercion or undue influence. First, when scheduling the interview, participants were contacted electronically and reminded that their participation is voluntary and no incentive was provided for their participation. This step alleviated some of the concern about pressuring students to participate, which can be associated with incentivized recruiting. Second, on the day of the interview and focus
group, I reviewed the informed consent form with the participants, reminding them of the voluntary nature of their participation and the option to stop at any point without penalty.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

There are inherent boundaries when undertaking a qualitative research study. Some boundaries are beyond the control of the researcher, while others (delimitations) are purposefully established by the researcher. A more obvious limitation of this study is mass generalizability, or the type of validity that is commonly part of quantitative studies. For this study, three areas of concern placed limitations on different aspects of the study’s construction, implementation, and findings. One limitation is my positionality as a Biracial woman, which provides the opportunity for some students to feel more comfortable discussing their views on race. However, for students who have parents of more than one race and chose to identify as monoracial, they may have been less comfortable being forthcoming with their narratives for fear of judgment, despite my assurance that I was genuinely interested in their narratives. Additionally, I am not without bias, and although I have implemented trustworthiness techniques to identify and address my subjectivity, the creation of the study is grounded in my academic, personal, and professional skills and experiences with Multiracial students and college access resources. Finally, an important delimitation of this study was not narrowing the categories of Multiracial students that can participate in the study. For instance, some researchers restricted their Multiracial studies to specific racial combinations (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Feagin, 2008) to increase focus of the study findings.
Although I have grounded the sample population to those who affiliate with a Black identity, the study participants have a wide array of racial backgrounds. Given there is scant literature about this topic, I did not restrict the study’s sample and as such I was subject to the random sample of students who chose to participate.

**Summary**

This chapter detailed the chosen methods for studying how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. The guiding assumptions of constructivism and a brief history of the emergence of the paradigm was offered. The study’s research design included a discussion of the definition, history, and criticism of narrative inquiry. I provided a review of myself as a primary research instrument. Study sample, access, and interviewing assumptions were delineated in the data collection subsections. The 13 participants were introduced. The selected data analysis strategy, analytic induction, was described including a review of coding and theme emergence. The presentation of findings was reviewed. The trustworthiness considerations of reflexivity, peer debriefing, and triangulation were addressed. Finally, ethically consideration, limitations, and delimitations unique to this study were discussed.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents 13 restoried narratives that were developed from 13 one-on-one, semistructured interviews and two focus groups. The subsections that follow address the findings from this study’s three guiding research questions: (a) what pathways do Multiracial students take when accessing postsecondary education, (b) what college access resources do Multiracial students perceive as available for use and, (c) how does a student’s Multiracial identity interact with college access pathways and resources utilized?

Through their narratives, study participants revealed what information they had (and wished they had) available to them during their college choice process, their expectations for guidance, where they sought support, what their dreams were for college, when their racial identity interacted with their college journey, and their ultimate college choices. From participant experiences, findings addressed a variety of challenges and successes similar to those found in previous college choice and access literature. Findings presented here highlight the commonalities and differences across college access and choice pathways, racial identity, and family backgrounds. Data is presented first through a narrative analysis of each participant, with attention to the guiding research questions and the contextual influences of each participant’s college access and choice processes. Contextual influences are defined by the study’s theoretical framework of a Conceptual Model of Student College Enrollment (Perna, 2006): student and family context; school and community context; higher education context; and, the social,
economic, and policy context. The chapter concludes with a summary of the thematic categories presented comparatively.

A Narrative Analysis of Multiracial Narratives

A cursory review of the majority of participants’ experiences presented here shows alignment with the experiences generally common for monoracial minority students. However, upon further investigation, the participants communicated the influence, or lack thereof, of multiple racial backgrounds on how they perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources.

David: “I don't know if I'd fit in even if I tried.”

David’s college access and college choice pathway developed through his experiences within his school and community context. David did not receive any strong messages about college from his home environment. His college choice messages were limited to the local community college, and he received conflicting messages from institutional agents as to whether to attend. David used minimal college access resources throughout his multiple postsecondary transitions. The resources that he perceived as accessible were a matter of his Multiracial background. Indeed, David’s Multiracial background did not directly interact with his college choice; however, it interacted with his use, or lack thereof, of college access resources.

Community college as an entrance to postsecondary education. David’s college access journey began at the second high school that he attended and from which he eventually graduated. Within the school building, he had a difficult time finding
support academically and socially. Located in a predominately White, upper-middle class neighborhood it was difficult for him to find a sense of belonging in his high school, which affected his academics and eventually his college choice.

It was like super difficult to like fit in socially. Um, I was like bullied a lot, which is rough. Um, didn't do very well in school. So, um, I guess relating to your research in education, like it wasn't really, college wasn't really much of a thing for me. Um, it wasn't really on my mind. I didn't really know what it was, apart from athletics.

Unlike other participants, David did not have a home environment that supported or provided positive attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of postsecondary education. Whereas many students who do not receive guidance within their home environment find support and resources in their school and community context, David struggled to find a basic sense of belonging socially and academically.

The majority of the students in David’s high school attended CC; however, David did not personally receive the same college-going message:

Um, yeah, and I remember very distinctly, having a conversation with my, um, 12th grade English professor, and he was like, kind of sat me down and was like, "Hey, I'm going to be honest with you. Like your writing skills suck, your reading skills kind of suck, um, like I want to know what your plan is, moving forward," and I was like, "Oh, well, I talked to my guidance counselor, she said to go to [CC]," which was the community college in the area. And he was like, "Don't
waste your time on that. You'd be better served as like a security guard or something."

After speaking with his English professor, he was “oddly motivated” to enroll in postsecondary education and earn a degree. David sought out his high school counselor and completed the process of applying and enrolling in CC, determined to prove he was college material.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Once David enrolled in CC, he began working with a campus college access organization that assisted underserved populations with financial aid and academic advising. When asked to define underserved David stated, “Um, mainly students of like different racial groups.” Participating in a college access program for multiple racial groups was best for David, as it allowed him not to think of his racial identity and sense of belonging within the group.

...it really didn't matter, um, like what your race or ethnicity was. The staff and professors were super, um, committed to building relationships. They kind of were very encouraging along the way. Um, so, that, kind of that aspect of like searching for that racial identity wasn't really much on my mind.”

Towards the end of David’s four years at CC, he worked with his college access advisor to transfer to BSU to complete his bachelor's degree. David said she was helpful; however, there were some complications, “...she forgot to mention one requirement that was, that was needed to get an associate's, so I was one credit away from getting an associates.”
In preparation for attending BSU, David moved to the BSU area and worked for a year to be eligible for in-state tuition. Although, David stated that, “[i]t was refreshing to see diversity in the school, because I'd never had that before,” he did not participate in any programs for students of color, opting to just use the resources offered as a part of a survey class for transfer students.

**High interaction with Multiracial identity.** David traced many of the problems he faced back to his racial identity. David’s racial identity is complicated, as he is unsure of his racial background.

Um, my mom was also like very hush-hush about race and eth- and ethnicity, so it was always kind of like a mystery to me...When we'd talk about it, and I don't know if that was stemming from some shame she had, since, um, I didn't know my dad growing up. So I don't know if that played a factor, if there was like some bitterness there. She didn't want to admit that to me because, I mean, she would tell me his background, was like Puerto Rican, but when I asked again, or talked about her- like his heritage or where he came from, like she wouldn't tell me much.

Additionally, the conversations David had with his mother about her racial background were not consistent or detailed, “[a]nd then talking about her background, like she would always tell me something different, and her stories would be very inconsistent.”
David’s racial background was an issue in his school and community context, “I think being Multiracial was difficult for me because I definitely didn't like look like everyone else.”

During his high school career David identified as Black without any support from home. His physical appearance was constantly referenced by his high school peers.

Um, and then when I would self-identify with that, because I remember kind of going through a phase where I liked hip hop a lot, and I guess related more to an African-American culture. Um, and then I would be bullied for the fact that I wasn't actually African-American, even though they labeled me as such.

David’s negative experiences with his racial identity, coupled with subpar college access guidance, impacted his college access pathway. There were differences in how David’s Multiracial background interacted with the college access pathway and resources that he chose during his high school to CC and his CC to BSU transitions. At CC, he found support in a Multiracial environment in which he did not have to think about his racial identity. At BSU, he chose not to use these resources or participate in programs dedicated to different racial groups because he felt he would not belong.

I just felt ... Um, mainly because I didn't really ... I guess because it was difficult, because I didn't really identify as either. I was like, I don't know if I'd fit in even if I tried, um, so I don't know that much about it. I don't have the same like passion or desire that they may have, the same kind of goals or experiences, so I don't really think much of it. Um, I guess it wasn't really on my radar.
Reflecting on his college choices and transitions (in addition to his racial identity) David noted the diminished importance of race in his life. He currently identifies as Puerto Rican to curb conversation surrounding his race and he does not think it is a “big deal.”

Um, I think at least as an adolescent, like looking back on it, that's kind of time where you're really searching for identity. You're kind of looking to kind of latch on to anything to be like, hey, this is me, and I'm going to rebel against the institution, or I'm going to be, you know, um, you know, whatever. Um, where like now, it's kind of like, it's just not that big a deal.

In sum, David employed a college access pathway similar to many low-income, first generation students who do not have strong influences from their home environments. However, his perception of resources available for use and what resources he chose to utilize interacted not only with his Multiracial background but the absence of a knowledge pertaining to his parents’ racial identity.

**Jalen: “Just don't fall into a trap.”**

Jalen’s college access and college choice pathway was simple: avoid negative outcomes common in his home, school, and community contexts by enrolling in the local community college. He believed that his experience at SCC would help him determine if college was right for him. Working one-on-one with his contracted college access advisor Jalen applied, secured funding, and enrolled in SCC. Although, he identifies as Black, Jalen only used resources designed for low-income students. Jalen does not reference any
interaction of his college access and choice process with his racial identity, which aligns with his efforts to reduce conversations about his race.

**Community college as an entrance to postsecondary education.** Jalen’s college access journey was guided by a philosophy that was echoed in different messages he received in his home, school, and community contexts. He explained “[j]ust don't fall into a trap” to mean that he should avoid many of the negative behaviors that were normal in his home, high school, and community. Despite the constant messaging, once Jalen started to attend high school he “fell off.” Jalen’s K-12 experience was unique in his school district because he lived in feeder district for a 7th-12th grade STEM high school. As such, all schools that feed into the high school serve grades K-6. Jalen stated that once he was promoted to the seventh grade his academic focus waned.

I just fell off. After elementary school I just dropped and then I guess it got better because I started to realize if I don't do this I'm gonna stay here forever….in about tenth grade [my grade point average] kinda went up but … I still, you know, I regret not doing what I can do now. I, I know I'm smarter than what I was before. I just wasn't putting myself out there.

After his 10th grade year, Jalen maintained the possibly distracting friendships that he created during his high school career while refocusing on improving his academics, “[s]o they didn't really change anything. I just stepped it up and did my homework and my classwork, I didn't- I still acted goofy and everything.”
A first-generation college student, Jalen received positive messages about enrolling in postsecondary education from home, but ultimately it was his decision and hinged on his efforts and the resources available within his high school. “Of course my mom...she wanted me to do good, so she asked and I was like, ‘I'm just gonna go [SCC].’ She was onboard with that. She maybe wanted me to be an architect but I'm like, "Ehh, I do computer science, I'm fine with that.”

Similar to other study participants, Jalen limited his college choices and only applied to the local community college. In terms of college choice, he explained SCC was his “first and only [choice]. I didn't think of anything else because I just knew I wasn't getting into any higher colleges with a 2.0 GPA.” He explained

Okay. I knew I wasn't gonna get accepted into universities or big colleges because I kinda just slacked off through most of high school. That's what I feel like. And so I, I knew I wanted to go, so SCC was the next option.

Jalen’s Pell Grant and a small scholarship from his contracted college access organization covered his tuition and fees for SCC. With only one college choice that was funded, Jalen’s college choice process was simple to complete.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Jalen did not participate in financial and programmatic resources related to college access events as because of his paid tuition and fees and a focused on college choice. However, he did take advantage of one-on-one advising with his district contracted college access advisor. Yet, when asked who he discussed his college plans with Jalen stated, “I don't really discuss my school life unless
someone asks.” Luckily for Jalen his college access advisor did ask about the tasks associated with college enrollment beyond just Jalen’s financial aid, “She did most of that. She told me to get my financial aid finished. She kept... She was actually just bugging me about it so I just did it. And I, I guess that push actually helped, I guess.”

Jalen explained that his limited use of college access resources centered on a need to see if college was for him. “I wanted to know the feel. I just wanted- I didn't even get a job before- I just wanted, I really wanted just to know how college was gonna ... If it was me, you know?”

At the time of his participation in this study, Jalen had completed his first year at SCC. When asked how he felt about college he stated “I love it. I like college” and planned to take courses during the summer. He plans to research scholarships he can receive and programs that he can participate in during his second year at SCC. When asked if he would pursue any scholarships or programs based on race, he had no aversion.

**No interaction with Multiracial identity.** Since becoming a college student Jalen has changed his racial identity.

I came to that decision maybe last year, I'd just say I'm Black because I get asked it like, um, frequently. Some guy at the store even asked me it. He asked where I'm from. I was like, "I'm from here." He was like, "No, you're not. You- You look like one of us." Because he was um- I think he was Arabian? I don't know, I don't wanna assume.
Jalen stated that using a Black racial identity made conversation easier. “I just say I'm Black. My mom tells me I'm Black. Birth certificate says I'm Black, so I just say it.” Jalen’s use of a monoracial label to reduce the conversation about his racial identity mirrors other study participants’ experiences. Jalen’s college access and choice pathway did not factor in race. He was far more concerned about broader personal goals. Due to the abovementioned goals and pathway, Jalen’s Multiracial background has no explicit interaction with his college access and choice pathway.

For Jalen, the largest factor in his college access pathway was knowledge and the ongoing messaging of not falling victim to the negativity common in his home, community, and high school. Indeed, these fears trumped all racial identification and his Multiracial background aside from a need to ease conversation about race through taking on a monoracial identity. Multiple study participants spoke to major identities outside of race that impacted the college access and choice process, including first-generation college going status and low-income background. Additionally, it seems that Jalen was not clear if college was the right choice for “trap” avoidance and as such placed strict boundaries on his college choice process.

Lee: “I didn't even want to go there.”

Lee’s college access and choice journey rests in his individual and family context and the influence of the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about postsecondary education that came from his home environment. To create a college-going culture, Lee’s mother espoused positive college-going messages and placed Lee in private schools during his
K-12 education, which she believed would be a positive school context to reinforce her ideals. His older sisters modeled college-going behavior by completing postsecondary education and sharing their college access and choice pathway with Lee. Lee relied on multiple resources to pay college costs and participated in programming designed for underrepresented students. Lee’s consistent Multiracial background interacted with his college access and choice pathway and the college resources he used through an appreciation of his mother’s past, the motivation his mother’s past provided him, and his willingness to use resources from all his racial backgrounds.

**Predetermined pathways to access postsecondary education.** For Lee, attending college was always an option. His parents made sure that Lee knew college was expected and possible.

Well, uh ... it was one of those things like, my parents always told me, and my siblings told me, my sisters, like, you know, you guys are going to go to college, and you're going to, you're going to graduate from college, you can do whatever you want. Like, as long as you stick your mind to it and put in the work, you can do whatever you want.

Lee’s pathway to access postsecondary education was heavily influenced by his individual and family context via the positive college-going messages espoused by his parents and the college-going behavior modeled by his sisters through their enrollment, persistence, and completion of postsecondary education. Additionally, Lee was aware of his mother’s hard work to “make a way” for him and his siblings, “both my parents only
had high school education, but [my mom made] a way for me and my sisters too, for all of us to go to college and one of us would go through law school...” This included working with community organizations to cover the cost of Lee’s years of private school and college education. Lee went on to explain that in terms of college specifically, his mother held education in a high regard, “Coming from the Philippines, um, over here, she thought that education is, like the key to success, pretty much,” and education meant going to college.

Lee’s college plans centered on going to college away from home and making a name for himself at a diverse institution, “My thing was, get away from [home], and go to a diverse school.” Lee researched schools that met his requirements; however, he did not apply to his top three institutions. “Those were, like, my top three ... Um, well, I applied to...[my top choice]. [My top choice] was actually the first school that accepted me. Um ... and then I never, I didn't apply to the other two.” When asked why he did not apply to the other institutions at the top of his list, he explained that his pathway was influenced by his family’s, namely his sister’s, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about postsecondary education.

Because it was just like, I, I have my older sister who ... we're four years apart, so every time she, like, graduates, I'm, like, going in, or it's always like that. So she was just telling me, like, you know, take in consideration financial aid, and being away from home, and all these other things. So, I just really changed my focus to,
to applying to, like, different schools in the area. And then my grandmother forced me to apply to [that college], and I didn't even want to go there. Whereas other study participants felt as if they did not have any support, Lee’s college access and college choice pathway is marked by a seemingly overwhelming amount of positive attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about higher education that influenced what Lee wanted from a postsecondary institution.

Following his sister's advice Lee applied and was accepted to FU, among other institutions close to home. Using a college choice pathway that was developed by his sister, Lee narrowed his college choice list down to three institutions, none of which adhered to his initial requirements of being far from home or diverse. A common final factor in decision-making among other study participants, Lee weighed college costs to make his final college enrollment decision. Lee compared his financial aid award packages as the deciding factor in his college choice. The institutions on his final college choice list did not include his first choice due to the lean financial aid package offered.

So then it came down to FU, [Private College], and [Home College]. [Home College], I cut them out of the picture because they, they really didn't give me much money, and it was expensive to go there. So, it came down to FU and [Private College]. And ... I did a little campus visit at [Private College], and just ... I, my oldest, my sister went to FU as well, my middle sister, so ...My financial aid ... once I received all my financial aid package, it was like, "uh, I might as well go to FU."
**Limited use of college access resources.** When seeking out college access resources, specifically grants and scholarships, Lee had no concerns about what resources were available. Initially he started within his school and community context before looking to his selected postsecondary institution. He explained that a nonprofit organization that supported him in covering the tuition at his private high school provided support for college as well.

I applied to one through, uh, it's called [Guardians Helping with Education]. It was a non-profit in the area for a while. Um, they're actually the ones that helped my mom out with scholarships and, so I can go through high school. It covered the majority of my high school tuition, which was roughly $8,000 a year. Um, so I was on through them and they have a, if you go to a school in [the Midwest], they have a $3,000 scholarship that you can get every year.

Lee also participated in a ball for a local chapter of a Black Greek letter organization and received a scholarship for participating, “So I, um, I got that one. And also the alumni chapter, Delta Sigma Theta, I won a scholarship through their debutant ball.” Aside from the abovementioned scholarships, Lee received his remaining funding from FU.

FU provided more than just financial aid to assist in Lee’s high school to college transition. Lee received materials from FU inviting him to participate in an early arrival program for minority students. “Like, I did the one, it was called [Friends at FU]. It's for minority students to come, about three, three days before everybody arrives at campus, to come like participate in a pre, like, college type of program. So I participated in that.”
When asked his thoughts on being invited to a minority program, Lee cited general college access and transition advantages.

…didn’t mind it all because it gave me, I mean, honestly at that time, I was able to move in early, so I know I would be able to get there before my roommate got there, and I felt like it was going to give me an opportunity to get to know people that was going to be in my class with me before, like, instead of just coming to campus that day and just trying to start fresh and new, it was like, I had an opportunity to meet people before the, before everybody came back to the campus.

Overall, Lee saw all college access resources as applicable in his college access and choice pathway. However, he admitted that he did not use resources that aligned with his Asian Pacific Islander (API) background. When asked why he did not seek out these opportunities, he stated that he should have given more effort to his college access and choice process. “I didn't put as much effort into, you know, applications and scholarships. So now that I know what I know, I'm like, yeah, but like I missed out on a lot.” Lee, like other participants, used the college access resources that were easiest to access.

**Limited interaction with Multiracial identity.** Lee’s mother is Filipino and his father is Black. Lee’s mother was his primary caregiver. Unlike other participants, Lee explained that he spoke about his racial identity often to acknowledge his mother’s hard work and sacrifices that influenced not only his racial identity, but also his college aspirations. When asked if he talked about his Multiracial background he stated:
Like, I embrace having a mom who comes from pretty much, like, almost a third-world country, and being able to come over here and make a life, like, I've seen the sacrifices that she has to, have to make. And I always, like, let people know, because when people look at me, they think, "Oh, you're Black." I'm like, "No, I'm actually Filipino and Black like." I have that in me as well. So, yeah, it was ... if anything, if it was any time that, you know, talking about past, or the way I was raised, or my family, yeah, I would definitely talk about it.

Lee’s perspective of his racial identity was a consistent component of his college access and choice pathway. Identifying as Multiracial or recognizing his multiple monoracial identities provided Lee with the confidence to participate in programs marketed to monoracial minorities to get the resources he needed to enroll in college.

Although FU gave Lee the most competitive financial aid award package, the institutional characteristics, specifically the racial demographics were a difficult reality. When asked if FU fulfilled his need for a diverse institution he replied, “It didn't. Not one bit.” He continued

Not one second, one ounce, any or anything. It didn’t…like, my first couple months there, I would actually come up, come back home or go to the mall just so I could see diverse people. Because I was around the same people every day, and I just wanted to see people that looked like me. And that was very far and few.

Lee’s frustration with FU institutional characteristics interacted with his Multiracial background as he sought out spaces to find students who “looked like him.” Lee also
mentioned that he wanted to attend an institution that had a study abroad program in the Philippines so that he could visit and experience where his mother was from; FU did not have such a program.

Lee’s college access pathway was aligned with research on the creation of a college-going environment. He was surrounded by positive college-going messages, expectations, and aspirations. His mother employed tactics to ensure that Lee was academically ready by enrolling him in academically rigorous private K-12 schools. Lee perceived general, minority-specific, and monoracial minority resources as available for use in his college access and choice process. Finally, the interaction between Lee’s Multiracial background, college access pathway, and college choice is visible in his respect for and motivation generated from his mother’s background and the institutional characteristics that he first pursued when creating his college choice list. However, Lee’s pathway was impacted by his sister’s perceptions, attitudes, and belief about postsecondary education, which ultimately changed his choice pathway.

Liberty: “I wanted to be around, like, other really positive Black people.”

Liberty’s college access and choice pathway began with her choice to transfer to a high school that had a partnership with a local university. Through her high school, Liberty took advantage of one-on-one college access advising, college level courses as part of her high school curriculum, and a fully funded first year of postsecondary education. This aligned with the heightened importance Liberty placed on financial aid. Liberty’s mother is Multiracial, API and White, however she closely identifies with a
Black racial identity. Liberty identifies as Black and did not perceive API-specific resources for use. She instead centered her scholarship search to those offered to minority or Black students.

**Impact of school context on pathway.** Liberty’s experiences as she transitioned to college are unique in that she attended an early college high school that encouraged students to take advantage of a fifth year of high school. During the fifth year, each student’s cost of attendance at the partner postsecondary institution, HSU, was fully funded. The opportunity for free postsecondary education was the very reason she transferred from her first high school.

So, um, then when it started to get serious, like 10\textsuperscript{th} grade when I really started thinking about going to college, um, everybody, the few people I do know that went to college was like it's so expensive, blah blah blah. And my god-sister was actually going there. She went there for like a year or two and she was like, "It's free college ..." Blah blah blah. And they said, “free college”, I said, “I'm going.”

As a first-generation going college student with good academic preparation and college aspirations from her home and school contexts, Liberty focused her college access pathway on her remaining key areas of college access: gaining college knowledge and funding. Transferring high schools provided Liberty with not only access to college knowledge and funding but also the opportunity to attend her first choice institution, Hillman University.
As Liberty completed her fifth year as part of her high school partnership she began to research other institutions and funding options to pay for her attendance. One year as a full-time student at HSU left Liberty with a clear understanding that HSU was not a good fit for her socially, and she was eager to attend a different institution. Liberty cited that she explored a broad range of scholarships, but she limited her search to identities that she felt comfortable representing. Liberty was not successful in securing what she considered to be enough funding to attend Hillman. She then began to research predominately White institutions.

I didn't get them [scholarships] and I started having to look smaller, looking in [State]. I applied to [colleges], they weren't giving me any money. My Pell Grant's not that big, so I don't get money from that. You know, the income thing, like, based on your income, FAFSA, right, is basically your income? I mean, I have a single mom, whatever. I, we're not rich but I guess FAFSA thinks we are so they weren't giving us any money. So [colleges] wasn't and then at that point, I was feeling really discouraged so I just stayed at [HSU] 'cause I basically was already going there so I just stayed.

Liberty was very disappointed with her decision to stay at HSU but believed it was the best financial decision. She acknowledges that HSU did not meet her requirements and that she would have been happier attending an HBCU.

Yeah, like just that, and it just, it kinda like opened up my eyes to like how important it is for, it was for me to be around people that, like, looked like me in
like a learning setting. Just because, like, I knew a lot of people around me, like, they didn't finish school. And then, when th-, I decided to stay at [HSU], I kind of felt like, um, like I was going back on that because I was going ... I wanted to, I really wanted to go to [a] HBCU because I wanted to be around, like, other really positive Black people doing things like going to school and getting degrees and stuff like that. So when I decided to stay at [HSU], it was just kinda like, I went back on that, you know, being around Black positive students, I guess.

Liberty chose to disregard her college access and choice pathway and her desire to attend a HBCU after her cost benefit analysis at the end of her college access and choice processes.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Knowing the financial hardship postsecondary education might put on her family, Liberty settled for the institution that would cost the least amount of money for her and her family. She searched for numerous scholarships to reduce the financial burden, “I kinda just Googled scholarship (laughs) and anything I thought was like unique to me or whatever, I-, scholarships…I was just trying to get there and, um, I tried. I'm, I do feel like I could've did more but I was also working full time, going to school full time, so…” Despite being very concerned about finances and actively applying for scholarships, she did not apply to opportunities for API students. She stated that she believed she would not be a good applicant because she does not identify closely with being API.
Um, somebody had mentioned that to me but... for whatever reason I'm like, I don't... I guess because I don't necessarily identify... I guess, that... It just didn't come to my brain, like, I don't think, like, oh, I'm Asian or Pacific Islander. I'm just, like, Black, you know? So anything that was like if you're a Black woman or whatever, Black woman for science.

Although, mentors and teachers that Liberty worked with throughout her college access and choice process recommended that Liberty seek out college access resources related to all her racial backgrounds, she decided that would only pursue resources for Black students.

When seeking out college knowledge, Liberty was cautious when interacting with institutional agents. She was able to find a knowledge translator that provided her with the options that aligned with her racial identity.

...during school I had never, like all my years of school I had never really gotten close to anybody at any schools that I went to. Like, a lot of my friends have their favorite teachers and stuff like that and I never really had that, so I'm not saying she was never teacher and, I honestly don't even remember how I got so close with Ms. T but she was working at the school and, I don't know, my people hung around hung around her, so I just got close with her but she was really helpful. She, um ... It was very helpful. She put me onto scholarship. She, she really helped me.
Her relationship with Ms. T impacted the type of resources, albeit limited, Liberty took advantage of as it was Ms. T who introduced Liberty different scholarships.

**No interaction with Multiracial identity.** Liberty’s second high school was a different experience than most of her K-12 education, as she had never attended a school that was not predominantly White.

Like, people would comment on my hair all the time, when I started going to Black schools. They commented because I'm Mixed, but their hair looked like mine, you know what I mean? So, like, their dress was like mine, the way they spoke was like mine, like me, and I felt like I spoke, like, differently at home than I did at school when I went to a private.

Liberty’s mother is White and Polynesian and heavily identifies with Black culture. Liberty, like her mother, likens her style, pattern of speech, and overall identity to being Black.

And, um, my mom was like, even though she's White and Polynesian, she ... Like her story is very bizarre. So she moved here and then she is from [a Black neighborhood], so she ... Yeah. So, she grew up, like, around Black people, obviously, so everything about her, like, her culture, the way she talks, the way she dress, everything is like, I guess, Black...my mom is like a Black mom, I guess.

Given her and her mother’s lack of identification with their Multiracial backgrounds, Liberty did not take advantage of college access resources for API students. Liberty’s
college access and choice process did interact with her racial identity: however, that identity was monoracial Black.

**Little: “I didn’t want help.”**

A desire to be independent and work full-time through his college career were the key components of Little’s college access and choice process. College enrollment was an expected step after high school in both Little’s home, school, and community context. However, Little did not have a clear pathway for college access and enrollment besides accommodating his job and not asking his father for financial support. Little did not seek out college access resources from his other contexts and decided to attend the local community college without a full understanding of his postsecondary options. In terms of his race, Little, like his Multiracial mother, identifies as Black. His monoracial racial identity was consistent and was not impacted by conflict in cultural knowledge or racial ascription. Paired with his pathway for college access and choice and limited use of college access resources overall, his Multiracial background provided no visible interaction with his college access and choice processes.

**Community college as an entrance to postsecondary education.** Little’s college access and choice pathway was based on his need to be financially independent. Little has multiple siblings, three of whom were enrolled in postsecondary education and an additional three siblings were recent college graduates at the time the study. Although, his mother did not “push” college, his father was clear on postsecondary aspirations for Little, “Yeah. My dad - yeah, my dad ... well, my mom, didn't really push it, but my dad
did.” Additionally, Little stated that he comes from a middle class community in which college attendance was expected, “Some people would come in and say, ‘You don't need college,’ but a lot - most of them, they would say, ‘Go to college,’... they were pushing college a lot.”

Little’s first choice for postsecondary was a large private research university that was “dismissive” or, said another way, Little was not accepted to the university. After applying to a few other institutions, Little decided to attend SCC so that he could work through college.

Yeah, uh, I got a job, and I didn't ... I just wanted to work through college. I got a job at the post office, so I didn't want to ... well, I was already - I already knew I was gonna be homesick. I wasn't ready to leave, and I got a job, so I decided to just work through college instead of [leaving].

Despite not wanting to leave his hometown so that he would not miss his family, Little did not seek out any support from his family when making college decisions. Positive college-going messages were modeled by Little’s siblings and verbalized by his father. Little’s decision to go to college seems to be the only decision influenced by his home, community, and school contexts. Looking back, Little acknowledged that he should have asked his siblings about their college experience, “Uh, I don't know. I should have. I didn't really - I didn't talk to anybody.” He contributes his choice to go it alone to being young as he stated “being a teenager, I didn’t want help.”
No use of college access resources. Little’s college choice pathway impacted his use of college access resources, as he did not seek out advising for the most important factors in his choice, financial aid and flexibility to work. Little made his college choice without receiving financial aid packages for all the institutions he applied to because he believed that the other institutions would be too expensive, “I did at SCC. Yeah, I did. But I - I didn't know ... I wasn't really informed enough. I thought that it'd be really expensive, so I didn't want to even ask my dad for loan or anything.”

After completing one semester at SCC, Little withdrew from college and took two years off. Recently he re-enrolled at an EU regional campus to study engineering. To complete his engineering degree he would have to transfer to EU’s main campus, which would interfere with his work schedule. Little chose to change his major to history and keep working,

I wanted to work still, through college, and they said that if I wanted to...major in engineering, I had to go to the - to the regular campus, but I could do history on the branch - on the - the regional campus. So, and I like history anyways. It's easier.

Again, Little did not seek out any additional college access resources, such as scholarships (aside from the Pell Grant he received when he completed his FAFSA). Little’s desire to work full-time while in college affected his Pell Grant eligibility, “I ended up making too much money, so they - they don't give it to me anymore.”
Little described his choice to not take advantage of college access resources and work full-time as uncommon, both generally and within his family: “They're, uh, they're more like ... they might work, but they don't really work like full-time jobs. And they're still kind of like ... they're on their own, but they're still kind of like at home.” Little stated that, although his college journey is uncommon, he did not see any other way to proceed.

At EU he reached out and formed a working relationship with an on-campus advisor. Little’s engagement with his advisor was limited. Little stated that the on-campus advisor was helpful in answering specific questions related to courses, but not larger consideration such as financial aid, transfer options, and choosing his major.

... every time I needed, uh, schedule help, I would go in there and she would check, like, my [courses] and tell me what I needed and what I didn't need and would advise me, saying that that might be - this might be too hard. This - this might be easier, so like stuff like that.

No interaction with Multiracial identity. Little’s eligibility to participate in this study is the result of his mother’s Multiracial background as his Black father. However, his mother, like Little, identifies as Black, “Well, my mom's ... she's really light, but you can tell she's ... she identifies as Black. You can tell she's not just Black, but she identifies as Black.” Unlike other participants, Little did not speak about his race or his family’s race often. In terms of his college access pathway, he chose not to seek out any college access resources for Black or low-income students when he applied to college. His
mother’s Black monoracial identity and his disengagement from college access resources created a space in which Little’s racial identity had no visible interaction with his college journey.

**Love: “You to have a certain amount of college apps before you can finish this class.”**

Love’s college access pathway was bounded by the resources available from her school context. Her mother was supportive of Love attending college; however, she made it clear that it was Love’s choice. As part of a college access course, Love completed the necessary milestones to apply for and enroll in college; however, she struggled to finance BSU. Love was not aware of many college access resources, especially grants and scholarships. Despite a Multiracial identity and no issues using resources for Black, Hispanic, and minority students generally, Love did not take full advantage of the resources available to her because she did not know that they existed.

**Predetermined pathways to access postsecondary education.** Love has always considered herself a good student. Once she transferred to a high school that aligned with her academic needs, she was among the top-rated students in her class. As part of her high school curriculum Love was enrolled in a “Go To College” (GTC) course. Love is not sure how she was selected for the course because she did not apply to participate. The class was appropriate because college was something that was spoken about in her home environment; however, it was not until her senior year of high school as a part of the course that college became a real option for her.
I would say I really started to know like senior year when we were like, in that class and like, all my friends were applying for college and just seeing everybody. And then my mom, I mean my mom always pushed for, but my mom is also, “I'm not gonna push you to do something you don't want to do because that's your life.” And she was like, "Well, if you do decide to go to college, you have to choose somewhere that you want to be because that's where you're going to spend the next four years for your life, not mine."

As seen with other participants, Love had to seek out resources and support from her high school; these resources were institutionally structured as a part of GTC. The quality of resources available through GTC was a barrier for Love early on.

Love recalled that the instructor for GTC was new to the position, and the course itself was a poorly organized alternative to scheduling study halls.

This was her first year every doing [GTC]...they tried to give us like, a study hall type thing, but it didn't work out. So they decided to change it into like, a college advising class instead. And so, I guess, like, midway, almost in like, November, is when they changed it into like, a college class, and then, like I said she didn't know the ropes, so it was like she didn't really teach us anything. So it was like “Apply for your FAFSA, this is the website.”

Deadlines effected Love’s college choice early on due to the late start of GTC. However, the late start provided Love, and her instructor, with an urgent motivation to
apply to colleges before postsecondary application deadlines further dwindled her college options.

By November first, like early decision deadlines are already done. Most like, early actions deadlines are already done, so at that point it was just all regular decision. And we were just starting to get into the common app, I would say, like the second week in November and she would say, "You've got to have this filled out, you need to have it applied for." So I was like, forced to look at it kind of.

Love’s college choice list was generated solely from common applications. Her late start made it all but impossible to research and apply to college individually.

So I was looking at the college app and then I was, “Well, let me see what colleges I want to apply to” and [BSU] was one…And then, I was just some of the other schools that I knew like, were famous and had good names like UNC and things of that nature. And so they were like “Well we need you to have a certain amount of college apps before you can finish this class.”

Using the generally Common Application and the Common Black College Application (an application specifically for HBCUs), Love applied to 30 postsecondary institutions and was accepted to 29.

Love received a delayed enrollment option from her first choice institution, “Um, they told me that they couldn't offer me fall admission because I had applied to school so late.” Like other participants, she believed that she had to enroll in postsecondary education immediately following high school to ensure she would be able to avoid
common negative behaviors in her community, “Um, they couldn't offer, uh, fall admission, but they could offer me spring admission and just knowing the background which I come from, if I would have waited to go to school, I probably wouldn't have went.” Love explored institutions by going on college tours near her home. So when she received her acceptance to BSU she told her mother, “I was like, ‘Well, I haven't been away yet, we haven't been to the Midwest so let's go!’” Her visit to BSU was the final factor of her college choice, “And then we got to tour, like, the residence halls and everything like that. And then like, I don't know, I started to fall in love with campus.”

**Limited use of college access resources.** Once she had fallen in love with BSU, Love began to seek out ways to finance her education because BSU gave her a lean financial aid package in comparison to the other schools that accepted her.

Yeah, so everyone offered me money. But somehow I miraculously ended up [at BSU], and not- So, and even the crazy thing was, is that I found that like- like HBCUs, so like Historical Black Colleges and Universities don't often give out money. And I had like anywhere from like fifty to a hundred percent of my tuition paid by every HBCU I applied to. Um, and that's partially just because I graduated like top three in my class. So, but I went to the school that didn't have money, that didn't give me any money.

Love did not speak of any assistance with comparing the institutions that accepted her. She shared that after her BSU visit her mother was very excited that Love had found an
institution she wanted to attend. Love applied for and was denied multiple loans and yet still attended BSU.

I would say, because financials was really hard for me, um, like, I applied for like, I wouldn't say like, fifteen loans, and they all got denied...Um, and then one, which was Sallie Mae, who I feel like they give a loan to any damn body to be honest. Um, they only approved me because my grandma. I had got denied, like, so many times and so I think looking back then, and where I was freshman year, and now, I would definitely say, I should've taken it way more serious sooner.

Despite her mother’s enthusiasm and her participation in GTC, Love was unaware of many of the opportunities available to her in terms of scholarships. Unaware of scholarship opportunities through the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) until after she enrolled at BSU, Love took advantage of opportunities through the United Negro College Fund in high school. Love openly identifies as Multiracial and had no issue taking advantage of any resources related to all her racial backgrounds.

**Limited interaction with Multiracial identity.** Love’s mother is Black and her father is Puerto Rican and Panamanian. Love identifies as Multiracial and consistently acknowledged both of her racial backgrounds during her college choice process.

I do identify as Multiracial, like, so if I'm filling out an application, if I can only select like, Black, like I know like some applications will put like, Hispanic as like an ethnicity sometimes or they'll put it as a race and like they'll put Black as
an ethnicity. Like, they switch it up or whatever, um, but if I can't select both then I usually select “Other.”

The racial categories available to her when she applied to college stood out to her. Love observed the many different ways she would have to describe her racial identity. She believed that it was important to acknowledge both her backgrounds despite having a closer relationship with her mother and her mother’s side of the family.

I think it was more so when applying to college is where it was like, “Check one,” or “Check,” like you only had one option. And so, like, I've always identified with both sides even though me and my dad aren't the closest, like we don't have the closest relationships, but I also identify with both sides and I'd never see that one side is more so than the other.

Love’s choice not to identify with one side more than the other would have increased her options for college access resources if she were aware. Love did not openly speak of negative or positive interactions between her college access and college choice process outside of the differences in racial categories available on college forms. Unlike other participants, Love had no issue applying to HBCUs: however, when asked if she applied to any Hispanic Serving Institutions, she was unfamiliar with the designation. Love’s Multiracial background interacted with her college access and choice processes by only revealing the limited college knowledge she had during the process.
Monika: “Wow there are like a lot of White people here.”

Monika’s college access pathway began in the sixth grade when she enrolled in a BSU college access program for young students. This program provided Monika and her family with one-on-one college advising, support in completing college access milestones, and college knowledge over her six years of program participation. The most attractive aspect of the program was that BSU offers completers a cost of attendance scholarship. Monika cited her participation in the program, specifically the scholarship, as the reason why her college choice process was predetermined. In terms of her Multiracial identity, Monika did not speak of her racial identity often and stated that her Multiracial identity did not directly interact with her college access and choice processes. However, her perception of herself as a woman of color did impact how she viewed BSU’s campus.

**Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education.** Monika’s college access journey began when her parents enrolled her in BSU college access program that began in the sixth grade. Her participation in the program set the stage for college expectations.

I always knew [I would go to college]. It was just something that both of my parents did stress to me growing up that higher education was important even though neither of them had a degree at the time. Especially because I was introduced to the [BSU] program at such a young age. I was inducted when I was in the sixth grade. That program basically changed my life. It's basically a
financial need based scholarship awarded to inner city school students, minority students, basically, that meet requirements, GPA requirements, and things like that, oh and that parents hadn't had a degree before. My sister actually applied for it as well, she's seven years younger than me, and she didn't get it because my Mom had went back to school.

The program had an impact on Monika and her mother. Participating in the program for six years provided Monika and her mother with the college knowledge to enroll and complete higher education. Her mother decided to return to college when Monika enrolled and earned her bachelor's degree.

Monika’s pathway included attending a challenging high school. She described her high school as one of the most academically rigorous in her school district, and she actively participated in BSU’s program year around. When asked about her college readiness, she said she wasn’t prepared “For the most part I think [my high school] was a little harder than other schools. However, going into college I still don't think I was as prepared coming out of [high school and] going into college.” Monika further explained that many students who did go to college from her high school did not earn a degree.

2012 was one of the larger graduating classes from the four years that I was in school. Out of that group I would say a lot of my classmates went to college, but a lot of people only did one year and then came back. I feel like it wasn't because of other factors, I feel like it was because a lot of people were not prepared.
Monika’s cited college access involvement with BSU and perceived unpreparedness for college as major factor in her college choice.

When discussing college options and how she would fund her college education, she was encouraged to attend the institution that provided the most grants and scholarships.

My [BSU program] advisor Mrs. V she had an influence on me with you don't turn down full tuition to go out of state and accumulate all this debt. Then my parents on top of that as well. My brother, he went to [college], he's three years older than me, and he's what I was talking about earlier. A lot of people from [my high school] go for one year and come back. He was one of those people. My parents took out all the loans and stuff because he didn't get any scholarships. Took out all the loans in my parents’ names and he only did a year. My mom's like, “You're not doing that. We're not doing that.”

So when it came time for Monika to actively search for other scholarships and institution types, she was less inclined to do so because she knew she had a cost of attendance scholarship to go to BSU.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Monika’s participation in the BSU college access program significantly shaped her college choice pathway. Because of the BSU program’s comprehensive nature, her participation also limited which college access resources she perceived she could use. Monika mentioned her advisor Mrs. V and how she influenced her college choice. Mrs. V served as Monika’s college knowledge
translator for six years. When describing the support provided by Mrs. V and the BSU program, Monika credited the program for her ability to enroll, persist, and complete postsecondary education.

I had my advisor from sixth grade to 12th grade, and then when I got to [BSU] we switch over to the retention advisors and we had to meet monthly grade checks, and status reports, and progress reports, and all that stuff. They were very supportive and I feel like a lot of people don't have supportive groups like that going into college. I feel like that's the main reason why I was able to complete school versus my peers that I went to high school with that maybe came back.

As previously mentioned, dropping out of college was a major concern for Monika as she saw her high school peers and her brother return home with postsecondary debt and no degree. The security and support of the BSU program meant that Monika did not have to research college access resources because she was attending BSU. Although she took great care to work hard because she was given such an opportunity, she did acknowledge the perks of the program, “All my friends are struggling to find scholarship money and I'm just sitting back chilling.” Monika participated in a summer bridge program that she stated was beneficial. However, she participated because her BSU advisor encouraged her to do so.

I actually did a transition program...A lot of [people from the BSU program] does that. They recommend for us to do it, whatever, then also other people another minority type thing, minority group that was supposed to be our transition into
college. I really enjoyed [it], I learned a lot, and I also met a lot of other people as well who were going in the same direction as me and everything.

**No interaction with Multiracial identity.** Monika thought she was familiar with BSU’s campus as she had attended workshops and meetings there since the sixth grade. However, once she committed to BSU, she began to notice demographic differences that she did not see before.

I didn't think about it as much ... I didn't realize the difference until I actually got on campus. When I was on campus, before I got to college, we would go and do the Saturday morning workshops, but there weren't classes on Saturday's so you don't really see the student population. My Dad, he's like a huge football fan and he would take us to games but I would never really pay attention to the difference, or the crowd, or how many people were actually this, or how many people were actually that. I didn't really pay attention to it until I actually got to college, and I was like, wow there are like a lot of White people here.

BSU Scholars was a predominantly minority program, which gave Monika a skewed perspective on the actual student population attending BSU.

Monika identifies as Multiracial (her mother is Black and her father is White) but spoke about fitting in with Black students more than White students.

I worked at the [Black cultural] center on campus. I would say I spent a lot of time there because I worked there, a lot of programs were there, [BSU program] office is in the basement of the building. I would say I probably going into, or
hanging there around that place, made me identify more with Black people because I spend most of my time around these people and [BSU] is such a not diverse campus. It was kind of like a happy place on campus where a lot of people go. I know I fit in there.

Like other participants, Monika did not discuss her racial identity often. She stated she only spoke about it when she was asked. Even when asked most people were confused about her Black and White backgrounds:

A lot of people are surprised when they see that my dad is White just because they're like, “Oh you look like you're Mixed but you don't look like you're Black and White.” Or, whatever. I only talk about if people question it. It's not something I'm just like, “Oh, I'm Mixed.” Like broadcast it to the world.

Monika’s Multiracial background did not interact with her college choice process directly. Although Monika identifies as Multiracial and has a White and Black racial background, within BSU, a predominately White intuition, she found her “happy place” among the African American or general minority resources on campus.

**No Sleep: “Um, it really was whoever was going to give me a scholarship...”**

During his sophomore year of high school, No Sleep began creating his college choice list. His list differed from his peers, as only institutions that recruited him for football and offered cost of attendance scholarships made the list. Given his bounded college choice pathway, he did not perceive college access resources to be useful. In terms of his Multiracial background, No Sleep wanted a “pretty diverse” institution in
contrast to his overwhelmingly White high school. Other than a desire for diversity, there was no interaction between his college access and choice pathways and his Multiracial background.

**Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education.** No Sleep’s college choice process was simplified by his involvement in high school football and attending an academically rigorous high school, “We had to take Latin for the first two years, so that's pretty unique, which is terrible. And it's a pretty good school. I think the average ACT is, is a 27, coming out of high-school, so it's a pretty, it's a pretty good school.” At his predominantly White wealthy school, No Sleep said that his race was discussed but not too often, “It definitely came up. Um, not too many times. It was like a one-time thing. But not-not too much. It was something that was just kind of understood.” No Sleep identifies as Multiracial, specifically White and Black. He stated that is racial identity came from home and from himself, “Uh, something that came from home, and I just came to it myself too. It's just what I am. For-for real.”

Although, football was the most relevant factor in his college access and choice pathway, he stated that college was an expectation both in his home and school contexts. When asked what college messages he received at home, No Sleep said, “Uh, there was no option. I was going to go, as long as I was able to.” When he spoke about his high school expectations he stated:

College was, it was expected that we were going to college. For me, a lot of people told me that [my high school] was harder than college, which it really was,
um, which is a big benefit to me because school isn't as hard, and it's a lot easier to operate because we're taking college level courses at, in the sophomore. So ... as a sophomore. So, that really prepared me.

No Sleep’s entire high school career was focused on becoming prepared for college not only academically but also athletically so that he could secure a football scholarship to fund his undergraduate degree. He began being recruited in his sophomore year, which he credited to defining his college choices.

His college choice centered on football and financial aid, followed by other important factors such as campus size, distance from home, and racial diversity.

For real, I just wanted to, I wanted to go to a school that was mostly, pretty diverse...Nothing like, nothing one race, or mostly one race, and that's why I chose like a BU type, um, feel, because the campus isn't 50,000 like [other universities], or even more, it's, um, 22,000, and like 6,000 people commute, so that's what, something I wanted, like a, a mid-sized school, uh, that was a pretty big campus but it wasn't too big, and it wasn't too far from home. So that's something that came up, um, played a part too was just how far campus, or, campus was from, uh, actual home.

No Sleep did not work with a college advisor or mentor to devise a college choice pathway. His parents helped with the process but he made the majority of the decisions.
In total, No Sleep only applied to one postsecondary institution, as his college choice was limited by scholarship offers and factors that he decided were important to him. Ultimately, he stated that the final factor was as follows:

Um, it really was whoever was going to give me a scholarship, a divisional scholarship. I knew that MAC was a good, good al-al-al-alternative for maybe not the Big Ten, or something as big, so I definitely looked into that, like a smaller D1.

When asked if he would choose BU again, he stated, “Yeah, I would go to [BU.] I like [BU].” Additionally, when probed about the BU and factors he listed as important to his college choice, he said BU met all his requirements. Unlike, other participants in this study, No Sleep was able to pay the cost of college without sacrificing diversity.

**No use of college access resources.** Due to his bounded pathway for his college choice, No Sleep did not participate in any programs or events that were college access resources. No Sleep, participated in a program during high school that assisted other students in key areas of college access including academic preparedness, “There was, there was a group where I would go to school and tutor kids, in my spare time, and just tutor them with-with math, or science, or whatever they needed to be tutored in.” The other program recruited minority students to his high school. He explained that he dedicated most of his time to football and academics.

And there was another group called My Brother’s Keeper, which was, um, a minority group for [my high school] that was trying to recruit more minorities to
come to that school, and to like reach out. So, that's another, that's another group that I was in in high-school. And those, those were the only two groups I was in.

I-I was playing two sports too, as well.

Once No Sleep selected BU, his college access resources, again, centered around his athlete status. The summer before his freshman year of college, No Sleep reported to campus early to train and take courses. “That summer, uh, I worked out and then reported to [BU] where I took two summer classes, and then trained all the way up to football camp, until the season.” No Sleep explained that he arrived to campus in late May so that he could practice and take the two courses selected for him before the school year began, “They chose them for us. They were just like pre-electives that would count towards anybody's major…” No Sleep stated that he had no spare time that first summer or any other summer since as he is required to be on campus, “Uh, like five days we had a break, but, no. That's even shorter now. Like my, coming up, I only get like a week off.” His time intensive commitment to play football at BU left no time, or need, to research or use any other college access resources.

**No interaction with Multiracial identity.** No Sleep had a clear and effective college access and choice pathway. His choice of institution hinged on who recruited him for football and offered a cost of attendance scholarship. Although he stated that there were other factors that contributed to his college choice, No Sleep’s two primary factors were financial aid and athletics. With his status as athlete dominating his college choice process, there was little interaction between his access and choice pathway and his
Multiracial background. He stated that he wanted to attend a pretty diverse institution that was not “one race, or mostly one race” and found that BU was a good fit. BU is a predominately White institution; however, No Sleep is happy with his college choice. In this case, No Sleep’s Multiracial background had no visible interaction with is overall college access and choice pathway because other major identities (e.g., athlete) had a greater interaction with his decision.

**Olivia: “I definitely sold out for money.”**

Olivia is a first-generation college going student. Despite this fact, her college access journey was not marked by common issues and experiences cited by first-generation college going students. Olivia and her mother carefully chose her high school experiences and they made sure she took advantage of the college access resources available within her school, community, and higher education contexts. Olivia’s Multiracial background impacted her college access and college choice pathway in two ways: (a) it was important to Olivia to attend a college that was diverse and appreciated diversity and (b) as her cultural knowledge grew so did her identification with her different racial backgrounds and what college access resources she perceived for use.

**Impact of school context on pathway.** Olivia and her mother were very active in preparing her for postsecondary education. Olivia stated that, although she was first-generation college going, you would not know from her upbringing,

Um, but you wouldn't be able tell that by, uh, my parents. Um, because it was always...It wasn't probably until like my freshman year that I realized that not
everybody goes to college. Because it was just always, "You need to figure out what school you're gonna go to."

While in high school, Olivia noticed differences in the college-going cultures among the first high school she attended, the high school she played sports for (Neighbor School), and the high school where she attended classes and eventually graduated from (Top A). Olivia first attended a low academically performing school her freshman year before lottering into highest academically performing high school in her school district, Top A. When comparing Top A to Neighbor School, Olivia speaks to the college-going culture.

Um, so, I think like one of the biggest things ... So I, um, at [Top A] we don't have sports...so I played sports at [Neighbor School]. Um, and just like, especially during my senior year, when I was like, searching for scholarships and applying to colleges, and I was talking to some of, like, my teammates who were also seniors and also thinking about going to college ... Um, and I would talk about how, you know, “My guidance counselor sent me like ten scholarship applications today.” And they were like, “Oh our guidance counselor doesn't send us, like anything.”

Her college access pathway and college choice, like that of her high school choice, was a matter of gathering college knowledge and resources, particularly financial aid for college.
Olivia’s college choice was informed by college visits and research to help her narrow her options. EU was not one of her top choices; however, after attending a visit day program, the institution rose to the top of her list.

EU was definitely most active in, um, like pursuing me... I wasn't even really interested in EU. I came for a visit because I got to skip school for a day. I ended up falling in love with it. And the, the um, application for that visitation program was also the application for admission. And so I got my admissions decision during the visit. And I was able to talk with faculty and all this stuff. And it was really different from any other college visit I had been on.

Olivia felt connected to the campus through having what she believed were candid conversations with students and staff and through the institution’s efforts to ensure she completed important college going milestones.

I felt really connected to the campus. Um, not only to like, um, being able to see all the campus, but being able to talk to faculty, being able to talk to students. Not just, like, on a tour. Um, and so after I was accepted, like, they sent me like a timeline and would like check in and be like, “Hey don't forget, like, your FAFSA is due in two weeks,” or something like that. And it, that meant a lot to me because it seemed like they were very invested in making sure that I would get to where I wanted to be, even if it wasn't EU.
Throughout her college choice process Olivia believed that she was taking the right steps to ensure that she was choosing the best institution. Choosing EU aligned with what she thought she wanted.

Olivia participated in college access programs in high school and believes that diversity was discussed; however, the language was coded. “They definitely brought up like location. Like, “Do you want to be in an urban environment?” “Do you want to be in a rural environment?” Um, and, I think, looking back on it, I think that was like their code for race.” Reflecting on her college choice process, Olivia would have been more critical of institutional location.

I think I would pick the city. I would pay more attention to like the actual location of my school. Um, because I didn't really think about that in regards to like the actual like environment surrounding the school. I was really just concerned about distance, um, moreso than, is it urban or rural? And what is this city like or what is this town like? Like what's the ratio make up? What's the economic make up? Things like that.

Olivia’s concerns were a matter of her identity and her perceived safety in her community.

EU is not as diverse as I thought it was. It's also not as accepting of diversity, um, and inclusion as I thought it was. Um, and just like being at a predominantly White campus and being a Black female...can be really uncomfortable, really
threatening, really, um ... Uh ... What's the word I'm looking for. It's just, um, you kind of stick out like a sore thumb.

When summarizing her conflict over attending EU Olivia stated that she was able to grow from the experiences and does not regret attending. She often thought about how attending a different institution type would have changed her undergraduate experience, “I thought a lot this year about like, what if I would've gone to like a HBCU. Um, just because like I was getting tired of the PWI experience. Um, but I knew that I couldn't afford to go to HBCU…” Olivia was thoughtful in her college access and choice pathway as she researched and took advantage of multiple resources. However, the impact of EU’s recruitment efforts was a key factor in her choice.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Olivia’s college access and choice pathway had strong component of surrounding herself with potential college access resources that she believed would be helpful in her college choice. Specifically, she used resources that were designed for first-generation college going, low-income, Black, or minority students. The selection of her graduating high school was a corrective decision, as the high school she attended her freshman year did not deliver on the academic opportunities that were promised when she enrolled. While at her first high school, Olivia was invited to be a part of a federal GEAR UP program, but when she transferred high schools her spot in the program was revoked.

Once I transferred schools, it wasn't offered at [Top A] and because I didn't enroll, uh, while I was at [my first high school], it wasn't available to me anymore. And
again at [Top A], like, the expectation was, like, you know like, academic excellence. So there was no need for GEAR UP.

Olivia was able to continue her participation in a different program through BSU that was not high school specific; the program started the summer before her 9th grade year and ended once she graduated from high school. In addition to a focus on legal studies, the program assisted students in the completion of key college access milestones.

And that is a college prep program for s-, um, inner city students who are interested in law. Um, and so, that was based moreso on your, like your academic performance. Um, but the program is overwhelmingly Black.

Like other study participants, Olivia found the greatest amount of resources marketed for underrepresented students within the institutional context. Olivia participated in a first-year experience program for underrepresented students as a part of a scholarship she received from EU, “It is for, um, multicultural students. Um, and it's about retaining, uh, recruiting and retaining them. So, I was paired with a peer mentor who could be like a sophomore, junior, senior, fifth year…” Olivia stated she had no issues participating in the program.

**Limited interaction with Multiracial identity.** Olivia applied to participate in a variety of programs; however, she centered her search on programs that targeted multicultural students or Black students. Olivia identifies as Black; however, around the time of her college choice process she encountered racial identification conflict in her home context.
I remember, um ... right before I was getting ready to apply to college, we had the Census, the 2010 Census and my mom was filling out the Census for me and my brother. And she marked herself down as Black, but she marked my brother and I down as “Other.” And I was like, “Why would you do that?” I was like asking all these questions, like, “Why would you do that? What do you, what do you mean?” She was like, “Because you guys aren't just Black. You're this, this, and this.”

Although Olivia did not agree with her mother’s decision at the time not to mark her and her brother down as Black, overtime her racial categorization changed.

Olivia cited the Census encounter with her mother, explaining that her chosen racial identification has become more complex as she learned more about her background outside of her Black ancestry.

I think once I got comfortable understanding my family's roots, I was able to be more comfortable identifying as "other" or things like that. Getting closer to, um, my Trinidadian family, that also made me feel more comfortable in identifying as something other than Black. Um, and just really having, like, the knowledge, uh, to say like, “Yes I am Native American and I'm Blackfoot and Crow Native American,” instead of just saying, “Yeah, I'm Native American. I don't really know what.” Um, that made me feel more confident in my answer and my ability to, almost like, claim it, in a sense.
Furthermore, Olivia’s comfort with her family’s roots impacted how she identified herself on college forms.

I didn't do it on, like, a consistent basis. I would mark “Black” or I'd mark “Other” or “Multiple,” or whatever. Um, it wasn't until recently, and I still don't always do it, but I, um, marked “Hispanic” because I just don't feel connected to it. Um ... although I am. Um, so yeah, I mean, my answers as far as like forms, as far as like what all I check, um, that varies, but overwhelmingly, I always check “Black” ...

Um, as the primary or only option, if that's the option.

The interaction of Olivia’s college pathway with her Multiracial background are unknown, as she did not share an event that occurred due to her patterns of racial categorization on college forms.

As a student at EU who struggled with what she perceived as a lack of racial diversity she questioned if EU was the right fit for her racial identity and her Multiracial background.

I did like have kind of like that internal conflict for a bit of, you know, "Dang! Like you came to EU or a PWI because of money but, but you know like, look at how they're treating you and stuff like that." Um, but, I think overall, I can say I don't regret going, ah, just because, um, like the experiences that I had, I grew a lot. Ah, despite, you know, how good or bad they were. So, but yeah, I definitely sold out for money.
Olivia’s pathway was informed by her racial identity but it is unknown how her Multiracial background interacted specifically with available resources. There were limited interactions within her home, school, and community contexts as she learned more about her racial background she began to recognize them as a part of her process. **Paula: “I had to make it happen for myself.”**

Paula’s college access and choice pathway started with her choice to lottery in to a college-going high school. With this decision, Paula was able to access what she believed to be better academic and overall college access resources. Paula had a traditional college access and choice process until she decided to withdraw her enrollment and seek out another institution during the late summer after high school graduation. Maximizing college access resources and her networks, Paula enrolled in college the fall immediately following her high school graduation. Paula speaks to her Multiracial identity interacting with her college access and choice pathway in a positive manner. Paula stated that her Multiracial background enables her to navigate different spaces in a way that monoracial individuals cannot. **Impact of school context on pathway.** Paula described her community context as an area where individuals do not have high aspirations for their futures. When it came time for Paula to choose a high school she was clear that it would not be her neighborhood school. When researching high schools, she looked for academic rigor and a college-going culture that was going to give her greater opportunity to access college access resources.
I knew the academic rigor wasn't that hard, and I really did wanna challenge myself because I was in Gifted and Talented at, in middle school. So I wanted to go to a school that was gonna be challenging that would have a lot of opportunities.

When Paula researched high schools, she searched for more than what would impact her for the next four years. Selecting a high school was about making the right decision that would help her achieve her college and career aspirations.

Like I knew when I was like lotterying into [that school] and having my mom filled out those forms, I knew this was gonna be my key, like there wasn't, I didn't have people in my life that were gonna die and give me a bunch money. I didn't like know anyone in the community that could offer me an opportunity, like a life changing opportunity

When asked why she was so motivated to earn a degree she referenced her family and need to escape poverty.

Right. So, I don't know, so it was kinda weird, but, I mean, I wanted to go like because I just, I didn't wanna be poor, and like I knew that like if I wanted to like advance my, like myself, or get my family the things that they needed, like I wanna to buy my mom house, and I wanna like give her a place where she feels like she's not gonna lose it. And like I can't do that, I knew if I didn't have a college degree…
Paula does not speak of much support coming from her home environment. Her older brother was enrolled in college when she was applying to college; however, he did not offer her guidance or support. Paula stated that she communicated her college plans. “Like I felt like I made that decision on my own, and then I communicate it to my parents and they're like, okay, great, you know, go for it.” Overall Paula was in charge of ensuring she had the resources and knowledge to enroll and complete college, “I had to make it happen for myself. So, I know for me college was definitely going to happen, I just didn't know how.”

Maximized college access resources. Paul maximized her college access resources by using all the institutional agents around her. There were common agents such as school counselors, college advisors, and teachers as well as her peers and their parents serving as college knowledge resources and individuals who modeled the behaviors and life that she wanted to have. She compared the types of conversations she had with peers and how they differed between her home and school contexts.

[At home] It wasn't like future tra- trajectory wasn't a conversation. It was like oh, yeah, I'm gonna work, I'm gonna do this, and maybe I wanna do this, but nothing ever felt solid, nothing ever sounded like a real plan. Whereas in [at school] like all these kids, yeah, I'm gonna go to college, and I'm gonna be this, like it was, it was just more of a solid plan. It was people who had like bigger ideas, and people who just thought differently than the people [at home]. And a lot of it had, I knew it had to do with like how they felt about their own opportunities and options.
which I felt grateful for having that awareness because it made me feel like less jaded I think.

Paula maximized her contacts and took part in a variety of academic, financial, and aspirational college access resources.

Through her school context Paula took college level courses as part of her high school curriculum. She visited postsecondary institutions via overnight programs and traditional tours. Her institutional agents were supportive in making sure that Paula took full advantage of postsecondary programs at the high school level. Paula recounted one instance in which her teacher encouraged her to leverage a summer program for potential financial aid.

My Spanish teacher told me about that opportunity, and I was like, oh, I really wanna do that. And, you know, I knew [that] was a really good school, but it was like Stuuuupid expensive. So they ... He told me, he was like, well if you like go out there and you're like super interested they might really help you out. And I was like, cool, you know, I'll do that. And so I went and I had an amazing time…

Paula used her resources to gain enrollment into her first choice institution and was excited about attending with a cost of attendance financial aid package. She stated that at the beginning of the summer before her freshman year, she sat down with her institutional financial aid officer to make sure that her college costs were covered, “And so I'm sitting in the financial aid office and like so there's no balance, like ‘I'm good to go, I'll see you guys in a couple months.’ She's like, ‘Yep.’, you know, ‘Have a good
time’. However, she received a large bill in the mail that changed her postsecondary plans.

Paula received a $10,000 bill from her first-choice institution after being told her costs were covered.

And what happened is they sent a bill to my house and it was like 10,000, some crazy high number, you know, like a number, like one that like, um, money, 'cause the money doesn't exist to me, it's just the numbers that I know that are there. [I said] “I'll see you guys in a couple months.” She's like, “Yep.”, you know, “Have a good time.” And then I get the bill and I start like freaking out, like I'm going crazy, I'm like I didn't know that went into, like what is this? And how do I owe $10,000, why didn't that lady tell me when we were at the school?

Paula was told that she could not move into her dorm until the bill was paid. Defeated, she decided that she would cancel her admission, “So it was just, didn't seem feasible. So I was like well I'll just cancel my admission 'cause I can't go, I can't pay it.”

After canceling her enrollment, Paula engaged with everyone in her network to see what would be her options for postsecondary education. She researched other institutions that she had applied to and was offered mid-year enrollment, “I knew, like I felt like if I did not get to college I don't know what would have came of my life.”

However, after a conversation with a friend she reached out to a completely different institution that was on a different academic year schedule. An admissions representative reached out to not only offer her admission for the fall but also a spot in a summer bridge
program. Paula stated that it felt like divine intervention, “There's been a few different times in my life where I felt like maybe there was some type of divine intervention, going [RU] felt like one of them.” After a potentially negative event, Paula was able to maximize her college access resources to gain admission and financial aid to college, again.

**High interaction with Multiracial identity.** Paula’s college choice pathway was impacted by her ability to maximize her resources. For Paula, this included all available resources from her racial backgrounds. Paula identifies as Multiracial and used resources for monoracial students and resources marketed to underrepresented students generally.

Um, I identify as Multiracial. I mean, I think ... I'm really proud of the fact that, um, both of my parents are different races, that both of my parents have Native American heritage, and, um, that I'm like racially ambiguous. So I feel like I can just be whatever I want, you know...

When speaking about her Multiracial identity and where she felt comfortable, she explained that she sought out other minorities.

I always gravitated towards minorities, like other color of people because that's how I identified, and I felt like they could identify with some of the things that I would feel or like think about in a space that we were also sharing.

Despite this connectedness, she stated that she did not always feel included, “And I never really felt like I could fully integrate myself into like any particular racial group because I am Multiracial, and because those people are identifying me separately from them.”
The only uncomfortable interaction her Multiracial identity had with her college going process was a college tour event. Paula stated that as part of the program the group visited HBCUs. She explained that she felt different while on campus.

but the one time I felt weird about my identity and how I fit in was at a HBCU, I did not feel like I fit in that space very well. Um, and I didn't know why, like I was, it was like really existential moment for me, like I didn't, I didn't get why I felt different there…And that was like the one time I felt like, I don't know, like, like Black culture to me was like different. And that was really strange, but then it also at the same time I also felt like it was my culture, it was just a re-a really strange like experience for me.

Paula did not apply to any HBCUs during either of her college search processes; however, that did not impact the overall resources she perceived to be available to her or her sense of self.

I found comfort in not having to label myself either way. And as- as much as it sucked, and as much as like sometimes it did hurt my feelings to like have people like push identity onto me, or make me feel like I have to form my own because I can't just be a part of what already exists. Then like that was challenging, but over time I found like pride in it, I found like what good comes of being able to, like what skills I get now, and like how I am able to like just navigate different spaces like comfortably…
Q: “This might sound bad but honestly, I didn't even like ... I didn't know.”

Q’s college access and college choice pathway was similar to most of the college-bound students in her predominately White high school. Like those in her peer group, she applied to the closest institution and a few other large schools in the state. She used college access resources; however, she is not aware of how she came across the only scholarship for which she applied. Q identifies as Black and took advantage of perceived general minority resources for use as seen through her scholarship application. Q’s Multiracial background interacted with her college access and choice process namely in the college knowledge she was not provided. Her Black racial background was rare in her school and community context and was not acknowledged in the type of information provided to her. Q was not provided with information on minority serving institutions or resources developed for minority students, which impacted the resources she perceived for use and her college choice.

**Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education.** Q is one of few people of color in her hometown. Her high school served a large area as the only high school in the county. Economic disparities were deciding factors in the college messages that were conveyed in her high school. However, Q stated that postsecondary education was expected in her peer group:

Yeah, I guess, I guess it was expected at least for like, me and my friends and the people I was around. Like, we all went to college, but there was like, a good amount of people who...It was mostly like more of like, the poor people, um, who
just didn't go to college or, decided to have a family or just decided to work or, you know, do something else other than that, which is fine but yeah, for the most part, it was expected.

Like other participants, for Q there was not any alternative to college, as she stated “...always knew since I was younger that I would be going to college. Um, I didn't really think about like, an alternative.” A critical factor in Q’s college access pathway and college choice was that she did not have support from her home context. As such, she looked to her high school and community context to provide resources and support.

Q’s high school college-going culture was pervasive but limited. Postsecondary education was encouraged however most students were directed to the university near the high school. With no college choice support from home, Q, like her most of her high school peers, made EU her first choice. Q cited EU as her first choice because of her familiarity with the institution and lack of information due to her first-generation college going status.

Yeah, and it was the most familiar to me. Like, I took classes in high school at EU and I knew the campus really well, and also like, I'm the first born child so I was the first to go to college and I didn't get a lot of help from anybody, you know, telling me what ... where should I apply and how should I apply. I kind of just did it on my own so [EU] was just right there. That's all I knew.

Limited knowledge of postsecondary institutions did influence Q’s college access pathway, including where she applied to college and specifically as it related to
institution types. She stated that within her predominantly White school and community context there was no discussion of the variety of HBCUs and wish that she would have known.

...this is kind of embarrassing, but in high school I didn't even know what an HBCU was...cause like, I went to a White school so like, that never came up in discussion. I thought [Hillman] was the only HBCU, ever. Like, I didn't know there were multiple ones but, no. I didn't even ... It didn't even cross my mind to apply for one, which I, I kind of regret, but it's okay.

Q has regrets about Black postsecondary options but was unsure of pursuing the only HBCU she knew existed.

Ultimately, Q’s final factor in choosing her college of enrollment was the financial aid awarded. EU was her first choice and she made plans to attend with close friends from high school, plans that she canceled when she was awarded a cost of attendance scholarship from BSU.

Um, well I had planned to go [EU] because like, my friends were going. Like, we even set up, like, a living arrangement, like, living in the dorms together but then I got, um, word that I, like, received a scholarship to [BSU] so it's the cheaper option so I just like, went to [BSU] even though it was like technically, my second choice.

**Limited use of college access resources.** Q’s perception of college access resources available for use is limited. Paired with her relatively limited college
knowledge she did not know of many resources that could have been available to her. Whereas some participants sought out scholarships and not programmatic resources, Q stated that she only applied to the BSU Scholars program. EU was her first choice yet there she was not awarded many grants or scholarships. When asked about comparing her financial resources between BSU and EU she stated that it was an easy decision because the BSU scholarship was the most any institution had offered. “Um, the only [other] scholarship I got was from [EU]. It was really small. It was like $2,000 and that's it. So, that's the only thing I had to turn down, and I had to turn down, um, my acceptance from there but that's, that's pretty much it.” College access resources within her school and community context were procedural and academic, as she spoke of taking college level courses at EU during her high school career and applying to college. However, Q does not reference any institutional agents contributing to her college knowledge or assisting in her college choice. Overall, Q did not use college access resources because she was not aware of that they existed.

**Limited interaction with Multiracial identity.** Q’s mother is White and her father is Black. Q identifies as Black. Despite her monoracial Black identity and her regrets about not knowing more about HBCUs, she believed that she was not ready to attend an HBCU her senior year of high school.

...at the time in high school, I was really intimidated by being around a lot of Black people. Like, when I went to family reunions on my dad's side, like I just felt super intimidated, I guess is ... I don't know if that's the right word, but I don't
know. I felt like I, I wasn't a part of them or I was different so going to like, an entire school full of Black people, it just kind of freaked me out...

Similar to other participants, Q had different layers of comfort with her racial backgrounds. However, she felt no issue in seeking out college access resources from her Black racial background. She applied for the BSU scholarship, which she described as a minority scholarship that eventually changed where she enrolled in postsecondary education. “Um, well yeah. [it’s] is a minority scholarship, I can't really remember the process of how I sought that one out. It kind of just happened…” Additionally, Q describes the scholarship as minority generally, not Black, which meant it was for multiple underrepresented populations. Due to the scholarship’s overall minority marketing, Q applied and was awarded the scholarship without the discomfort that she experienced being around large groups of Black people.

At the time of the study, Q was happy with her choice to attend BSU and had become fully immersed in her scholarship program and Black social organizations on campus. Q’s experience had a positive outcome. When discussing her racial identity, Q credits the friend group created through her scholarship and BSU’s students as helping her become comfortable with her identity.

Um, yes because in high school, I wasn't really ... I didn't really like myself, as in like my identities. I was really ashamed of being, you know, a person of color but now, like, I'm completely proud. Like, I'm proud of my hair. I never wore my hair
like this in high school. I'm proud of my skin, proud of, you know, being a Black woman here, so yeah.

In sum, Q’s overall pathway was similar to that of her monoracial White peers in her high school. Aligned with Perna’s (2006) model, the final factor in her college choice process was financial resources. Yet, the underlying pathway that she employed to access postsecondary education and institutions that she applied to were heavily driven by her school and community context. Her first-generation college going status pushed Q to seek out institutional agents in her school and community context to assist her in gaining college knowledge to use in her college access and choice process. However, the information provided to her did not acknowledge her Black racial background and limited her college knowledge.

**Steve: “I'll kick your ass if you stay. Go. Get out of here.”**

Steve’s college access pathway was guided by a need to have a better life than his parents. Steve believed that completing postsecondary education would be the best pathway to a career and out of poverty. As a first-generation college student, he looked to his school and community context for the college access and resources to make his best college choice. Steve took advantage of college access resources for low-income and minority students. His Multiracial background interacted with his college choice process in that he searched for an institution that was more diverse than his hometown, but also he prepared for racism but was blindsided when mocked about being from his hometown.
Impact of school context on pathway. Steve’s college access and choice process began in a town near EU. His high school was predominately White and low-income. Economically, his family aligns with his high school peers.

The racial diversity, there isn't much I would say. I went to a high school with like a thousand people. Um, and I think we counted one time at lunch and there were something like 50 uh, I would say like 50 uh, either Black or Mixed people um, in the school in all the grades. Um, and I'd say socioeconomic diversity, there's certainly the have's and have not's. Um, [My] County is I think the poorest county in the State but um, there's also the professors who live [near here]. Um, so they have a lot of wealth but then there's the opposite end of the spectrum like my family where nobody has much of anything.

Steve is a first-generation college going student and could not look to his family for support in his college access and college choice pathway.

They just didn't know. I mean my, my parents have never taken the ACT or the SAT. So they didn't know the first thing about that. Um, they didn't go to college. So it wasn't like I could go to them, for advice about where I should attend. Um, I mean my mom took me to on college visits but I didn't really know what to look for in, in a college either. So it's just basically going at it until you felt right.

Steve knew for certain that what would not feel right was a life like his mother’s. Coming from a low-income background, Steve saw college as a way to live better as an adult.
Um, I knew I didn't want to live like my parents did. Um, and I thought college was the only way for me to achieve that because I remember nights going to sleep and listening to my mom cry because she didn't know how she was going to pay the bills or how we were going to have food…Um, and I saw college as a way of making sure that didn't happen.

Steve had clear college aspirations, yet little tangible support from his home environment. At his high school, Steve performed well academically and had positive relationships with key institutional agents in his school who contributed to his social and cultural capital. Steve stated that college was something that was expected of him in his high school, not only from adults but also his peers.

Um, I mean I was kind of probably the, the odd ball because I was somebody who is very high achieving and high performing and I am sociable, so I'm, I'm the type of person who my teachers knew really well, the guidance counselor knew really well. Um, so I think they've made a lot of efforts to help me get to where I ultimately am now.

Steve described being fearful of his college transition. Most of his perceptions about postsecondary education were formed from popular culture, specifically movies. “Um, I remember being really fearful. I couldn’t just talk to my parents to dispel any myths or rumors about college.” Although he was concerned about going to college, Steve was also excited at the idea of living in a community that was more diverse than his
hometown. Steve, like other participants, sought out institutions that were more diverse or just as diverse as their school and community context.

Yeah um, I wanted a change of pace… I felt like there was a lot of diversity at [BSU]. I didn't want to go to another school that was predominantly White, so ... I showed up on campus for my visit at [BSU] and I kind of fell in love and I knew that this was the place for me.

Falling in love with BSU is a sentiment echoed by other participants. Excited about the opportunity but afraid to leave home and friends behind for a potentially frightening college transition, Steve was encouraged by his friends. He explained his conflict to one of them and they offered simple advice, “I've got this scholarship opportunity at BSU, but I don't want to leave you guys behind, I think I'll go to EU, and he said ‘No, I'll kick your ass if you stay. Go. Get out of here.’”

Maximized college access resources. The support that Steve received from his guidance counselor and eventually his high school friends was pivotal in his college choice process. These community agents supported in his college aspirations and options, and assisted him in finding and taking advantage of resources to alleviate college costs.

Um, so I had a guidance counselor who was um, really big on making me know that all the uh, possible opportunities that I had available to me, as far as colleges. Um, made sure that I was applying for scholarships cause my people wasn't going to be able to afford school. Um, and I had a lot of teachers who I think really believed in me and sort of pushed me to achieve.
Steve’s relationship with his guidance counselor and his teachers influenced the type of college access resources and opportunities that he knew of and perceived as available for use. Unlike other participants, Steve was encouraged to look outside the traditional college choice list common to his school and community context. He explained that the support he had from his guidance counselor provided him with college access and choice altering opportunities.

Well, I think it's sort of assumed when you grow up in [here] that you're gonna go to [EU] or gonna go to um, [the local community college]. Um, but I think that she saw that I would have scholarship opportunities elsewhere, um, like BSU…Um, and so I applied for scholarships here at [BSU] um, ended up getting a full ride to [BSU] and a full ride at EU and it was kind of a ... I wanted to stay home because everybody I knew was staying home but she and some other people were kind of pushing me to go so. Um, but the rest is kind of history I guess.

Steve chose to attend BSU and went on to participate in a summer bridge/first-year experience program that he described as a minority student program that was not just for minority students:

Um, I don't think it was minority only, but it ended up being only minority students. It might have been like, I'm not even going to guess what the criteria was, I think there was one White student in the group, and the rest were either African American or Latino.
As was common among study participants, Steve was not aware of the requirements for the programs that he participated in but described them as intended for minority students.

Steve’s institutional agents provided him with access to college resources that were designed for underrepresented students including the BSU Scholars program. The support that Steve received from his school and community context was critical to his college knowledge, as he, like other participants, was the first in his family to attend postsecondary education.

**Limited interaction with Multiracial identity.** Steve’s mother is White and his father is Black. To his mother’s dismay, Steve identifies as Black because of the impact of his racial ascription.

Yeah. I mean, I, the way I explain it to people ... I think my mom kind of doesn't like to hear that I feel ... That I identify as Black, because she feels like I'm leaving out that part of my identity, but my experience has never been White, um, and I'm not treated by society as if I’m White. Um, when Obama became president, nobody said he was the first half-Black president, they said he was the first Black president, and Obama is as Black as I am.

Steve’s racial ascription impacted his racial identity, “I mean, I was called a nigger the first day of kindergarten, um, so. There was never any mistaking, for me, who I was to the rest of the world.” He explained:
I'm, I've been harassed by the police before, um, they, the experiences I have with the police isn't the experience that a White guy's going to have with the police, it's going to be a lot different. Um, so, I don't identify as White, because again, my experience has never been White.

Steve’s Multiracial background indirectly interacted with his college access and choice pathway through his identity as a Black man and also his desire attend a diverse institution. In fact, Steve was so concerned with his racial identity and low-income background that he was not aware of how his other identities might be perceived at BSU. Steve was familiar with stereotypes about his racial and low-income background, but he did not expect were jokes and insults about his hometown generally.

I think when I got to [BSU] was the first time I'd ever heard jokes about [the area where I grew up] and everybody sort of said the people from [my hometown] were uncultured and unintelligent. Um, so, that was something I'd never experienced before I came here.

Steve’s college access and choice process was driven by his personal belief that postsecondary education would give him the skills and resources necessary to live better than his parents. Without the support of institutional agents in his school and community context, Steve would not have had access to the resources and college knowledge to make his high school to college transition possible.
Taryn: “There was never a question it was always, ‘You're going’.”

Taryn’s college access pathway was influenced by the resources provided by her parents. Her parents’ employment at a postsecondary institution provided her with a significant discount at their, and partner, institutions. Given those bounds and her own interest in the discounted institutions, Taryn took advantage of traditional pathways in the college choice process. With a supportive home environment and no issues financing her education, Taryn did not take advantage of any community or institutional scholarships or programs (beyond the discount). She spoke of one scholarship opportunity for Black students that was offered by YU but then revoked. Taryn’s traditional college access and choice pathways, coupled with her stable monoracial Black identity, provided no visible interactions between her Multiracial background and her college access and choice process.

Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education. Taryn is different from other study participants in that she is not a first-generation college going student, and additionally both of her parents work at a prestigious liberal arts college in the Midwest. Taryn parents’ place of employment provided her with the opportunity to receive a discount at partner institutions.

Um, so I guess my biggest one is, um with my parents working at [the college] we get like, the discount for going to like, any of the five schools for a significantly different price, um, whereas like other people in my community don't get that opportunity, I guess.
Taryn started her college choice list with the partner institutions, and, although others were on the list, she eventually chose YU, a partner institution.

When asked when she decided to attend college she responded “There was never a question. It was always, ‘You're going.’” Taryn further explained that differences in home environment impacted how she experienced the college access and choice processes when compared to her peers.

I would say like most of my friend's parents or like, parents of people that I went to school with um, did not have the opportunities that I had or did not have parents that could give them the opportunities that I had, I guess. Um, a lot of people from my town, they work like in local, like, little businesses. Um, a lot of my friends, they moved around a lot. They’re just like not stable, I guess, I would say. Um, but I didn't experience that.

Drawing on her parents’ place of employment in comparison to her peers’ parents, Taryn highlighted the impact of stability and access to college knowledge and resources as key in her college access pathway.

Despite her parents being clear on her plans after high school, where and how she got there was her choice.

Yeah, um, maybe like they weren't like aggressive about the situation like, this is what you should do, this is where you should go. They were very open to, like for example, my Mom did not want me to go to [a rival institution] at all. She did not like it, um, she had never been, never like learned anything about it. She just
decided she didn't like it, um, but then we went and did the tour and we were like, going home and we always talked about like, what we liked about the campus, what we didn't and all this stuff and she decided she actually didn't mind it and it was okay... so, just little things like that like, “I wouldn't like you to go here but do what you want.”

Taryn’s parents acted as college knowledge translators, providing her with the information she needed to make informed postsecondary choices. Taryn was able to integrate her family's attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about postsecondary education into her college choice process while maintaining her own expectations and choices for college.

Acting in a supportive but not overwhelming manner, Taryn’s parents; support included encouraging her to take advantage of college choice tasks, such as campus tours and overnight visits. Indeed, Taryn visited YU multiple times before she decided to attend.

Oh, okay so, I did a couple overnights here and my first overnight was good...but I was a junior at that time so I wasn't really like fully committed to like, caring I guess, at that point. And then I took one at the beginning of my senior year and I stayed with this girl and I didn't like it at all. It was a really bad overnight um, and I told my Mom that and she's like, well, your first one was good so you should try again just to make sure and stuff like that so I did one more and um, I really liked it again.
The opportunities that Taryn’s parents were able to provide that gave her increased access to information and resources during her college access and choice processes were the same opportunities eliminated her ability to participate in other programs within the higher education context.

**Limited use of college access resources.** The opportunities Taryn spoke of seemed to limit the college access resources she perceived available to her. She only cited her discount and college visits as resources that she used. Taryn spoke of being notified and invited to participate in programs designed for what she perceived as minority students, specifically a scholarship for Black students that was rescinded once YU realized that Taryn’s parents worked for a partner institution and she would receive an employee discount.

So, there's a scholarship, I can't remember what it's called but, there's a scholarship for African-American students, um, where you go through ... like, you do an application, then you come to campus and you do like an interview and like they have this whole day where people come and do like little group activities and stuff like that, just for this scholarship. Um, so I could've done that but since I have the [discount] thing, I didn't get that opportunity but, yeah, so there's definitely things ... I was def-, like the mail for that, it stopped coming once, like, I got accepted and got my um, like financial aid stuff worked out.

Taryn perceived that her rescinded opportunity was for Black students; however, it is possible that there could have been a need-based component to the scholarship.
Taryn stated that the offer was rescinded after her discount was applied to her financial aid. If the scholarship had only been for Black students, Taryn would have still qualified for the scholarship and its social components. Regardless, Taryn perceived the scholarship as designed for Black students. Aside from that program and her discount, Taryn did not speak of any other resources.

**No interaction with Multiracial identity.** Taryn’s mother is Black and father is White. Taryn stated that she identifies as Black and that choice came from her own ideals, not from her parents. Taryn described an almost binary experience between herself and her friends; however, she stated that because she grew up in a small community and had the same friend group from a young age, there was little discussion among her peers about any of their differences, “It, it just came as second-like so it's just normal.” Taryn’s experiences with her racial identity align with other participants in that she had a consistent monoracial racial identification and there was not any visible interaction between her Multiracial background and her college access and choice processes.

Despite her clear monoracial Black identity, Taryn did not take advantage of college access resources. Taryn never explicitly stated why she did not seek out any other resources. After being excluded based on her parent-provided discount, she stated that her “financial aid stuff worked out” and, without any additional concerns she proceeded, to the general tasks before matriculating. Overall, Taryn describes her high school to college transition as smooth, using college access resources that are not racially specific and with
little interaction from her Multiracial background. She credited her parents for making it easier to choose, finance, and enroll in YU.

**Narrative Summary**

This subsection presented the study’s findings individually through narrative analysis. The choice to present findings in this manner provided opportunities to give a similar structured focus for each narrative while highlighting the unique contributions and experiences of each participant. Headings guided the reader through the analysis. These headings aligned with each participant’s college access and choice pathway, the college access resources they perceived for use, and how their Multiracial background interacted with their chosen pathway and college access resources.

**A Comparative Review of Multiracial Narratives**

This subsection provides a comparative summary of participants’ narratives through a traditional approach to presenting qualitative data when not using narrative inquiry. Data were examined across narratives to find common experiences and trends among how participants perceived, interacted with, benefited from college access resources during their college choice process. The themes presented below are the product of the nominal level, application of thematic categories, and restorying process described in chapter three (Cain, 1991; Riessman, 2008; Tamboukou, 2003). Themes are aligned with the guiding research question. As such, each theme is presented under the corresponding research question. Similar to the narrative analysis subsection, each participant’s experience will be presented; however, the extended accompanied quotes
will not. Table 4.1. is an overview of the participants and their aligning theme to each research question.

Table 4.1. Comparative Themes Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>RQ1 Theme</th>
<th>RQ2 Theme</th>
<th>RQ3 Theme</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>David</td>
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<td>Limited use of college access resources</td>
<td>High interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalen</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education</td>
<td>Limited use of college access resources</td>
<td>Limited interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>Impact of school context on pathway</td>
<td>Limited use of college access resources</td>
<td>No interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Community college as an entrance to postsecondary education</td>
<td>No use of college access resources</td>
<td>No interaction</td>
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<td>Love</td>
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<td>Taryn</td>
<td>Predetermined pathways for postsecondary education</td>
<td>Limited use of college access resources</td>
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College Access and Choice Pathways

Study participants employed multiple college access and choice pathways. All pathways interacted with different aspects of the participants’ contextual influences. Some pathways have their foundation in the participants’ student and family context and are driven by the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of the home environment; whereas others were developed within the resources, supports, and barriers of their school and community contexts. Finally, other participants were guided by the marketing and recruitment efforts, as well as the programs by higher education institutions. Here, I offer three thematic categories that encompass the experiences of the study participants’ pathways to access higher education and chose a postsecondary institution: community college as an entrance to postsecondary education, impact of school context on pathways, and predetermined pathways.

Community college as an entrance to postsecondary education. Use of community college crosses narratives was a key component in college access for David, Jalen, and Little. These participants had rigid limitations on their college access pathways and community colleges served as entry points to postsecondary education. David and Jalen’s academic preparation and Little’s concern for college cost and flexibility was alleviated through community colleges enrollment. David’s school counselor encouraged his college access and choice pathways. However, a negative college-going message from his high school English teacher is what provided David with the motivation to seek out postsecondary education. With below average academics David’s like Jalen’s options
were limited. Enrolling in community college was one of two college transitions for David. Once he accumulated enough credits he transferred to BSU to earn his bachelor’s degree.

Jalen echoed the two-year to four-year plan as he explained that he limited his college choice options because he knew that institutions available to a student with a low grade point average were limited. Additionally, Jalen was unsure if postsecondary education was “for him.” For Jalen, attending a community college was not only an academic choice but one of self-discovery. Similar to David, Jalen plans to enroll in a four-year institution after completing course work at the community college level.

Somewhat dissimilar to David and Jalen, Little’s approach to community college enrollment focused less on the academic component and more the potential financial burden of postsecondary education. Attending SCC was a low-cost option that was local and Little was able to attend college and work full-time. At the time of this study Little had transferred from SCC and enrolled at an EU regional campus to earn in Bachelor’s of Arts in History.

Comparing David, Jalen, and Little to the other participants there is a clear dichotomy in the type of institutions that each participant considered as part of their college choice list. Other study participants make no mention of two-year institutions even when faced with concerns on how they would pay college costs. Additionally, other participants spoke of their academic talents by their mention of the academic rigor of their high school, college expectations, or ranking in high school. However, David, Jalen,
and Little cited poor academic talents, habits, or made no mention of the academics at all. Overall this theme speaks to the ease of accessibility of the community college for participants who looked to the higher education context for a postsecondary education experience that fit within the untraditional boundaries and expectations that David, Jalen, and Little placed on their college choice.

**Impact of school context on pathway.** For some participants the impact of Perna’s (2006) second context, or the school and community context, contributed significantly to their college access and choice pathway. The resources, supports, and barriers within their high schools along with the institutional agents who shaped college choice through the quality of information provided, postsecondary options encouraged and discouraged, as well as general messages around postsecondary education were key to the pathways Liberty, Paula, Olivia, and Steve employed.

Liberty and Paula make clear that their choice in high school was to increase their opportunity for postsecondary enrollment. Liberty transfer after her sophomore year of high school to an early college program because a friend who was enrolled at the school informed her that students who attended were able to take advantage of a year at HSU full-time at no cost to the student. Liberty, already concerned with college costs during the middle of her high school career, stated that once she was aware of the “free college” she knew that she would transfer high schools. Her choice to transfer high schools and her year of financial aid from HSU heavily influenced her choice to stay at HSU despite her poor institutional fit.
Paula, like Liberty, chose a specific high school to attend as part of her school lottery program. Paula stated that her designed high school was within her community and she wanted access to more opportunities that want her neighborhood high school could provide. Key differences in the high schools were the access to social and cultural capital and the postsecondary aspirations that align with a college-going culture. Paula stated that when she had her mother fill out her high school lottery forms she knew her high school selection would be key to her college access and choice pathway. Olivia took a similar approach. She made her high school choice by evaluating the resources and opportunities that would be provided. Her first high school choice did not meet her expectations; however, after her first year of high school she entered the high school lottery for a second time and was able to enroll in the top academically performing high school in her district. Olivia noted the access to resources her high school provided when compared to her peers when she mentioned that her school counselor regular sent out scholarship opportunities and her peers’ school counselors did not. Although an unexpected factor, Olivia selected EU after attending a college tour facilitated by her high school.

Steve differed as he attended the only public high school option for his town. Additionally, within the building there was a clear script for the postsecondary options that were encouraged and discouraged with most students being directed to EU or the local community college. The key difference is was that Steve was well supported and informed while developing and implementing his college access and choice pathway,
specifically by being encouraged to apply to institutions and resources that were specific to his background and goals that were not commonly associated with the postsecondary options and messages of his high school.

The impact of the school and community context, specifically the high school environment on these participants’ college access and choice pathways is seen through how the students compiled their college choice lists and eventually selected their institution. Their college access and choice processes centered their intentional choice to seek out the aspects related to institutional agents, the quality of information provided, postsecondary options, and general postsecondary messages from their high school environment. Liberty, Paula, and Steve stated that their first-generation college going status pushed them to seek out resources that were within the school and community context because of the lack of college knowledge and opportunity available within their home environments. Olivia’s parents shared a similar gap in college knowledge however where other participants spoke of an absence of parental involvement Olivia states that her first-generation college status motivated her parents to accumulate college access knowledge to create an encouraging college-going culture in the home. Overall, for these participants the high school environment was a critical theme in their college access and choice pathways.

**Predetermined pathways.** The final theme that emerged across multiple narratives was a predetermined college access and choice pathway. The participants that fall within this theme used existing pathways from their home environments such as Lee
using his sister’s pathway and Taryn narrowing her college choice by institutions that offered a discount for her parent’s place of employment; their school and community context as seen in Q’s choice to apply to the same schools as the majority of her peers and Love following the tasks associated with her GTC course; and finally Monika and No Sleep’s college access and choice pathway was determined by the higher education context with Monika aligning with her pathway with participation in the BSU college access program and No Sleep’s bounding his college choice by institutions that recruited him with a cost of attendance athletic scholarship.

Lee started off his college access and choice pathway ready to live far from home and attend a diverse institution. However, his college choice pathway changed and became a family decision. He researched and planned to apply to three schools that he believed met his requirements of a postsecondary institution. Of the three he only apply to one. He also applied to schools that she had no desire to attend. Despite not wanting to attend he was encouraged by his grandmother and his sister. After, speaking with his sister about his college access and choice pathway Lee, dismissed his plans and replaced it with his sister’s advice. Utilizing his sister’s pathway Lee enrolled at the same institution that she graduated from, FU. FU gave Lee the most robust financial aid package but was not as diverse, was close to his hometown, and did not offer a study abroad program, which were the three criteria Lee listed that he was looking for in college. Taryn, like Lee, had a strong influence from her home environment however it was not as overwhelming to her college access and college choice process. With both of
her parents employed by a small liberal arts college Taryn was encouraged to choose a college that offered an employee discount. Additionally, Taryn’s parents were actively involved in her college access and choice pathway; serving as college knowledge translators and suggesting Taryn’s next step in the process. Overall, Taryn’s parents guided her college access and choice pathway yet, unlike Lee, Taryn’s college choice was hers to make.

At the school and community context Love and Q relied on their high schools to provide resources and a pathways for college access and college choice. Unlike the participants cited in the impact of high school context theme above, Q did not chose her high school and Love did not seek out her GTC course. Q, like Steve, attended the only public high school option available in her. Unlike Steve, Q did not seek out multiple resources unique to her background thus her college access and choice pathway was similar to her predominately White peers. Q stated that adopting the same college access and choice pathway as her White peers left gaps in her college knowledge specifically as it related to minority serving instructions and the variety of college access resources available to minority students. Q ultimately chose to attend BSU because she was awarded a minority cost of attendance scholarship. Q does not remember who informed her of the opportunity and stated that she did not put much effort into her application.

Love transferred from her first high school, however it was due to an academic incompatibility and not a deliberately seeking out specific college access resources. Despite receiving positive college-going messages from her home environment, Love
was fully aware that it was her choice to enroll in postsecondary education. It was not until her senior year and Love began to actively take the steps to enroll in postsecondary education. She stated that a college course, GTC, was assigned to her schedule during the late autumn of her senior year that inspired her to complete the necessary milestones to apply to college. The course was a poorly executed alternative to study halls. Love does not know how student were selected to be in the course and stated that she did not ask to be in the course. As part of the course requirement Love had to apply to a specific number of postsecondary institutions. She created her college choice list using the institutions listed on the general Common Application and the Common Black College Application. After being accepted to BSU (a Common Application institution) Love did a campus visit and decided to commit.

Monika and No Sleep’s college access and choice pathway are similar because they both relied on opportunities from the higher education context to determine their pathway. Monika participated in a college access program starting in sixth grade that she credits to changing her life. Her program participation was key to her college access and choice pathway as she used her program advisor as a key college knowledge translator and the program itself served as a space to prepare for and complete the milestones required to apply and enroll in postsecondary education. In addition to the one-on-one and group advising that Monika received she was also offered a cost of attendance scholarship to BSU, which she utilized. Her parents and program advisors discouraged
Monika from passing up a cost of attendance scholarship. Monika, as she had done since the sixth grade, took the advice of her program advisor and attended BSU.

No Sleep applied to one postsecondary institution. His college access and choice pathway was predetermined based on the institutions that offered him a cost of attendance athletic scholarship. Starting his sophomore year, postsecondary institutions began to make the list and by his senior year No Sleep had four choices. Within the four institutions No Sleep had other desires such as diversity, location, and other athletic factors. Yet, it was only applied to the predetermined list. After deciding which college would most closely align with his desires No Sleep applied to that institution and reported for on-campus football camp less than one week after graduating high school.

The study participants whose narratives were discussed within this theme of predetermined college access and choice pathways had various contextual influences. Across narratives one key element was consistence, the participants did not create unique college access and choice pathways that centered on their salient identities or what they specifically wanted in an institution. In some cases, such as Lee, the predetermined pathway completely overshadowed what students wanted in a postsecondary institution. Other participants, such as No Sleep, were able to work within a predetermined pathway to still attended to what institutional characteristics they preferred. No matter the degree of influence each participant’s pathway was not tailored for him or her.
College Access Resources Perceived for Use

The college access resources that participant’s perceived for use aligns with three levels of use. Each level is used to label a thematic category: no use of college access resources, limited use of college access resources, and maximized college access resources. Within each theme the factors that contributed to their level of use varied from interaction with their racial identities and other salient identities to a lack of college knowledge and ease of accessibility. The following thematic categories cover the experiences that each participant provided when describing the college access resources they perceived for use and the amount of resources they incorporated in the college access and choice pathway.

Maximized college access resources. Steve and Paula maximized the college access resources provided as a part of their school and community context. Steve identities as Black, although he acknowledged his White background, and as such saw all college access resources marketed to Black, underrepresented, and general minority students as available for use. Additionally, Steve is a first-generational college going student from a low-income background, which broaden the type and amount of resources that he utilized as part of his college access and choice pathway. Steve maximized his resources by participating in college advising via institutional agents to gain as much information about the types of resources available and then applied for participation. Paula’s story mirrors Steve’s in the holistic method she employed to learn about college access resources that would be available to her. Paula is a first-generation college going
student from a low-income background who identifies as Multiracial. Paula stated that her identification as a Multiracial individual made her perceive all resources from her racial backgrounds as available for use and when possible took advantage of the resources as part of her two college access and choice pathways.

**Limited use of college access resources.** The perception of what college access resources participant’s perceived for use varied by background and contextual factors. David, Liberty, and Olivia perceived college access resources were limited by their affiliation with different racial identities. Whereas Jalen, Lee, Monika, and Taryn’s perception of the college access resources available for use were a matter the level of difficulty in accessing the resources. Lastly, Q and Love were limited by their college access knowledge.

**College access resources limited by racial identity.** David struggled with his racial identity and ascription among his high school peers. He traced much of his conflict back to the absence of details related to his parents’ racial backgrounds. The college access resources that David perceived for use were limited to one-on-one advising with his high school counselor to assist in his application and enrollment to CC. Once at CC David was willing to participate in access and persistence programming that was designed for underrepresented students and did not have a focus on racial identity. David cited this inclusive design as a reason why he did not have think about his racial identity and his fit within the program. This is different from how he explained his use of college access resources during his CC to BSU transition. During that transition he stated that
although he was glad to see the celebration of diversity on BSU campus he did not perceive any of the resources for use because he did not have a strong conviction or passion for his racial identity. Instead, David chose to take advantage of a survey class marketed to all transfer students at BSU.

Liberty and Olivia share common traits in how they perceived college access resources. Both individuals identify as Black and generally took advantage of resources that were marketed to Black students or other inclusive descriptors such as underrepresented, minority, low-income, and first-generation college going. Liberty had a understanding of her background but cited that her mother closely identified with Black culture and thus made her uncomfortable to take advantage of resources for API students because she did not represent that population. Olivia had fluid perception of the resources available for use as she had multiple racial backgrounds of which she did not have a close understanding. As she learned more about each racial background and how she fit within it, she began to affiliate with that identity and perceive the resources for use for that identity.

**College access resources limited by ease of accessibility.** Jalen, Lee, Monika, and Taryn have contrasting college access and choice pathways; however the college access resources they perceived for use were a matter of accessibility. For instance, Jalen only applied to SCC. However, because of the persistence on his contracted college advisor he did apply for and was awarded a small scholarship from the organization. Jalen also stated that he was more interested in ensuring that postsecondary education was right for
him. Any activities from that took too much effort away from that goal, including participation in group college access programming or securing employment, was out of the question until he felt comfortable with his postsecondary decision.

Lee, Monika, and Taryn’s college access and choice pathway was predetermined and interacted with the type of support provided. Each participant had comprehensive support in terms of social capital and higher education funding. Additionally, they perceived college access resources that aligned with all their identities for use. Monika and Taryn’s experience is different from Lee in this manner as they have Black and White racial backgrounds. However, both participants perceived resources that targeted Black, minority, or underrepresented students available for use. Lee, stated that he was proud of his API and Black racial backgrounds yet did not seek out any API specific resources. When asked if he would have any issue accepting resources for API students he stated that he would not. In sum, with what they considered the most important aspects of the college choice covered they had no need to seek out other resources.

*College access resources limited by college knowledge.* Q and Love attended BSU and relied on their school and community contexts to guide their college access and choice pathways. Love identifies as Multiracial and like other participants perceived college access resources marketed to all her racial backgrounds, minority, and other inclusive descriptors as available for use. For Love, this perception is mirrored in the groups in which she felt comfortable. Love applied for scholarships from Black cultural organizations and it was not until her freshman year of college that she became aware of
Hispanic serving organizations. When asked about her college access journey Love stated that looking back she was unaware during her college access and choice processes of the multiple opportunities that were available to her.

Q, who stated that because she attended a predominately White high school many of the minority specific opportunities were not discussed which, echoed Love’s lack of college knowledge. Q perceived college access resources marketed to inclusive descriptors as available for use. She applied for and was awarded the cost of attendance BSU scholarship, a program that Love would have possibly qualified for if she knew it existed. Additionally, the BSU Scholars program was the only scholarship that Q applied for as seen in her option to accept a $2,000 institutional award from EU or the BSU scholarship. Both Q and Love’s college access and choice pathways was predetermined and was not uniquely crafted for them. Ultimately, their experiences highlights the limits of generalized college access and choice assistance within the school and community context. Love and Q relied on resources and support from her high school to fill the gaps in her college knowledge. Their institutional agents were successful in assisting them in choosing, applying, and enrolling in postsecondary education; however they did so with without the full amount of resources available to them.

**No use of college access resources.** The two participants, Little and No Sleep, who did not perceive any college access resources for use is a matter of their unique approaches to college choice. Little did not research or perceive any college access resources for use. His decision not to use even the most basic college access advising
services, formal or informal, heavily influenced what resources he perceived as available for use. Little’s need to navigate his college process alone created no opportunity for him to learn about any resources that he could have potentially seen as useful in his college access and choice pathway. No Sleep’s college access and choice pathway was in itself the only college access resource that he perceived for use. His limited college choice list is a matter of the most cited college access resource, financial aid. For No Sleep the only form of financial aid that he considered was cost of attendance scholarships. Postsecondary institutions began recruiting No Sleep is sophomore year, which left no need to seek other opportunities.

**Interactions: Multiracial Identity, College Access, Choice Pathway, and Resources**

The final guiding research question explored how each participants’ Multiracial background interacted with the college access and choice pathways employed as well as the college access resources they perceived as available for use. Not all components of the participant’s pathway interacted with their backgrounds in the same way. Like their multiple racial backgrounds, the multiple contextual factors as described within the abovementioned themes (e.g. college knowledge, pathway, other major identities, and need for college access resources) interacted differently depending on the unique experience of each participant. The patterns that emerge in relation to this research question began with the level of interaction between their pathway and perceived resources. This observation was then coupled with the contextual factors to present a
robust theme that accounted for how the interaction occurred and the degree of the interaction.

No interaction. Participants with no interaction had a strong sense of self in regards to their racial background and a college access and choice pathway that often did not rely on the use of specific racial resources. These participants often had pathways that aligned with their other social identities. For instance, neither Jalen’s pathway or the resources he perceived for use, or used, had anything to do with in Multiracial background. The resources that he used were marketed to low-income students and his pathway was based on a need to escape the potentially detrimental impact of his community after graduating high school. Like Jalen, Little did not speak of his Multiracial background often. Their college access and choice pathway of using community college enrollment as a means of postsecondary access did not allow space for an interaction between their Multiracial identities as Jalen and Little ultimately only saw SCC as their college choice because of non-race related reasons and did not seek out any minority-based resources.

Monika and No Sleep’s Multiracial background had a similar interaction as Jalen’s and Little’s. However, their overall pathway and perceived resources for use were nonexistent despite holding a Multiracial identity. Their pathway was predetermined. No Sleep did not limit his college choice as he only sought out a “pretty diverse” institution among those who recruited him. Monika followed the steps outlined for her by the BSU program. It was not until she had enrolled at BSU that she understood and verbalized how
the predominately White campus interacted with her Multiracial background. Their pathways made seeking out additional college access resources generally unnecessary and as such there was little interaction between their Multiracial identity and the college access resources they perceived for use.

Taryn, Liberty, and Steve had different pathways and resource utilization however those choices did not interact with their Multiracial background. Taryn’s college access and choice pathway was predetermined by her parent’s discount and Liberty’s pathway was a matter of the financial resources available in high school. Taryn recounted the story of an invitation to participate in a college access program for Black students that was revoked and had little to do with her overall approach to higher education. Liberty stated that she wanted to attend a HBCU, however after receiving more financial aid from HSU she discarded her HBCU dreams. Steve perceived Black, minority, and underrepresented resources for use and took full advantage of the opportunities. Neither Taryn nor Liberty spoke about their non-Black backgrounds and major factors in their choice. Steve only referenced his predominately White upbringing to note his experiences as a Black man and his choice to attend an institution that was more diverse than his high school. Liberty explicitly stated that he did not seek out API college access resources because she did not identify as such, Taryn’s pathway did not require resources beyond her parent’s discount, and Steve’s other background was White. For Liberty, Steve, and Taryn the interactions between race and college access were a matter of a Black racial identity, not a Multiracial identity.
**Limited interaction.** Participants with limited interactions between their college access and choice pathway and the college access they perceived for use either had various interaction levels or inconsistent interactions across their pathways or perceptions. Lee’s Multiracial identity interacted with his college access and choice pathway because of his appreciation for his mother’s background and what he desired in a college. Lee recounted the hard work and sacrifice of his mother to make sure the he and his siblings were prepared to go to college and made sure that any one who asked knew about his Black and API backgrounds. In terms of college choice he wanted to attend a diverse institution that had a study abroad program to the Philippines. The study abroad program requirement was so he could experience first-hand where his mother was born. Lee’s consistent Multiracial identity enabled him to perceive all related resources from all his identities for use. What limits Lee’s Multiracial identity interactions is the actual implementation of his desires. Lee did not attend a diverse institution with a study abroad program to the Philippines because he adapted his sister’s college access and choice pathway. Although he perceived API resources for use he did not use any because of the ease of resources provided by his pathways.

Q’s Multiracial interactions were a matter of the college knowledge that she was provided. She stated that her Black background was rare in her school and community context and as such she did not receive the college knowledge related to her Black background. This interacted with her college choices. Q was unaware of the variety within each designations of different minority serving institutions, specifically HBCUs,
and she believed there was only one, Hillman. Also a matter of her Multiracial
background interacting with her college choice, Q did not feel comfortable around groups
of Black people. Being intimidated at her father’s family functions and issues with her
sense of being in Black space influenced her decision not to apply to Hillman. Q’s
college knowledge in terms of resources was limited. She did not perceive or apply for
college access resources aside from college courses during high school and a scholarship
because she did not know others existed. Finally, the BSU Scholars program was
marketed as a minority scholarship, which ease Q’s issues with Black spaces as multiple
races were included in the marketing.

Love’s interaction with her Multiracial background, like Q, is a matter of the
access resources she was aware of as well as noting the available racial categories on
various postsecondary forms. Love’s college knowledge also limited her Multiracial
interactions. Love identifies as Multiracial stating that she always represents both of her
racial backgrounds. As such Love saw all related college access resources that she knew
of for use. Love took advantage of resources of Black, minority, and underrepresented
students but not Hispanic resources. Additionally, Love applied to HBCUs but not HSIs.
When asked why, Love stated that she was not aware of the opportunities. However, once
she found out about Hispanic opportunities, she applied. As seen when she learned about
the Hispanic Scholarship Fund.

Racial categorization during her college process interacted with Love’s
Multiracial identity. She also spoke of the different racial categories available to her as
part of college forms. Her Hispanic and Black identities sometimes became tricky to navigate but she stayed committed to her Multiracial identity. She noted that sometimes her Hispanic background was an ethnicity and sometimes it was listed as a race. In situations where she was only able to choose one race, she would mark “Other.” Love’s Multiracial identity was strengthened by this interaction during her college access and choice process because of her determination to recognize her two backgrounds whether it was via race or ethnicity categories.

Olivia’s Multiracial identity and the interaction it had with her college access and choice pathway in addition to the resources she perceived available for use was limited by the level of cultural knowledge she had at different times in her college journey. Olivia identifies as Black and stated that her mother and brother do too despite being aware of multiple other racial backgrounds. The interaction of Olivia’s Multiracial background is difficult to observe because her acceptance or representation of each racial identity changed as she learned more about each race. As Olivia collected her racial identities, she continued to identify as Black. She explained that she was able to simultaneously learn and include her Native American, Trinidadian, Asian, and Hispanic backgrounds in her identity but for her those backgrounds created a Black, not Multiracial identity. How she developed her racial identity furthered her need for diversity and for those around her to appreciate diversity. These are the two traits that were critical, and missing, from her college choice. Additionally, it is unknown what degree if any her changing racial category selection had within the higher education
context, aside from her designation as Two or More Races. Certainly Olivia’s Multiracial identity interacted with what she looked for in an institution and that she perceived a growing number resources for use as she learned about her backgrounds, however understanding the degree of interaction is limited by the fluid nature of her process.

**High interactions.** Paula and David had opposite experiences of their Multiracial identity interacting with their college access and choice pathways as well as the resources that they perceived for use. Observed on a positive to negative spectrum these participants would anchor the scale with Paula having positive interactions and David having negative interactions between their Multiracial identity and college journeys. Paula’s Multiracial experience was positive and stated that she was proud of the many races that were included in her background. She believed that being Multiracial gave her the ability to navigate spaces and situations in a way that monoracial individuals cannot. Paula acknowledged that she was never truly able to fit in completely with one racial group be she celebrated her difference. This perspective was important when she lotteried into a high achieving high school where she strengthened her social capital network by making connections and new friends with individuals who either had the college knowledge she desired or modeled the college-going culture she wanted as part of her life. Paula’s view of her Multiracial identity allowed her to perceive college relevant college access resources for use as well as to programs that were marketed under inclusive labels such as minority and underrepresented. She needed ample resources as she completed two college choice processes before she enrolled at RU.
Paula spoke about one instance that she stated was different but not negative that involved her Multiracial identity interacting with her college access and choice pathway. While on a college tour at a HBCU Paula had the feeling that she did not belong. She said that there was a disconnect between what she believed was Black culture and the Black culture at the HBCU. She did not name this moment as a major contributor to her college access and choice pathway but it should be noted that she did not apply to any HBCUs as a part of either of her college choice processes. Overall, Paula’s strong sense of self and appreciation of her Multiracial background interacted highly and positively, which is completely different from David’s experience.

David’s complicated development of his racial identity began with his mother and her refusal to provide consistent details about her or David’s father’s racial background. Without a firm understanding of his background David experimented with his racial identity in high school. Adopting the racial ascription given by his White peers David identified as Black in high school, which elicited an undesirable response from his peers. He was frequently bullied over his race and stated that as a result struggled with depression and did not engage in his academics. Isolated, David did not take advantage of any college access resources in high school. His decision to attend college was motivated by a teacher telling him his time would be better spent being a security guard that going to college. As a student at CC David’s Multiracial identity interacted with a college access and success program that he utilized. The program was marketed to underrepresented students and did not require David to think about his racial identity and
fit. Once he transferred to BSU he purposefully did not participate in race-based resources because he felt like he did not belong. Unlike Paula, David did not celebrate this difference, he avoided it. David’s Multiracial background, and his lack of knowledge about it, interacted highly but negatively with his college journey as it created limitations and barriers to what postsecondary options and resourced he saw available. When asked if David had any positive memories about being Multiracial he stated he did not. At the time of this study David identified as Puerto Rican. He stated that he looks Puerto Rican and using that label reduced conversation about his race, which he prefers not to discuss.

**Comparative Summary**

This subsection provided a more comparative presentation of the data. Data were aligned with the three guiding research questions with each corresponding theme displayed thereafter. This style of reporting deconstructed participant narratives in a way not commonly associated with narrative inquiry. However, the comparative representation is a more direct way to answer the guiding research questions across all participants. In total, nine themes were presented with each research question having three aligning themes. College access and choice pathway included community college as an entrance to postsecondary education, impact of school context on pathway, and predetermined pathways for postsecondary education. College access resources perceived for use included maximized college access resources, limited use of college access resources, and no use of college access resources. Finally, the interaction of participant’s Multiracial identity includes the themes of no, limited, and high interaction.
Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the research study in two forms. The first was a presentation of narratives intact with attention to the three guiding research questions and the study’s theoretical frame. Within each narrative their college access and choice pathways, what college access resources they perceived for use, and the ways that their Multiracial background interacted with their pathway and resource perception were highlighted. In addition to the narrative presentation of findings a comparative thematic summary was offered to provide a comparative qualitative display of the research findings. Whereas the first presentation of findings looked within each narrative the second reached across narratives to find commonalities and difference within the aspects of each participant’s experiences. The comparative analysis served as a summary of the findings and referenced, not replicated, the extensive participant quotes as was seen in the narrative presentation. Themes were aligned with the guiding research questions and narratives were deconstructed to arrange specific experiences within each theme.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how Multiracial students perceived, interacted with, and benefited from college access resources. Utilizing a constructivist narrative inquiry this study was guided by three research questions: (a) what pathways do Multiracial students take when accessing postsecondary education; (b) what college access resources do Multiracial students perceive as available for use; and, (c) how does a student’s Multiracial identity interact with college access pathways and resources utilized? Findings from these questions were detailed in chapter four. Participants’ narratives were presented first through a narrative analysis to highlight each participant's unique contributions. Narratives were then deconstructed to provide a comparative, or horizontal, presentation. Although not a common way to present narrative findings, I deemed this approach as appropriate because it complements the narrative analysis and provides a summary of major commonalities and difference across narratives. As there are few researchers who have brought together the college access and college choice literature to explore Multiracial students’ college journeys the major themes provided a recognizable and easily digestible summary of the research findings.

This chapter reviews the research findings and then answers the guiding research questions with attention to existing literature reviewed in chapter two and the theoretical framework: a Conceptual Model of College Enrollment (Perna, 2006). With findings reviewed and the research questions answered, this chapter ends with the limitations of
the study and areas for future research, implications and recommendations, and my concluding thoughts.

**Review of Findings**

The findings presented in chapter four are summarized within nine major themes that align with how participants accessed higher education, the resources they utilized, and those they did not, as well as how their racial identity interacted with their college access and choice processes.

Participants’ pathways were categorized into three major themes, community college as an entrance to postsecondary education, impact of school context on pathway, and predetermined pathways. Jalen, David, and Little used community colleges as a way to access and enroll in postsecondary education despite their own contextual concerns. Participant concerns centered on the home environment as well as the school and community context. Issues of independence, costs, and academic performance were key factors in the community college theme. The participants who make up the impact of school context on pathway theme purposely utilized their high school as a factor in college access. Liberty, Olivia, and Paula actively sought out specific high schools to increase their access to resources that informed their college access and choice pathway. Steve, was not able to chose his high school however he deliberately worked with institutional agents within his high school to access resources unique to his college going needs. Lee, Love, Monika, No Sleep, Q, and Taryn used pathways that were
predetermined. Said another way, these participants adopted pathways from individuals, groups, or institutions with little or no modification of their own.

The college access resources that participants perceived for use were summarized as the level of resources participants actually used. Usage was tiered as: no use of college access resources, limited use of college access resources, and maximized college access resources. Little and No Sleep’s experiences were described under the no use theme as their pathways did not lend themselves to the need for college access resources and Paula and Steve maximized the college access resources they perceived for use as part of their well resourced and highly individualized pathways. As expected, the majority of participants fell within the limited use theme with three subthemes clarifying their experiences: racial identity, ease of accessibility, and college knowledge. David, Liberty, and Olivia’s resource use was limited by their racial identities. Specifically, they limited the college access resources they perceived for use based on their racial identification. Love and Q’s college knowledge influenced their perceptions of resources available for use. Simply put, they were unaware of what was available. Jalen, Lee, Monika, and Taryn’s use of college access resources were limited by the ease of accessibility as a part of their highly limited or predetermined pathways.

Finally, the interactions between a participant’s Multiracial identity and college access pathways and resources utilized were also summarized via a degree of interaction: no interaction, limited interaction, and high interaction. Jalen, Liberty, Little, Monika, No Sleep, Steve, and Taryn’s racial identities had no interaction with their college access
pathways and resources utilized. Jalen and Little’s pathway hinged on an open access
institution and the financial support they received was based on their income, not race.
Liberty, Steve, and Taryn asserted a monoracial Black identity and any interactions that
occurred were founded in a Black identity not a Multiracial identity. Although No Sleep
and Monika identify as Multiracial, their predetermined college access pathwayss did not
require events that led to Multiracial interactions during their college choice and college
access process. Lee’s interaction was limited by receiving ample financial aid from an
institution with which he was familiar. Olivia and Q’s identity had a limited interaction
primarily because they received enough financial aid to cover the college costs and only
perceived college access resources for use that aligned with their racial identities. David
and Paula’s Multiracial identity had a high level of interaction. David's interactions were
negative and restrictive, while Paula’s interactions were positive and supported her
enrollment in college.

Discussion of Findings

The pathways and college access resources participants utilized to prepare for and
enroll in postsecondary education supported and contended with the existing literature on
the college access and college choice experiences of underrepresented students,
particularly underrepresented racial minority students. Study findings also highlighted
opportunities for further exploration. Below, I answer the study’s guiding research
questions to assess the meaning of the findings in relation to previous literature and the
study’s theoretical frame.
Question 1: Pathways of Multiracial Students

Participants pathways to access postsecondary education generally mirrored patterns stated in the research for low-income, first-generation college going, and racial minority populations (Eberle-Sudré, Welch, & Nichols, 2015; Goyette, 2008; Iloh & Tierney, 2013). The pathways of study participants aligned with the college access and choice scholarship on academic preparation, aspirations, college knowledge, and the impact of financial aid (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Heller, 1997; Hoxby & Turner, 2013; Martinez, 2013). Differences were observed in the details of the college access and choice processes of participants; however, macro level observations support the influence of low-income background, first-generation college going status, and racial minority categorization as key factors in students’ college access and choice pathways.

Initially, all students took stock of their academic talents (Chait & Venezia, 2009; Greene & Winters, 2005). How students acknowledged their academic accomplishments varied. Some mentioned the prestige of their high school to compare or in some cases contrast their academic abilities (Condron & Roscigno, 2003; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Others mentioned their participation in different groups and programs that were based on academic merit. Indeed, similar to previous research, participants spoke about academic abilities and preparedness in multiple ways (Atherton, 2014; Greene & Winters). One participant, David, stated that he had poor academics abilities. However, he recounted being advised to apply to the local community college by his guidance counselor and was told he was not college material by a teacher. Ultimately, David attended community
college and went on to earn his bachelor’s degree. Research supports that students in the United States are more likely to have a positive outlook on their academic abilities despite conflicting information (Atherton, 2014; Buchmann & Park, 2009).

Academic abilities are related to students’ college aspirations (Galotti & Mark, 1994). Often, the college-going messages that students receive are aligned with their academic engagement patterns associated with postsecondary enrollment, which can influence college choice (Hill & Tyson, 2009). For instance, four-year private for-profit institutions enrolled a higher percentage of Black students in fall 2015 than private nonprofit and public four-year institutions (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016). A similar pattern is seen at two-year institutions. When observing the same data for students who identified as Two or More Races, students represented similar percentages of the population across all institution types (Carnevale et al., 2016). Most of the participants from this study attended four-year institutions, which conflicts with previous research that highlighted the overrepresentation of underrepresented students in two-year and for-profit institutions and recent enrollment data (Carnevale et al., 2016; Iloh & Tierny, 2013). However, as high achieving students with high college aspirations who utilized college access resources from the higher education context, the majority of participants were able to avoid the issue of undermatching (Hurtado et al., 1997; Iloh & Tierny, 2013).

College aspirations were shared by all participants with positive college-going messages being provided to participants from various contexts. Similar to the overall
American student population, participants shared the belief that postsecondary education was an option for their future (Buchmann & Park, 2009; Goyette, 2008). Their transition from aspiration to action was a clear point of departure among participants as they understood the limitations of the social capital provided by their home environments (Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Of the 13 participants 10 were first-generation college going and 12 were considered low-income by Pell Grant eligibility. Previous literature has described the need for underrepresented, particularly first-generation college going students, to look outside their home environments to access vital college knowledge and complete necessary college access milestones (McDonough, 2004; NCAN, 2016a; Swail & Perna, 2002). Most participants did not have access to the resources they required to develop and implement a pathway in their home environment alone and as such sought out other contextual supports.

Participants pathways to access postsecondary education started in the home environment and, as necessary, moved through the contextual layers represented in Perna’s (2006) enrollment model until they reached a context that they believed provided them with the college knowledge to develop and implement a college access and choice pathway (Brown, Whon, Ellison, 2016; Grodsky & Jones, 2007). Most participants adopted pathways or created their own utilizing the resources from the school and community contexts as well as the higher education context (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Programming available within these contexts provided social capital as part of a college-going culture that is a noted gap in the college access
and choice pathways of underrepresented students (Oakes, 2003). Participants support previous scholarship as they primarily situated their pathways in the school, community, and higher education contexts. No matter where participants’ pathways were based all had a concern for financial aid.

As noted in Perna’s model (2006) participant's final college choice decision was a cost/benefit analysis that for some either strengthened their implemented pathways or made them completely disregard their pathways. The influence on financial resources could be a matter of the sample population (Avery & Hoxby, 2004). All participants but Taryn and eventually Little received the Pell Grant. Their low-income status could have a stronger influence on the college choice pathways they implemented and at times disregarded. Participants in this study are unique to the overall underrepresented student population in that no matter the participant’s pathway they were successful in accessing and matriculating to their selected postsecondary institution.

**Question 2: College Access Resources Perceived as Available for Use**

The college access resources that participants perceived as available for use were influenced primarily by their college access and choice pathway and college knowledge and aligned with previous research on underrepresented students (Brown, Whon, Ellison, 2016; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Pathway was one of the strongest factors that contributed to which college access resources participants viewed for use. For instance, participants whose pathway was comprehensive in terms of social and financial support were less likely to seek out additional resources. This included
participation in long-term college access programs that offered cost of attendance scholarship at the end of program completion or only considering institutions that provided full athletic scholarships. A restrictive pathway decreased the amount of resources participants believed were necessary to complement or complete their college access and choice processes. For those who did seek out resources they primarily focused on college knowledge and financial aid.

Participant’s options for college knowledge programming varied. Similar to scholarship on college access programming, there were different approaches for assisting participants in the completion of college access milestones (Maynard, 2014; NCAN, 2016a; Swail & Perna, 2002). Some utilized institutional agents from their home environments as well as the school and community context. The advising methods aligned with those common in the college access field with participants receiving support from an college access organization, a school counselor, or a caring adult such as a teacher (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013; McDonough, 2004). Research showed that underrepresented students, like those in this study, use college access and choice pathway that centered on resources from outside the home environment (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Leveraging their limited social capital networks students looked to institutional agents to assist in filling their college knowledge gaps.

The college knowledge participants received, or did not receive, increased or restricted the resources they perceived for use. Postsecondary institutions and agents from the school and community context built rapport with participants through providing
college knowledge (McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). First-generation college going students often miss important deadlines and have gaps in college knowledge that create barriers to college enrollment (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). The Multiracial students who participated in this study aligned with the low-income and first-generation college going research and spoke to the impact of the individualized method of college advising on their college knowledge. This method relayed general college going knowledge that assisted in milestone completion but also provided space for the unique concerns and desires of the student. By providing college knowledge frequently needed for low-income, first-generation college going students, institutional agents were increasing the number and type of college access resources participants perceived for use. To that end, participants generally perceived college access resources that aligned with their overall college choice pathway and the race crossing labels of low-income and first-generation college going resource as available for use (as appropriate by each participant's background). However, it was the race specific college access resources that participants stated they were not aware of and did not perceive for use, which relates to the third research question discussed below.

**Question 3: Multiracial Identity Interactions**

Understanding the interactions between participants’ Multiracial backgrounds, college access and choice pathways, and the college access resources that they perceived for use must begin with an observation of each participant's racial identity. The majority of participants in this study asserted a monoracial identity. As all participants had some
affiliation with a Black racial identity, historical American norms (e.g., the one-drop rule and hypodescent), would suggest this pattern in racial identity (Davis, 1991; Herman, 2010). Additionally, the pathways that participants implemented were primarily based on criteria that include students from multiple races such as first-generation college going and low-income. Identity salience related to low-income and first-generation college going status was described in participants’ narratives. Specifically, in their need to escape poverty, their home, or school contexts as powerful motivations to enroll in postsecondary education and may have contributed to participants college access and choice pathways. To that end, these realities left few opportunities for interactions with participants’ Multiracial backgrounds.

Renn (2000, 2003) affirmed five racial identity patterns that were put forth by Root (1990): (a) monoracial, (b) multiple monoracial, (c) Multiracial identity, (d) extraracial, and, (e) situational identity. Of 13 total participants seven stated that they identified as monoracial, Black. Of the five remaining participants who claimed more than one racial background two align closer to a multiple monoracial identity than a Multiracial identity. As seen by the participants’ patterns of identity as well as with a subtheme of only using resources aligned with their racial identities, there were limitations to what college access resources participants perceived for use and the interaction their racial identities had with their college access and college choice pathways. Previous scholarship supports this limitation of resources perceived for use (Literte, 2010).
The racial identities that make up each participant's background influenced the boundaries of their monoracial identity. Black/White study participants holding a Black racial identity, did not place boundaries on college access resources. Research supports part-Black Multiracial students being more likely to take on a Black monoracial identity (Herman, 2010; Khanna, 2011). Influences from broader American social history lend themselves to the notion of hypodescent both in racial identification and racial ascription (Davis, 1991; Townsend et al., 2012). For participants who had minority backgrounds in addition to their Black racial ancestry they knowingly chose not to access resources that targeted their other racial backgrounds. Specifically, participants whose parents represented multiple non-White racial identities but held a monoracial identity described instances by which they were truly bounded by the type of resources they perceived as available for use. For instance, participants who had an API or Hispanic background did not take advantage of API or Hispanic specific college access resources because they did not feel connected to their API or Hispanic racial identity enough to assert it in their college access and choice pathways. When asked to elaborate participants spoke to a conflict found in racial identity literature, not possessing enough cultural knowledge (King, 2008; Literte, 2010).

Renn (2003) and Wallace (2003) found that students who do not have cultural knowledge such as knowing about foods, language, and customs associated with a racial identity have difficulty claiming that racial background. In this study other monoracial minorities did not exclude most participants who shared their racial background.
However, participants chose to remain respectful but unincorporated with that part of their racial ancestry. Some attributed their monoracial identity to how their parents identified while others described that as they became more aware of their racial background and the culture that goes with it, they felt more comfortable claiming that racial heritage. Learning and claiming their racial ancestry did not change participants’ racial identities. Participants described and acknowledged their racial backgrounds but their multiple cultures formed a monoracial Black identity. As such Black, underrepresented, and generally minority college access programs were the most common college access resources participants perceived as available for use.

Findings for this question provided insights into the interactions of Multiracial backgrounds on college access and choice processes. However, when observing all participants’ narratives there is not one instance where a participant's Multiracial identity interacted throughout all contexts. Research on Multiracial students suggests that it is an incongruence between students’ racial identity and institutional views on race that impacts students’ college access and choice pathways, as well as the resources they perceive for use (Literte, 2010). Although, the participants in this study have multiple racial backgrounds, most do not have a Multiracial identity and thus are congruent with how college access resources were organized, marketed, and implemented by postsecondary institutions and college access organizations. An alignment between racial identity and the resources participants used reduced issues or concerns related to their Multiracial identities during their college access and choice processes.
Limitations and Areas for Future Research

In addition to the known limitations at the beginning of the study additional limitations arose during the data collection, analysis, and reporting process. Recall, I entered this study with the known limitations of a qualitative study. Employing narrative inquiry provided findings that could be applied for other similar populations. However, findings do not have the validity and generalizability that is found in quantitative research. I also cited my positionality as a Biracial woman and the impact it may have had on recruitment of or rapport with participants as a limitation of the study. My racial identity was an area of concern for many of the participants. Indeed, the majority of the participants inquired about my racial background and why I was researching access for Multiracial students. By not stating my racial identity at the beginning of the interview I could have placed limitations on what the participants were willing to discuss. Throughout this research process I have observed additional limitations related to college access and institution of enrollment, the racial identity of the participants, timing of narrative collection, and the lack of recent literature that contributed to theoretical frame.

Research supports that most minority student populations, particularly first-generation college going, low-income, and racial minorities do not enter and complete postsecondary education at the same rate of their majority peers. Yet, based on the study criteria, participants of this study not only entered postsecondary education but also did so immediately following their high school graduation with the majority of participants enrolling at four-year institutions. Participants who did not initially enroll in a four-year
institution, either had plans to transfer to a four-year institution to earn their bachelor's degree; were currently enrolled at a four-year institution’s regional campus; or, had already completed their coursework at their two-year institution, transferred to a four-year institution, and earned a bachelor's degree. Future research in college access and college choice for Multiracial students might look to identify study participants based on enrollment trends in the field, thus incorporating a larger participant base enrolled at 2-year and for-profit institutions (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). This research could compare and contrast the college access and choice pathways students use as well as college resources used to enroll in postsecondary education to enroll at 2-year and for-profit institutions.

Conversely, future scholarship college could seek out Multiracial individuals who did not enroll in postsecondary education. Research has documented a phenomenon entitled Summer Melt, which is when a seemingly college intending student completes the necessary milestones for college enrollment but fails to matriculate to their selected institution (Castleman & Page, 2014). Disaggregated demographic comparisons of student whose college access and choice pathway fail during the summer months, that includes Multiracial students, could contribute meaningfully to efforts to understand college intending Multiracial students who do not enroll in postsecondary education. As low-income, first-generation college going students seem to mirror many of the experiences of the Multiracial students in this study it would be beneficial for researchers to understand these experiences from a Multiracial student lens.
All participants had multiple racial backgrounds and an affiliation with a Black identity but not all participants had the same racial identity, which made observing interactions between their Multiracial identity and college journeys difficult. The guiding definition of Multiracial for this study aligned with the Pew Research Center’s (2015) parent definition. Although participants acknowledged their multiple racial backgrounds, this did not translate to a Multiracial identity for most of the study’s participants. Without the existence of a Multiracial identity most study participants prepared for and enrolled in college utilizing a college access and choice pathway as well as college access resources that aligned closer with their monoracial identity or another salient social identity. Scholarship could build on the findings and lessons learned as a part of this study by limiting the sample population to individuals who have multiple racial backgrounds and who currently hold a Multiracial identity.

It should also be noted that this study is limited by the study participation requirements. I interviewed individuals who had enrolled in postsecondary education, which placed limitations on how narratives were co-created. This research is a reflection study rather a longitudinal study. The length of time that has past since each participant’s college choice and enrollment alters the narratives that they provided. A longitudinal study would capture participant’s perceptions and attitudes during their college access journeys instead of reflecting on their experiences at least a year after it occurred. The limitations of implementing a reflection rather than longitudinal study also impacts the lens of the participant’s racial identity. Narratives for this study are reflections through
the lens of the participant’s current racial identity and may not accurately capture their identities during their college access and college choice processes. Participants stated that their racial identities changed since their college access and choice processes. Two participant’s racial identity changed from a Multiracial to a monoracial identity. Future research could follow students as they navigate the higher education enrollment process and potentially capture changes in identity and how college access and choice experiences interacted with student’s racial identities, particularly given recent research by Harper (2016) documenting changing Multiracial identification between entering and graduating college.

The guiding theoretical frame for this study, Conceptual Model of College Enrollment (Perna, 2006) was selected to allow opportunity for the unique experiences of Multiracial students college access, choice, and enrollment processes to be understood within the traditional contexts that apply to a student’s college journey. However, the model as well as the research that it is founded on was published more than a decade ago. The participants in this study recounted a college access and choice process that occurred after the model was published. With college access and choice having so many contextual influences it can be difficult to keep pace with the ever-changing policies, trends, and costs related to college enrollment. Thus this study is limited as it provides a snapshot of experiences within the available research and resources.

In addition to the limitations created by the research that informed the model as the study was implemented other limitations became known. One of the strengths of
selecting Perna’s model for this study was its broad contexts representing the college enrollment process that provided space for the unique experiences of participants. However, findings from the narratives highlight a need for a theoretical frame that acknowledges the variations and impact of race generally, and a Multiracial background specifically. As Perna’s model was not explicitly designed to account for racial identity and the interactions that occur within each contexts between race and the college enrollment process future scholarship should employ theoretical frameworks that account for racial interactions. As with all research, scholars must remember to explore new theories, question the scholarship cannon, and remain innovative to understand the meaning of social phenomena.

**Implications and Recommendations**

The biggest implication and recommendation for this study centers on the racial identity of the participants. As mentioned above individuals who participated in this study, as a group, held multiple patterns of racial identity. This study advertised for individuals who had parents from more than one racial category. Once participants expressed interest in being a part of the research they were directed to complete a consent form and a demographic questionnaire. As part of the questionnaire participants were asked to describe their race and well as the race of their parents. For the purposes of this study students were asked to select all the racial categories that applied in three separate questions for themselves, their mother, and their father. Only two participants selected a monoracial identity on their questionnaire however, upon further examination, eight
participants stated they held a monoracial identity. Conclusions drawn from this research would encourage an additional screening process to ensure that the participants can speak to experiences as an individual who racially identifies as Multiracial, not just an individual who has a Multiracial background.

This implication has merit outside of the research setting as well. The U.S. Department of Education issued a mandate that required all postsecondary institutions to implement a more inclusive racial data collection process by 2010. As part of the mandate students are permitted to select as many racial categories as they believe applies, with individuals who select two or more races being placed in the Two or More Races category. In chapter two I described the concerns surrounding the multiple races, cultures, and ethnicities that are accounted for in this single statistic. Findings from this study suggest a disconnect between racial identity and racial background. It is possible that students who hold a monoracial identity (e.g., the monoracially Black identifying participants in this study) at the time of categorization are being included in the Two or More Races statistic. Most participants from this study selected two or more racial categories however their experiences align with what previous scholars have found about the college access and choice pathways of monoracial minority students.

The implication for monoracial students being included in the Two or More Races category is a skewed understanding of the racial makeup of postsecondary institution’s student populations. This could be unfavorable if the majority of students answer the two-part question based on a parent or grandparent definition of Multiracial and not self
definition (Pew Researcher Center, 2015). In an attempt to create an inclusive environment postsecondary institutions may use the Two or More Races statistic in data driven decisions and provide more college access resources for Multiracial students. However, if the majority of students with Multiracial backgrounds are identifying as monoracial then an imbalance in resources may occur. Literature that highlights the growing Multiracial population and the need to create student services that are inclusive of their identities could push the field forward however without clear understanding of the students populations entering and currently on college campuses, advancing programming for Multiracial students could cause more harm than good (Espiritu & Omi, 2000; Literte, 2010). Again, there is a need to further understand who is represented in the Two or More Races category.

An overly simplified solution to include Multiracial students during the college access and choice processes would be to collapse Multiracial students into an underrepresented racial minority (URM) category and count them among their monoracial peers. However, this action would eliminate the opportunity to acknowledge the interactions between individuals with multiple racial backgrounds as found in this study. Previous scholarship on the evaluation methods of college access organizations are either nonexsistant or does not delineate students with Two or More Races from their monoracial peers (Swail & Perna, 2002). Although the majority of participants in this study identified as monoracial, this study showed the diversity in identities and their interaction with each participant’s college access and choice pathways. Unlike
monoracial students, Multiracial students have multiple patterns of identity and collapsing all students can hide these differences (Renn, 2003). Although, it may seem easier to group all students into underrepresented/represented categories, acknowledging distinct identities will assist in increasing access for all students to postsecondary education.

College access organizations do not know if their current approaches to assisting students in college readiness are working (Swail & Perna, 2002). College access organizations and postsecondary institution that implement college access programming should aim to understand their student populations and create resources that align with their racial identities and social realities. Implementing surveys or questionnaires as part of program services can assist with collecting basic information on students. Specifically, using survey data that allows students who identify their racial background and their racial identity. This data should be incorporated into the types of resources provided to students. College access professionals should know the social identities of the students they serve, provide potentially relevant resources, and allow students to decide what resources would complement their college access and choice pathway. Human capacity was cited among key constraints in college access organization’s evaluation gap (Swail & Perna, 2002). To assist in filling this need organizations could ask for assistance within their existing funding and volunteer networks. The information provided as a part of evaluations can strengthen the delivery of services through targeted programming but also organization’s ability to seek funding. Having a clear understanding of clients served
and organizational impact could entice individuals, private foundations, and corporations to invest in successful, targeted college access programming. Proper inclusion and evaluation of Multiracial students in college access programming helps Multiracial students and their monoracial peers.

Concluding Thoughts

At the end of this exploration I am left with both assurance in the progress of Multiracial students in their postsecondary goals and more questions than I began with in terms of college access, college choice, and the experiences of Multiracial students. In my endeavor to explore how Multiracial students perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources I have questioned my own college access and choice decisions. As the finish line for my doctoral studies begins to come into view, I think back on all the times my race was a topic of discussion or how many forms have I completed and the seemingly random ways racial categories were provided. Although, the racial categories may have changed, Multiracial students are navigating similar experiences that I and others with a Multiracial background have faced before.

Although an opportunity for my academic growth, the various ways participants navigated their college access and choice processes speak to a growth in the way that Multiracial backgrounds are conceived and enacted. Not all participants understood a Multiracial background in the same way and although at times frustrating to communicate in research, their ability to name themselves is at the heart of the research agenda Root (1990), Poston (1990), and their colleagues created and what many scholars
build on today. I would be remiss not to note the challenges that Multiracial students still struggle with in their quest for postsecondary education (e.g., monoracialism and microaggressions; see Johnston-Guerrero & Renn, 2016). What does it say about the current racial paradigm when individuals are able to know their multiple backgrounds but because of the enacted values of monoracialism, Multiracial individuals identify as what others ascribed them to be? The enduring legacy of the White, non-White racial ideology is a historic and observable undertone in higher education. The Multiracial participants in this study were able to develop and implement college access and choice pathways that were successful. However, this population is a point of departure in understanding the college journey of Multiracial students. Future research should attend to American racial realities as well as the many ways that Multiracial individuals identify.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment Messages by Email and on Social Media

Email

SUBJECT LINE: Multiracial Student Research Study Recruitment

Hello [Gatekeeper],

My name is Blossom Barrett and I am a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University. I am asking for your help in identifying participants for my research study to explore how students with parents from more than one racial group perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources. To participate in this study, the student must be:

- At least 18 years old at the time of study
- Currently enrolled at or recently graduated (within past 1 year) from a degree-granting institution of higher education
- Have parents from more than one racial category.

Interested participants will be asked to review and sign a consent form, complete a short demographic questionnaire, and interview with me in-person, via telephone, or Skype. Interviews will average 45-60 minutes and all interviews will be digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of actual names to protect participant’s identity. Additionally, participants will be asked to take part in a focus group, which is optional and is estimated to last about an hour.

If you are interested in participating in this study or know someone who is, please contact me at barrett.690@osu.edu.

Thank you,
-Blossom
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education and Student Affairs
The Ohio State University
Hi Everyone,

My name is Blossom Barrett and I am a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University. I am asking for your help in identifying participants for my research study to explore how students with parents from more than one racial group perceive, interact with, and benefit from college access resources. To participate in this study, students must be:

- At least 18 years old at the time of study
- Currently enrolled at or recently graduated (within past 1 year) from a degree-granting institution of higher education
- Have parents from more than one racial category.

Interested participants will be asked to review and sign a consent form, complete a short demographic questionnaire, and interview with me in-person, via telephone, or Skype. Interviews will average 45-60 minutes and all interviews will be digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of actual names to protect participant’s identity. Additionally, participants will be asked to take part in a focus group, which is optional and is estimated to last about an hour.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at barrett.690@osu.edu!

-Blossom
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

Multiracial Student Study

Multiracial Students and Higher Education Access

Interested?

Are you a current or recent college student who has parents from different racial groups? Are you willing to talk about your experiences preparing for and entering college?

If so, please contact Blossom Barrett! (barrett.690@osu.edu)

Criteria for Participation in Study:

- 18 years or older
- Current or recent college student
- Parents from more than one racial group

Contact for more Information:
barrett.690@osu.edu
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Preferred “Pseudonym” (i.e., fake name):

Participant’s Race: (select all that apply)
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- Two or more races
- White
- I do not wish to identify
- Other:____________________

Ethnicity:
Please describe:________________________________________________________________________

Please indicate your gender: ☐ Man ☐ Woman ☐ Transgender ☐ Other:___________

Please indicate your sexual orientation:
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Other:____________________

As of today, how old are you (in years): _________

What is your home zip code? ___________

What is the name of your high school? ________________________________________________

Where is your high school located? _____________________________________________________

Current or most recent college or university attended? _________________________________

What is your current classification in college: ☐ Freshman/1st year ☐ Sophomore/2nd year
- Junior/3rd year ☐ Senior/4th year ☐ Senior/5 or more years ☐ Master’s student
- Doctoral student ☐ Law student ☐ Medical student ☐ Graduated ☐ Other:___________

What is your primary academic major(s)? ______________________________________________

What is your primary academic minor(s)? ____________________________________________

| What is the highest level of education that your mother/father completed? |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Did not finish high school | Mother | Father |
| Graduate from high school | | |
| Attended some college, but did not complete degree | | |
| Earned an associate’s degree | | |

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<thead>
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<th>Earned a bachelor’s degree</th>
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<td>Earned a graduate degree</td>
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<td>Do not know</td>
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What is your mother’s race? *(select all that apply)*
- [ ] American Indian and Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
- [ ] Hispanic/Latino
- [ ] Two or more races
- [ ] White
- [ ] I do not wish to identify
- [ ] Other: ____________________

Mother’s ethnicity:
Please describe: __________________________________________________________

What is your father’s race? *(select all that apply)*
- [ ] American Indian and Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
- [ ] Hispanic/Latino
- [ ] Two or more races
- [ ] White
- [ ] I do not wish to identify
- [ ] Other: ____________________

Father’s ethnicity:
Please describe: __________________________________________________________

Have you ever participated in any college preparatory clubs, groups, or programs?  
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
  If yes, please list: ______________________________________________________

Have you ever received a scholarship for college?  
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
  If yes, please list: ______________________________________________________

Have you ever received the Pell Grant?  
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
  If yes, please list the academic years you received the Pell Grant: 
  ____________________
Appendix C: Consent Form

The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Multiracial students and higher education access

Researcher: Blossom Barrett under the guidance of Dr. Marc J. Guerrero, faculty advisor

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: The purpose of this proposed research is to explore the experiences of Multiracial students accessing postsecondary education. For this reason all participants must be: (a) at least 18 years of age at the time of their interview; (b) currently enrolled at or recently graduated (within one year) from a degree-granting postsecondary institution; and, (c) have parents from more than one racial category.

Procedures/Tasks: By agreeing to volunteer in this study the researcher will ask you to:

Complete a demographic questionnaire: You will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that will collect the following information: name, preferred pseudonym, race (and ethnicity, as applicable), socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, age (in years), current academic standing, primary academic major(s) and minor(s), educational background of their parents/guardians, and race of parents/guardians.

Complete one semi-structured one-on-one interview: As part of the interview, you will be asked to provide background information, discuss your race disclosure, discuss your economic status, as well as your overall college access experiences.

Participate in one focus group of the researcher’s choosing: Select participants will be asked to participate in a focus group to converse with other study participants about their experiences accessing postsecondary education. Emerging themes from primary analysis will reference for discussion.
Duration: The demographic questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The semi-structure one-on-one interview should last no longer than 60 minutes depending on how much you wish to share. The focus group should last no longer than 60 minutes depending on how much focus group participants wish to share. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits: The risks of harm anticipated in this proposed research are minimal. They are not greater than those encountered in daily life or during performance of routine physical or psychological examination or tests. Possible benefits of this study include providing useful information to campus administrators that can improve future practices and policies. Moreover, the results of this study will contribute to the extant literature.

Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and field notes. Only the researcher will have access to files and field notes. No specific references will be made in oral or written reports that could link individual participants to the study. These efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Finally, although we will work to ensure that no one sees your online response without approval, since we are using the Internet, there is always a risk that a breach of security may occur and your responses will be accessed. This could potentially lead to identifying information being obtained. However, the data will be encrypted in order to reduce the risk of this type of security breach occurring.

Incentives: There are no incentives for participating in this study.

Participant Rights: You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.
An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions: For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation you may contact Dr. Marc J. Guerrero at guerrero.55@osu.edu or 614-688-1428.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form.

By checking the following box and typing in my name below, I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study.

___ I agree to participate in this study.

By typing my name in the box below I am offering my digital signature in lieu of my handwritten signature.

Digital Signature: ______________________________________
Appendix D: One-on-One Interview Protocol

First, do you recall the consent form and demographic questionnaire that you completed online. [Hand copy of consent form to participant] Do you have any questions about this?

As a reminder, I am conducting a study to understand Multiracial students’ experiences in accessing higher education, acknowledging that not everyone of Multiracial descent identifies as such. Part of this effort includes one-on-one interviews with students like you to learn about your experiences. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. This interview should last approximately 60 minutes. I am going to ask you a series of questions. Feel free to respond as fully and openly as you would like. Also, feel free to include examples or “stories” along the way to convey your points clearly. Any questions about that?

Now, let’s get started. I’d like to know a little bit about your background. Please…

Tell me a little bit more about yourself—specifically, where you’re from and your family.
- Probe for educational background, family background, hometown, how they would describe hometown in terms of racial diversity, social class composition, etc.

Did you go to high school that differ from your home community?
- Probe for school, familial, and community distinctions; what percentage of high school classmates went to college

Tell me about the kind of people you hung out with in high school.
- Probe for college preparation clubs, teams, or programs in high school and what types of activities. Probe for continued involvement.

How often did you talk about having parents of more than one race?
- Probe: Has that changed since high school?

Did you always know you wanted to go to college?
- Probe: how did you know? What messages did you receive growing up about going to college?

What was your first choice for college?
- Probe for financial assistance. Probe for other institutions the participant applied to

Did anyone/program/organization help you prepare and apply for college?
-Probe for college access resources. Probe for prospective on college access resources participate is familiar and/or interacted with.

Did [institution] send you informational materials on different programs offered at [institution] before you arrived on campus?
  -Probe for institutional assumptions and student’s response. Probe for feelings about materials, visits, etc.

How did you decided to attend [current institution]?
  -Probe for types of communication provided by the institutions and any access programming. Probe for racial considerations. Probe for socioeconomic considerations.

What do you remember most about your high school to college transition?
  -Probe for racial and socioeconomic comparisons.

Did any of your abovementioned experiences make you think of yourself differently or make you consider how others saw you?
  -Probe for details on experiences; identification with specific demographics.

Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for talking with me today. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study please feel free to contact us at the information listed on the consent form.
Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Hello everyone thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study. This focus group should last approximately 60 minutes. I am going to ask you a few questions but please feel free to discuss any topics that you felt were important or that stayed with you from our individual interview. As always, feel free to respond as fully and openly as you would like. Also, feel free to include examples or “stories” along the way to convey your points clearly. Any questions about that?

Now, let’s get started. First, let take a moment and talk about civility and privacy. It is important that the topics discussed and information provided as a part of this focus group remain private. Also, although you may disagree with a fellow participate please refrain from any unnecessary language. Finally, please try not to talk over one another. Does any one have any questions, comments, or concerns about what I just said?

Okay lets learn a little bit about one another. Please…

• Take a moment to introduce yourself.

Questions from this point further will be driven by findings from the individuals’ interviews. Questions prepared below are samples of potential questions to focus group participants.

• One of the patterns that I saw across the individual interviews was [THEME]. Does anyone feel like that applies to their experience?

• In what ways do you think your college journey was typical or different from your peers? How much, if at all, does being Multiracial influence your view on how unique or similar your journey was?

• What was the most important factor in your college journey?

• Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for talking with me today. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study please feel free to contact me at the information listed on the consent form.
Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

The Ohio State University

Behavioral Institutional Review Board
300 Research Administration building
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1063
Phone (614) 688-8457
Fax (614) 688-0366
orrp.osu.edu

02/03/2017
Study Number: 2017B0001
Study Title: Multiracial Students and Higher Education Access
Type of Review: Initial Submission
Review Method: Expedited
Date of IRB Approval: 01/30/2017
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: 01/30/2018
Expedited category: #6, #7
Dear Marc Guerrero,
The Ohio State Behavioral IRB APPROVED the above referenced research.
In addition, the following were also approved for this study:

• Waiver of Consent Documentation

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring that all individuals assisting in the conduct of the study are informed of their obligations for following the IRB-approved protocol and applicable regulations, laws, and policies, including the obligation to report any problems or potential noncompliance with the requirements or determinations of the IRB. Changes to the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before implemented, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378 and is valid until the expiration date listed above. Without further review, IRB approval will no longer be in effect on the expiration date. To continue the study, a continuing review application must be approved before the expiration date to avoid a lapse in IRB approval and the need to stop all research activities. A final study report must be provided to the IRB once all research activities involving human subjects have ended.
Records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 5 years after the study is closed. For more information, see university policies, Institutional Data and Research Data.

Human research protection program policies, procedures, and guidance can be found on the ORRP website.

Daniel Strunk, PhD, Chair
Ohio State Behavioral IRB